

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS
JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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September 19, 2023
Start: 10:18 a.m.
Recess: 1:02 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Nantasha M. Williams, Chairperson
of the Committee on Civil and
Human Rights

Chi A. Ossé, Chairperson of the
Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries and International
Intergroup Relations

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN
RIGHTS:

Rita C. Joseph
Christopher Marte

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP
RELATIONS:

Eric Dinowitz
Amanda Farias
Shahana Hanif

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COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL
AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP
RELATIONS (CONTINUED):

Farrah N. Louis
Francisco P. Moya
Sandra Ung

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COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 3

A P P E A R A N C E S

Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate

JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of Policy
and External Affairs at the New York City
Commission on Human Rights

Sreoshy Banerjea, Executive Director of the
Public Design Commission

Sylvia Montalban, Chief Citywide Equity and
Inclusion Officer and Deputy Commissioner
Department of Citywide Administrative Services

Sideya Sherman, Commissioner of Mayor's Office of
Equity

Jennifer Jones Austin, Federation of Protestant
Welfare Agencies

Jerry Mikorenda, author of America's First
Freedom Rider, Elizabeth Jennings, Chester A.
Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil Rights

Jacob Morris, Director of the Harlem Historical
Society and the New York City Freedom Trail
Foundation

Salonee Bahman, post-doctoral fellow at the New
York Historical Society

Mitchell Grubler, Bowery Alliance of Neighbors

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

Michaëlle Solages, New York State Assemblywoman
and Chair of the New York State Black, Hispanic,
Puerto Rican, and Asian Caucus

Joshua Joseph, Executive Director of the New York
State Black, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, and Asian
Caucus

Stephen Banes

Annette Wilcox

Devine Prince, President of the U.S. Freedmen
Project

Cate Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator from
the Public Theater

Robert Briggs, on behalf of a group of New York
City residents and congregants at Hope Church
East Village

Lisa Betty, Community Researcher for the Bronx
African American History Project at Fordham
University

Markus Burrell

Zee Dempster, President of the New York Ramblers
Hiking Club, Assistant Director for IRADAC at the
CUNY Graduate Center and also for AFCP, and on
the Board of Trustees for the PSC CUNY Welfare
Fund

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
3 welcome to the New York City Council hearing of the
4 Committee on Civil Rights jointly with Cultural
5 Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
6 Relations.

7 At this time, can everyone please silence
8 your cell phones?

9 If you wish to testify, please go up to
10 the Sergeant's desk to fill out a testimony slip.

11 Written testimony can be emailed to
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is
13 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

14 At this time and going forward, nobody is
15 to approach the dais. I repeat, nobody is to approach
16 the dais including Council Member Staff. Council
17 Member Staff, you're going to have come around.

18 Thank you for your cooperation.

19 Chairs, we are ready to begin.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Good morning,
21 everyone. My name is Nantasha Williams, and I serve
22 as Chair to the Committee on Civil and Human Rights.

23 Today, we are joined by the Committee on
24 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International
25

Intergroup Relations Chaired by my Colleague and Co-Chair of this hearing, Council Member Chi Ossé.

I'd like to start off today's hearing with a quote that not only is important to me but signifies the importance of the package of legislation we will be hearing today. Many people quote the I Have A Dream by Martin Luther King, Jr., but not many people quote this one. "We have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds, but we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt." I'm hoping that the bills heard today will move us one step closer to cashing that check here in our City.

This morning, the Committee on Civil and Human Rights will be hearing Intro. number 716 in

1 relation to creating a school diversity monitor
2 within the Human Rights Commission sponsored by
3 Council Member De La Rosa, Intro. number 1073 in
4 relation to the creation of a truth, healing, and
5 reconciliation process sponsored by Council Member
6 Hudson, Intro. number 1082 in relation to creating a
7 task force to consider the impacts of slavery and
8 past injustices for African Americans in New York
9 City and reparations for such injustices sponsored by
10 Council Member Louis, Intro. number 1101 in relation
11 to anti-racism training for human services
12 contractors sponsored by Council Member Farias, and
13 my own bill, Intro. number 1118 in relation to anti-
14 racism and anti-racial discrimination training for
15 City employees.
16

17 Before we begin, I would like to thank my
18 Colleagues and Staff and everyone here that are
19 joined today.

20 Now, I will turn it over to my Co-Chair,
21 Council Member Osse, for his opening statement.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Chair
23 Williams, and good morning, everyone. I'm New York
24 City Council Member Chi Ossé, and I Chair the
25 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and

1 International Intergroup Relations. My pronouns are
2 he/him/his, and today our joint hearing includes
3 three pieces of legislation that have come through my
4 Committee. Intro. 934 sponsored by Public Advocate
5 Jumaane Williams and Council Member Charles Barron
6 which is a Local Law in relation to requiring the
7 placement of an informational sign near the
8 intersection of Wall and Pearl Streets in Manhattan
9 to mark the site of New York's first slave market,
10 Intro. 1085 sponsored by Council Member Sandy Nurse,
11 a Local Law to amend the New York City Charter and
12 the Administrative Code of New York in relation to
13 public art and school names, and Intro. 1150
14 sponsored by Council Member Christopher Marte, a
15 Local Law in relation to establishing a New York City
16 Freedom Trail Task Force. He has a cute little
17 brochure that he brought here today so if you would
18 like to get a copy, speak to one of the Sergeants and
19 he'll pass you one, maybe.

21 All three of these bills speak to the
22 importance of honoring and confronting the history of
23 our City including history that is rooted in
24 injustices and more wrongs. It is important for New
25 Yorkers to learn and know these stories and to

1 correct the wrongs that resulted from it. The only
2 way to move forward with our future is to face the
3 past, especially when that past has resulted in
4 centuries of harm. Intros 934 and 1150 are bills that
5 will ensure this history is told so that generations
6 present and future can understand the City's role in
7 the slave trade and the resilience and determination
8 of those fighting for abolition and freedom in the
9 midst of colonialization. Intro. 1085 seeks to right
10 those wrongs. We cannot continue to honor those who
11 benefited from this human rights atrocity and moral
12 crime. As Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
13 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations,
14 still figuring out the last part, I have a
15 responsibility to ensure that the stories of our City
16 and those who make up its fabric are told in an
17 honest and truthful way. The three bills heard today
18 will work to reckon our City's role with enslavement
19 and its impact on black and indigenous individuals in
20 New York City and will help tell the true stories of
21 the whole BIPOC community, starting from the earliest
22 days of our city which will not always be easy to
23 hear. I thank my Colleagues for introducing these
24 pieces of legislation.
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2 Finally, I would like to thank my Staff
3 as well as Committee Staff and others who worked on
4 preparing this legislation including May
5 Vutrapongvatana, my Budget and Policy Director,
6 Christina Yellamaty, my new Legislative Council,
7 Regina Paul, our Legislative Policy Analyst, and
8 Sandra Gray, our Financial Analyst.

9 I know that Council Member Sandy Nurse is
10 not yet here, but I would like to pass the remarks on
11 to our Public Advocate to speak about his bill today.

12 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Thank
13 you, Mr. Chair.

14 As mentioned, my name is Jumaane William.
15 I'm the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I
16 thank Chair Osse and Chair Williams and Members of
17 the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and the
18 Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
19 International Intergroup Relations for holding this
20 hearing and allowing the opportunity to provide a
21 statement.

22 I want to thank Council Member Charles
23 Barron for his co-sponsorship and Chris Cobb who is
24 the person who originally brought this to me in 2014.
25 In 2014, I introduced Intro. 0036 of 2014 when I was

1 a Council Member. This bill was heard but not voted
2 on. However, in 2015, the de Blasio Administration
3 agreed to proceed with placing a sign near but not at
4 the original location of the first slave trade at
5 Pearl and Wall Street. Today, the sign currently
6 stands in Manhattan Park on the corner of Wall Street
7 and Water Street. I'm calling on my Colleagues to
8 support 0934 of 2023 to ensure that we place a plaque
9 at the correct location of where the slave trade
10 first took place in 1711. While I am grateful that
11 the previous administration took the initiative to
12 move forward without the benefit of a local law, it
13 is also necessary for our history to be captured
14 accurately. In fact, two of my staff went out last
15 year looking for the existing sign, and they
16 encountered a senior citizen who had learned about
17 the sign on a Manhattan Neighborhood Network
18 documentary. She ventured out on three different
19 occasions before finding the sign. This plaque
20 ensures that every New Yorker and visitor knows that
21 this city was built on the backs of the enslaved.
22 Captive African slaves arrived on slave ships along
23 the East River and were brought to the market on this
24 site as part of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.
25

1
2 During this time, New York's economy was fueled by
3 slavery. Enslaved Africans were used to clear the
4 land to create Broadway, build the first City Hall,
5 the Fraunces Tavern, and the very wall that Wall
6 Street is named for. At this very moment throughout
7 our nation, some are introducing legislation to not
8 teach this history. It is critical that people see
9 the connection between what is happening today and
10 what happened at this market. It has been more than
11 250 years since the market was active, and all of
12 these communities still feel the crippling
13 generational effects of our past. The centuries that
14 followed clearly show the ramifications of slavery
15 transitioning into structural, institutional, and
16 systemic racism. Passing this legislation will allow
17 us as a City to acknowledge the enslaved men, women,
18 and children and pay our respects to the descendants.
19 It is monumental that we permanently document this
20 onto the walls that mark this intersection along with
21 speaking about it on the record, and I also just want
22 to say in this time we have people who want to make
23 believe that the communities that are doing the best
24 simply did so just out of hard work, and I never want
25 to take away the hard work that people did, but we do

1 know that it was hard work combined with oppressive,
2 suppressive, and an (INAUDIBLE) system combined with
3 a (INAUDIBLE) sense of entitlement and
4 exceptionalism. There are also many who believe why
5 they don't want to teach this history, that the black
6 community in particular, all of their roles in the
7 past, even though when our enslaved family and
8 ancestors were released, all of the institutions that
9 help guide you through your life were in the hands of
10 the people who had formerly enslaved them, and it is
11 very, very clear the connection between what's
12 happening in these communities and why some people
13 don't want this history taught, and I really believe
14 and hope that the City Council will pass this so that
15 we can get the history accurately put down where the
16 actual first slave trade market was. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you so much,
19 Public Advocate Williams.

20 I want to pass it off to my Colleague,
21 Christopher Marte, for some remarks on his
22 legislation.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Chair
24 Osse and Chair Williams.

1
2 First of all, I want to thank everyone
3 who helped work on this bill. My Staff, all the
4 activists, everyone who came to our office in the
5 past two years to make sure that we actually can hear
6 this today, Intro. 1150, which will set up a task
7 force to establish a Freedom Trail in New York City
8 commemorating historical sites that were part of the
9 Underground Railroad and Abolition Movement.

10 When we think of New York's history, we
11 tend to think of early Revolutionary figures like the
12 ones on the walls in City Hall, the mass immigration
13 of the early 20th century, or the fiscal crisis of
14 the 1970s, but there are histories that we must
15 reckon with like New York's role in the slave trade
16 and histories we must celebrate like the network of
17 people who organized for liberation and abolition.
18 The remnants of the Underground Railroad are
19 citywide, from homes of people who helped enslaved
20 people escape, organizations who fought for
21 abolition, or free black communities and farms who
22 thrived and help create this City in all of each
23 borough. This bill will help us preserve African
24 American history at a time when other states are
25 trying to erase it, and we'll make this history

1 accessible to every single New Yorker and every
2 single tourist from all around the world. Whether
3 you're someone purposely following this trail or
4 someone who just happens to walk by a plaque or a
5 site or a student who might look at a street sign and
6 learn about the real history of this city. Current
7 City efforts have fallen a bit short. There are a few
8 sites that are online where you can learn about the
9 Underground Railroad or, to a much smaller scale,
10 sometimes through non-profits or for-profit companies
11 giving paid tours to learn about the Abolition
12 Movement here in New York City, but we have to do a
13 lot, lot more. This task force would discover many
14 more sites citywide and hopefully implement a Freedom
15 Trail that can educate the public and preserve our
16 City's forgotten black history.

18 I want to add one more thing. When we
19 talk about systemic racism, it's shown about some of
20 the things that are forgotten, and, in New York City,
21 we have forgotten our role, and so this is the first
22 step to making sure that we remember everyone's
23 history, and so I'm glad that we are hearing it
24 today. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Next, we'll have
Council Member De La Rosa who is speaking on her bill
as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you,
Chairs, for this timely and important hearing. I want
to offer a few comments on the bill I'm introducing,
Intro. 716, which creates a school diversity monitor
within the City's Human Rights Commission.

New York City is known for its diversity,
but, when we take a closer look at neighborhoods in
our City, we begin to see how deeply divided they
are. We understand the disparate impact
discrimination and de factor segregation that are
still present in our schools despite beliefs that we
have moved away from a world where racial and ethnic
makeups define our educational, work, living, and
social spaces. The sentiment is echoed by the New
York City Board of Education's response following the
Board v. Brown education decision in 1954. In 2014,
the Civil Rights Project at UCLA reported that New
York State was the most segregated state in the
nation for black students with other analysis
determining that the problem persisted in 2018 and
again in 2021. Many attempts and calls to integrate

1 our schools have failed and demonstrated fear of
2 change in protests. In 2017, then-Mayor de Blasio
3 created a Student Diversity Advisory Group to address
4 lack of diversity in schools but was unsuccessful in
5 the full implementation that was further delayed by
6 the COVID-19 pandemic that halted in-person
7 instruction. Since then, we have now also welcomed
8 more than 19,000 migrant students who have enrolled
9 since July of 2022 whose only resource is to
10 integrate and learn in some unfamiliar spaces. With
11 this new population of students, we are faced once
12 again with the question of how to integrate our
13 school, analyze our diverse populations apart from
14 monoliths, increase language access, redistribute
15 resources, and support a population shift in our
16 city. This is the right moment to try a new strategy,
17 and I believe this legislation placing some of that
18 responsibility on our civil rights arm will make a
19 difference. It is not enough to move our students
20 around our neighborhoods they do no frequent or
21 provide teachers who do not hold cultural competency
22 to understand who is learning in a classroom with
23 them. We have a responsibility to guide and monitor
24 the transition to ensure that all students have
25

1 access to education and do not feel a lack of support
2 so I look forward to meaningful discussion today, and
3 I thank our Chairs for the opportunity.

4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Next,
5 we'll have Council Member Nurse.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chairs.
7 I'm just going to offer some comments on Introduction
8 1085. Apologies for being late, Chair.

9 Intro. 1085 is a reckoning with the
10 historical injustices that continue our haunt our
11 cities. This bill allows New York City to confront
12 the deep-rooted legacies of slavery, colonization,
13 and systemic crimes against humanity. By
14 contextualizing or mandating the removal of works of
15 art depicting individuals who profited from the
16 slavery of black people or committed heinous acts
17 against indigenous people, we challenge the
18 celebration of those who have perpetuated oppression.
19 This bill recognizes that art and public spaces are
20 not neutral. They hold power and shape our collective
21 consciousness. By mandating that the PDC create a
22 plan for removal, we are acknowledging and rectifying
23 historical wrongs. The inclusion of explanatory
24 plaques next to retained artworks serves as an
25

1
2 opportunity for education and contextualization,
3 allowing us to critically engage with our past.
4 Moreover, the bill's requirement for the DOT to
5 collaborate with the DOE to install plaques adjacent
6 to schools named after individuals who fit the
7 outlined criteria is a powerful affirmation of our
8 commitment to truth and reconciliation. We can
9 reevaluate the figures we venerate and the narratives
10 we perpetuate, particularly within public schools
11 where minds are shaped. This bill is not an erasure
12 of history. It is far from it. It is actually an act
13 of remembrance and truth to tell the entire story
14 rather than the convenient one. It asserts that the
15 stories we tell and the art we display must reflect
16 the values of equity, inclusivity, and recognition of
17 the struggles endured by marginalized communities. I
18 look forward to hearing from you all, your thoughts
19 and feedback, and thank you, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Now, we'll turn it
21 over to Council Member Farias.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIAS: Thank you, Chair
23 Williams. Good morning, everyone. I'm Council Member
24 Amanda Farias, and I'm proud to be attending today's
25 hearing to discuss the Juneteenth bill package.

1
2 This bill package led by Chair Nantasha
3 Williams, Council Members Barron, Hudson, Louis,
4 Nurse, Stevens focuses on rectifying and resolving
5 decades of systematic racism as well as reinstating
6 important practices that will bring lasting justice
7 to black, Latino, and AAPI communities. I'm proud to
8 support the package with my bill, Introduction 1101,
9 which would require annual anti-racism training for
10 human service contractors in New York City. At a time
11 when we're facing increases in hate crimes across our
12 black, Latino, AAPI, Jewish, and queer communities,
13 it is critical and urgent that we tackle racism and
14 bias at every level of our City's government. With an
15 increasingly diverse city, ensuring City workers are
16 equipped with a deep understanding of racism and bias
17 is how we equip them to best serve all New Yorkers
18 and ensure those serving them are making the best,
19 just decisions on the quality of life and benefits,
20 services, and resources they're helping attain for
21 them for our city. The more we can add to cultural
22 sensitivity, anti-bias, and anti-racism, the more we
23 can do for everyone in our city. Leading from the
24 front starts with this package. These bills will
25 serve as a primary example for New Yorkers across the

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2 city and what it means to be truly anti-racist. This
3 package of bills is of incredible urgency in our
4 city, and I thank Chair Williams and Chair Osse for
5 their leadership on this important topic. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Council
7 Member Farias. I do want to acknowledge my Colleagues
8 who are with us today, Council Member Farias, Council
9 Member Marte, Council Member Nurse, Council Member De
10 La Rosa, Council Member Dinowitz, Council Member
11 Hanif, and Council Member Moya who has joined us
12 online, and Council Member Joseph.

13 Now, I'll turn it over to Committee
14 Counsel to swear in our illustrious guests from the
15 Administration.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Good morning.
17 Welcome. My name is Jessica Boulet, Counsel to the
18 Committee on Civil and Human Rights.

19 Before we begin testimony, I want to
20 remind everyone joining on Zoom, you will be on mute
21 until you are called on to testify. I will be calling
22 on public witnesses to testify after the conclusion
23 of the Administration's testimony and Council Member
24 questions so please listen carefully for your name to
25 be called.

1
2 Council Members, you will be called on
3 for questions after the full panel has completed
4 their testimony. Please note that for the purposes of
5 this hearing, we will be allowing a second round of
6 questioning.

7 For public witnesses, once your name is
8 called, if you are joining us by Zoom, a Member of
9 our Staff will unmute you and the Sergeant-at-Arms
10 will give you the cue to begin so please listen for
11 that.

12 If you are attending in person, please
13 have a seat at the table to deliver your testimony.

14 We will now call representatives of the
15 Administration to testify. At this time, I will
16 administer the affirmation.

17 Panelists, please raise your right hand.
18 We have JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of
19 Policy and External Affairs at the New York City
20 Commission on Human Rights, Sreoshy Banerjea,
21 Executive Director of the Public Design Commission,
22 and Sylvia Montalban, Chief Citywide Equity and
23 Inclusion Officer and Deputy Commissioner Department
24 of Citywide Administrative Services.

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2 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
3 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
4 Committee and to respond, sorry, I don't have..

5 SIDEYA SHERMAN: I can just state my name.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: That would be
7 good.

8 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Sideya Sherman, Mayor's
9 Office of Equity.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you so
11 much.

12 SIDEYA SHERMAN: Non-profit.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Do you affirm
14 to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but
15 the truth before this Committee and to respond
16 honestly to Council Member questions?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I do.

18 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Yes, I do.

19 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBAN: I do.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you. At
22 this time I will invite Commissioner Sherman.

23 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Good afternoon.

24 Chair Williams, Chair Osse, Public Advocate Williams,
25 Members of the Committees on Civil and Human Rights,

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2 Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International
3 Intergroup Relations, distinguished Members of City
4 Council and the public, good morning. I am Sideya
5 Sherman, Commissioner of the New York City Mayor's
6 Office of Equity. I am joined here today by Sreoshy
7 Banerjea, Executive Director of the New York City
8 Public Design Commission; JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy
9 Commissioner for Policy and External Affairs at the
10 New York City Commission on Human Rights; and Silvia
11 Montalban, Chief Citywide Equity and Inclusion
12 Officer at the New York City Department of Citywide
13 Administrative Services; and other representatives of
14 the Administration.

15 Thank you for this opportunity to discuss
16 the Council's Juneteenth legislative package, which
17 seeks to advance racial equity and justice through
18 truth and repair. This administration is committed to
19 upholding these values as we work to foster a fairer
20 and more equitable city.

21 Last November, New Yorkers voted
22 overwhelmingly to embed racial justice in the heart
23 of city government, passing all three ballot measures
24 proposed by the Racial Justice Commission.

25

1
2 Included in the ballot measures is a new
3 preamble for our New York City Charter, which, for
4 the first time, introduces a set of foundational
5 values to guide how we govern and serve the public.
6 In the preamble, New Yorkers acknowledge "the grave
7 injustices and atrocities that form part of our
8 country's history" and the government's
9 responsibility to "act intentionally to remedy these
10 past and continuing harms and to reconstruct, revise
11 and reimagine our foundations, structures,
12 institutions, and laws to promote justice and equity
13 for all New Yorkers."

14 The Office of Equity is steadfast and
15 focused on uplifting these profound values throughout
16 government as we lead implementation of these
17 recently passed measures. This includes developing
18 the City's first citywide racial equity plan,
19 consisting of measurable goals and strategies for
20 structural reform across all City agencies. The
21 Charter calls on public servants to reorient our
22 roles to bring in practices of repair. With this
23 shared commitment, we express our support for the
24 spirit and the intent of these bills and look forward

1 to discussing them further with the Council this
2 morning.
3

4 There are eight bills in this package. I
5 appreciate your patience as we discuss and share
6 overarching comments.

7 Intro. 1082, Council Member Louis, which
8 creates a task force to consider the impact of
9 slavery and past injustices for African Americans in
10 New York City and reparations. The legacy of slavery
11 in our city and country requires that we thoughtfully
12 document past harms and integrate approaches for
13 repair. To achieve the most meaningful impact, we
14 believe this bill could benefit from further
15 refinement to align and address potential overlap
16 with 1073, which calls for a Truth and Reconciliation
17 Commission, and the recently passed reparations
18 taskforce bill that awaits Governor Hochul's
19 signature at the state level. We also recommend
20 extending the implementation timeline and that the
21 start date is timed to fall more than one year after
22 the City issues its first citywide racial equity
23 plan.

24 Executing this work with the rigor it
25 deserves requires significant staffing power, legal

resources, research, and academic expertise. For example, California's reparations task force undertook two years of work with considerable staff resources and support from the California DOJ. More than one year would be required to lead this vital work in our nation's largest city, with one of its longest histories.

Intro. 1073, Council Member Hudson, which would create a truth, healing, and reconciliation process. Our Charter's preamble recognizes "the profound physical, emotional, social, and psychological harm and trauma to individuals, families, and communities" and charges us to "reconstruct, revise and reimagine our foundations, structures, institutions, and laws to promote justice and equity for all New Yorkers." Truth and reconciliation commissions can be a powerful vehicle for promoting racial equity and justice.

As stated earlier in my testimony, we recommend that the Council consider refining this bill to address potential areas of overlap with Intro. 1082. We also share the same concerns around allowing an adequate timeline to ensure appropriate staff resources and quality execution of this work.

1
2 From a statutory perspective, Bill 1073
3 tasks the Commission on Racial Equity to lead this
4 work, which may fall outside CORE's intended focus as
5 presently defined in the charter.

6 CORE is not written into law as a
7 watchdog or a fact-finding body. As reflected in the
8 Racial Justice Commission's report, CORE was
9 developed in response to New Yorkers who "desired to
10 have City government more directly reflect community
11 priorities and, to the extent possible, incorporate
12 community power directly into decision-making."
13 CORE's essential Charter-mandated duties include
14 identifying community equity priorities and
15 responding to the citywide racial equity plan. CORE's
16 current composition reflects this goal. This process
17 will require additional resources, access to experts,
18 and ample time. We recommend that the Council
19 consider how to best work with CORE to leverage its
20 resources and clarify within the bill which body
21 would implement the reconciliation process after a
22 plan is created.

23 We support the aim and intent of both
24 bills and would happily continue working with the
25 Council to identify and review paths forward.

1
2 Intonr. 1101, Council Member Farias, which
3 requires the Mayor's Office of Racial Equity to
4 create anti-racism training for employees of human
5 services contractors used by human services agencies.

6 Our City's robust human service sector
7 provides critical social services to New Yorkers in
8 need. It is crucial that those who selflessly serve
9 our city's diverse communities understand anti-racism
10 and can incorporate best practices into their work.
11 We support this bill with caveats.

12 Fueled by the pandemic, the human
13 services sector has experienced considerable strain
14 over the past few years. The Administration has
15 worked diligently to improve how we do business with
16 nonprofits, creating a new Office of Nonprofits,
17 clearing over 6 billion in backlogged payments, and
18 embarking on the reform recommendations outlined in
19 the Joint Task Force to Get Nonprofits Paid on Time.
20 To ensure this requirement is a true value add for
21 employees and New Yorkers by extension, the City
22 would need to invest significant resources and allow
23 ample time for implementation. We also suggest
24 resolving the ambiguity of "covered employee" by
25 applying the requirement to all employees involved in

1 providing services, including managers. We don't
2 think anti-racism or anti-discrimination should only
3 be for front-line workers.
4

5 Intro. 1118, Council Member Williams,
6 requires the Department of Citywide Administrative
7 Services (DCAS) to annually create anti-racism and
8 anti-racial discrimination training for all Ccity
9 workers. Agencies can satisfy this requirement with
10 alternative training if approved by the Mayor's
11 Office of Racial Equity and CCHR.

12 The preamble directs our government,
13 "Vigilance is required to prevent the recurrence of
14 past or worsening of continuing harms." DCAS
15 implements an "Everybody Matters" training biannually
16 that helps employees recognize different types of
17 discrimination and racial inequity, introduces anti-
18 racism concepts, and is mandated EEO training. To
19 expand City employee understanding of racism and how
20 it can show up in our work, we recommend that the
21 Office of Equity and CCHR partner with DCAS to help
22 build upon their existing "Everybody Matters"
23 training to introduce a new and expanded anti-racism
24 module. This module would also help city employees
25 understand the recent racial justice charter

1
2 amendments and the citywide racial equity planning
3 required by law.

4 We support recognition of the painful
5 history of slavery that endures through our city and
6 country today, as well as highlighting and uncovering
7 the often-underappreciated history of resilience,
8 courage, and community-building by the city's black
9 communities across generations. In this spirit, the
10 City, led by the Department of Cultural Affairs,
11 looks forward to working with the Council to advance
12 Intro. 1150 by Council Member Martein relation to
13 establishing a New York City freedom trail.

14 Furthermore, DOT and NYC Parks look forward to
15 further discussions with the Public Advocate to
16 identify an appropriate location for the sign, in
17 response to Intro. 934 from Public Advocate Williams,
18 which requires the Department of Transportation to
19 place a sign at Wall Street and Pearl Street marking
20 the establishment of New York's first slave market in
21 1711.

22 With respect to Intro. 716 from Council
23 Member De La Rosa, which would create a school
24 diversity monitor within CCHR, the City's Human
25 Rights Commission, and Intro. 1085 from Council

1
2 Member Nurse, which would task the Public Design
3 Commission within six months to conduct a public
4 works review and create a removal plan, we have
5 concerns regarding the appropriateness of the
6 agencies identified and alignment with existing
7 efforts and requirements.

8 The Administration shares the Council's
9 commitment to increasing diversity across our school
10 system and ensuring equitable educational
11 opportunities and outcomes. However, Intro. 716,
12 which places an oversight monitor at CCHR, is
13 inconsistent with CCHR's core functions of civil law
14 enforcement outreach on the Human Rights Law's
15 protections. Further, the critical work outlined in
16 716, which includes identifying the complex root
17 cause of inequities is potentially duplicative of
18 current and ongoing administrative efforts to advance
19 educational equity, including work of agencies like
20 New York City Public Schools, and the newly mandated
21 citywide racial equity planning process, requiring
22 agencies to disaggregate data by race, establish
23 goals, and build strategies to achieve racial equity
24 through structural reforms.

1
2 We support the intent of 1085 to
3 reevaluate, recontextualize, and foster greater
4 diversity in the City's art collection. We should
5 note that the Public Design Commission considers
6 applications related to permanent public art in the
7 City's collection following the process outlined in
8 the City Charter, which requires a public meeting and
9 vote by the PDC, among other steps.

10 The City owns approximately 2,500 pieces
11 of art. The PDC would need a significant commitment
12 of resources to conduct extensive research, likely in
13 phases, and begin the collaborative process of
14 creating and issuing new guidance on items in the
15 City collection, requiring significantly more than
16 six months to develop.

17 As part of the City's broader efforts to
18 create a public art collection that better reflects
19 our city's diversity, PDC is committed to promoting
20 equity and diverse narratives through art, including
21 partnering with Black Gotham Experience to expand the
22 City Hall tour program, focusing on untold histories
23 and impact of the African diaspora. The Commission
24 recently approved the addition of a monument honoring
25 Shirley Chisholm in Prospect Park, which is the first

1 artwork in a larger project to honor more women in
2 our public realm. Earlier in 2018 and 2021, following
3 the 2018 Mayoral Monument Commission report, the PDC
4 also approved the removal of the Teddy Roosevelt
5 Statue at the American Museum of National History and
6 the J. Marion Sims Sculpture at Central Park. The PDC
7 advanced these actions through its existing
8 application, public hearing, and vote cycle.

9
10 We look forward to discussing these bills
11 and the full Juneteenth bill package further in
12 today's hearing. Thank you again for the opportunity
13 to comment and for these bold proposals to create a
14 more just city. We welcome your questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much,
16 Commissioner. We will turn it over to Public Advocate
17 Williams who has a few questions.

18 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Thank
19 you so much. Appreciate it.

20 I appreciate the testimony. Thank you. I
21 just wanted to see if I could drill down a little bit
22 because when they went to put the sign from the last
23 Administration, it was similarly that we would try to
24 find an appropriate space, but I just want to make
25 sure the appropriate space is on or around the corner

1 because we had some trouble, I think there was some
2 construction, some stuff was happening at the
3 building, but I want to make sure we actually get it
4 at the location so is that what you mean when you say
5 that?
6

7 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Thank you, Public
8 Advocate, and thank you for continuing to advance
9 this issue.

10 We certainly understand that the current
11 site is a temporary site. It was identified as a
12 temporary site, and so immediately after this
13 hearing, what we want to do is collaborate with Parks
14 and DOT to follow up with your office to find a more
15 appropriate site. I think there are some
16 technicalities in the actual bill language that have
17 raised concerns, but there certainly is an
18 opportunity to find a path forward to a site that is
19 more visible, more appropriate, and certainly is
20 aligned with what has been aligned, but that would
21 require further conversation with both of those
22 agencies.

23 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: I
24 appreciate it. I just want to be clear. You said a
25 more appropriate site so I just want to know is that,

1 is there a reason we won't be able to do it on the
2 corner?
3

4 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I understand your
5 question. What I'm saying is I know that that site is
6 temporary and there's an interest to move it to the
7 corner. Following this hearing, Parks and DOT will
8 have discussions with your Office specifically on how
9 we can have a path forward.

10 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Okay,
11 Thank you.

12 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I understand that
13 the goal is to bring it to that corner and the
14 importance of it.

15 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: I
16 appreciate you understanding that. I'm hearing not a
17 definite yes, but we're going to try to get there
18 just so I'm clear as what's being said.

19 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Understood. There
20 are some technicalities around identifying the right
21 actual location that's at that site or closest to
22 that site, whether it's a building or where that can
23 actually be, and, unfortunately, and I apologize that
24 I'm not able to speak to all the technicalities of
25 what's required, but I know that there is a

1
2 commitment to immediately follow up and have those
3 discussions.

4 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Okay,
5 thank you very much. I appreciate it. I just want to
6 add that all the things that were talked about in my
7 opinion, and I always like to make sure I say this
8 because people hear different things, but the issues
9 that we deal with now, black, white, brown, no one is
10 responsible for creating them, but all of us are
11 responsible for what we give the next generation, and
12 I think that's a place where we can all grab it
13 because sometimes people hear different things when
14 we're speaking so thank you so much. I appreciate it.
15 Looking forward to the conversations. Thank you,
16 Madam Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I just
18 have a few questions and then I'll turn it over to
19 some of my Colleagues and then I'll come back.

20 The first question I have, and I'll just
21 go by bill number, is in reference to Intro. 716 to
22 create the school diversity monitor. I know you
23 mentioned that is beyond the scope of CCHR's
24 obligations so just wanted to know if CCHR's foresees
25 any additional obstacles in the creation of this

1 school diversity monitor outside of what you just
2 testified?

3
4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Thank you
5 and thank you all for your work on these bills and
6 the opportunity to speak on these critical topics.

7 I think as Commissioner Sherman mentioned
8 the Administration generally is committed to
9 protecting New Yorkers from infringement of their
10 civil rights, preventing discrimination and bias, and
11 that is the core mandate of the Commission on Human
12 Rights, which for just a little bit of history was
13 founded actually in the 1940s in response to
14 uprisings in Harlem, racial tensions, and was
15 originally the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in
16 Harlem. That has expanded over time to be a
17 Commission on Unity and then a Commission on
18 Intergroup Relations in 1955 and currently the
19 Commission on Human Rights that we have today. I want
20 to speak a little bit about our core mandate because
21 I think that's a foundational piece of some of the
22 Administration's concerns around the
23 operationalization of this bill.

24 As we've talked before with Council,
25 there are really two main functions of our agency.

1
2 One, we serve as a civil law enforcement agency so we
3 hear complaints of discrimination that are occurring
4 today, and we work with individuals who have
5 experienced discrimination to remedy the harms
6 they've experienced, whether it's through a pre-
7 complaint intervention process or a complaint, and we
8 can talk in more detail about specific complaints in
9 this area. The other part of our work is really
10 education and outreach on the provisions of the Human
11 Rights Law so within our area of expertise is anti-
12 discrimination and within our mandate is all City
13 agencies and private actors in New York City, both as
14 employers and places of public accommodation.

15 Now, going specifically to the bill, I
16 think our concerns are really threefold so I hope
17 this will be helpful.

18 One is about the structure of assigning
19 one individual with a very wide set of
20 responsibilities and focused on one agency within
21 CCHR which really already has an enforcement function
22 that involves City agencies so we already have
23 jurisdiction over DOE in instances of discrimination,
24 and we're concerned that placing one individual
25

1 focused on DOE at our agency would be a bit in
2 conflict with our law enforcement function.

3
4 Second, as Commissioner Sherman
5 mentioned, I think in recent years both New Yorkers
6 who have voted on the ballot measures and this
7 Administration have created a new equity
8 infrastructure, and that is just being launched as we
9 speak, voted in in November. I think we're concerned,
10 as the Commissioner mentioned, that there is going to
11 be potential duplication of what comes out of the
12 racial equity planning processes and the efforts to
13 involve communities at an agency level.

14 The third thing I will say is really
15 about the role of the individual monitor as it's
16 structured. The bill requires an individual who has
17 expertise in pedagogy so how to teach in a culturally
18 competent way, fundraising, training teachers, and
19 data analysts, all of really which extend beyond the
20 expertise we have as an agency, and it is a lot I
21 think for one individual. I think we have spoken and
22 the Administration believes truly in the objective of
23 educational equity, and it's an all hands on deck
24 effort which will require multiple agencies as well
25 as experts in education and families. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. You said
3 you already have oversight over DOE. Has your office
4 processed any cases around discrimination at DOE?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Thank
6 you. Yes, we have cases against the Department of
7 Education. It is my understanding that the majority
8 of those cases relate to the protected class of
9 disability. I should mention also though that CCHR is
10 not the only oversight entity for Department of
11 Education. At the state level, there is a State
12 Education Commission, there's the Division of Human
13 Rights. There's also at the federal level the
14 Department of Education Office of Civil Rights so
15 individuals who have experienced discrimination on
16 the basis of a protected category have a plethora of
17 options where they can go and that's in addition to
18 DOE's own internal mechanisms.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thanks. Does the
20 Law Department get involved in those or do they let
21 you independently investigate?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: The
23 investigations that we undertake are independent so
24 they're done by our Law Enforcement Bureau. Even I
25

1 don't get to know about them because I'm not in the
2 Law Enforcement Bureau so definitely independent.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Got it. The next
5 question I have is on Intro. 1073, which is the
6 creation of a truth, healing, and reconciliation
7 process. What do you think would be a realistic
8 timeline for establishing a truth, healing, and
9 reconciliation process?

10 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. I can speak
11 to that. I think for both 1073 and, I'm sorry, I'm
12 blanking, I believe 1082, I think at a minimum we
13 would recommend that these start at least more than
14 one year after the City issues its first citywide
15 racial equity plan. Those requirements implicate both
16 the Commission on Racial Equity and the Office of
17 Racial Equity and will be a significant focus of the
18 City and the City's resources and also will reflect
19 the input from New Yorkers and lay a foundation so it
20 would be helpful to one, have the opportunity to
21 complete those and move those forward, and then also
22 have the proper time to stand up a reparations task
23 force and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
24 with the expertise that's required, the resources
25 that are required, and to also operate those bodies

1
2 with enough time to really do the work well. We also,
3 I think I shared in my testimony, believe that
4 there's some potential overlap or integration with
5 the two. We certainly understand that truth and
6 reconciliation commissions can look at a variety of
7 issues, particularly contemporary issues, but
8 certainly understanding impacts of slavery and
9 reparations in our country still also require us to
10 look at contemporary issues within black communities
11 and African American communities in particular so
12 there's an opportunity to figure out, and we would be
13 happy to continue to work with the Council to
14 understand timing, how the two connect, and also the
15 right way to leverage CORE which will really be a
16 vehicle for public engagement.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you have a
18 timeline for the racial equity plan to be released?

19 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. We are
20 working towards a framework, blueprint, draft in
21 early January, and then a plan in the spring, and
22 then the Commission is still standing up so we would
23 certainly keep the Council updated on our timelines.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Do you foresee any
25 other implementation questions or challenges with

1 regards to the proposed framework? I know you
2 mentioned the potentiality of maybe merging the two
3 bills, but is there anything in the implementation
4 that you find might be a challenge? If so, do you
5 have specific suggestions for approaching these
6 challenges?
7

8 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. I think we
9 shared some of the challenges in the testimony. I
10 think we're certainly happy to work through like the
11 fine details of the language in the bills and share
12 that with the Council. We're certainly tracking the
13 legislation at the state level as well and want to
14 make sure that the work that we do in the city, and
15 certainly understanding the importance of the City
16 having its work and leading its own work, but would
17 certainly want to make sure that we are aligned in
18 some and leveraging the resources of how the State
19 advances its work with an understanding that the City
20 and the State would need to rely on many of the same
21 experts, much of the same parties to testify, and so
22 we'd want to make sure that it's a value add for the
23 City and the State.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Yes, we
25 are told that Assemblywoman Solages might be

1 testifying so we're excited about her testimony
2
3 because we agree that we need to work with the State.

4 Last question on this. Almost a year ago
5 today, this Committee heard testimony about the wide
6 range of actions that contribute to the process of
7 truth-telling and reconciliation including ways in
8 which your office was planning to support such
9 activities if and when the racial justice ballot
10 initiatives passed, which they did in November of
11 last year. How might the proposed truth and
12 reconciliation process relate to your office's plans
13 and efforts in this regard?

14 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. Our
15 recommendation and I think, whether it's the
16 Commission or a separate commission that stands up
17 for that purpose, my expectation is that that process
18 has some level of independence and that the City is
19 responding to what they learned from New Yorkers
20 through that process. That's different from the
21 research around reparations, and so I think we would
22 envision hopefully connecting the two, but similar to
23 the way in which we envision working with the
24 Commission around the racial equity planning process,
25 we're listening to New Yorkers but there's an

1 independent vehicle to engage New Yorkers. We would
2 see the truth and reconciliation process the same
3 way.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Three
6 more questions. I'll just ask a question about each
7 bill.

8 For 1082, what sort of collaborative
9 efforts does CCHR and the Mayor's Office of Equity
10 plan on in the formation and work of this task force?
11 I know you kind of said it, but if you just can
12 elaborate how you think we can potentially maybe
13 merge because I think that's what your testimony is
14 alluding to, that maybe these two entities can be
15 merged in some way so what sort of collaborative
16 efforts from both agencies do you foresee in the
17 formation of the work of each potential or one
18 unified task force?

19 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. I think we
20 would have to develop more of a plan of action as the
21 legislation advances. I think at a minimum we would
22 want to think about the composition of the body and
23 what's needed. We obviously both operate many task
24 forces and commissions, and I think we need to,
25 sooner than later, understand the full resource need

1 and potential impacts in order to make sure that it's
2 done well, and so that would be where we would start
3 and obviously we would work to then collaborate with
4 the Commission and figure out what an operational
5 plan could be.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Almost
8 finished for now. On Intro. 1101, on anti-racism
9 training for human services contractors, how would
10 the training proposed by this bill fit in with the
11 existing trainings and requirements for human service
12 contractors?

13 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. From our
14 perspective, we would want this to really be a value
15 add, not a compliance exercise for contractors so
16 that this should feel and actually be something that
17 providers want their staff to participate in and see
18 a benefit from, and so our primary feedback here was
19 allowing ample time and we certainly can follow up
20 with the Council on what we would envision as a
21 reasonable timeline so that we can identify the right
22 training resources and establish something that would
23 be valuable to the providers. I think the legislation
24 calls for this to be available online. We would also
25 look to see if there's capacity to create in-person

1 vehicles for that as well, but, at a minimum, we
2 would want to make sure that we have an adequate
3 timeline to develop as well as identifying the
4 resource need.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Last
7 question on 1118, how would the training proposed by
8 this bill fit in with existing trainings and
9 requirements for City employees? I know you spoke
10 about the "Everybody Matters" training that is
11 currently available so how do you envision reshaping,
12 extending that training in relations to the proposed
13 bill?

14 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBAN: Thank you,
15 Council Member, for that question. I can speak to
16 that.

17 I just want to explain first that we do
18 support the spirit of the bill and want to elaborate
19 on what "Everybody Matters" does, which Commissioner
20 Sherman referred to.

21 It is a diversity, EEO, and inclusion
22 training that provides an overview for New York City
23 employees on key principles. Currently, there are
24 four modules in it. It has an introduction to EEO
25 principles and protected categories, workplace

1 harassment and discrimination, diversity and
2 inclusion, and racial equity components. We've
3 managed to make it mandated through Local Law 121,
4 and we created it in consultation with the Commission
5 on Human Rights as well, and it has a lot of
6 interactive components. There are some effective
7 things that this training has that aligns with the
8 spirit of 1118. "Everybody Matters" is available to
9 all the City employees on a web-based platform as
10 well as instructor-led training that is hosted at the
11 DCAS citywide training center, and it is also a
12 training that we provide to agencies to be able to
13 also present it at an in-person format too as a train
14 the trainer model so we are definitely open to and
15 willing to look at how we can expand and build on the
16 content to include a focused anti-racism component
17 that could complement what I've outlined, and that is
18 the recommended approach because to create a separate
19 and new training would present some challenges, both
20 financially and operationally, but I believe that we
21 can work together to create a more enhanced content
22 on anti-racism.

24 I do also just want to emphasize that we
25 do have an EEO and DEI training portfolio in DCAS for

1 additional focused trainings that support anti-
2 discrimination efforts in different contexts, and
3 that's very important because these resources are
4 necessary because we've recognized that our workforce
5 has very intersectional identities where race does
6 overlap with other protected categories. To give you
7 an example, we have additional mandated trainings
8 that we know of are sexual harassment prevention
9 under Local Law 92, the LGBTQ training under
10 Executive Order 16, and agencies are strongly
11 encouraged to also complete other elective training
12 such as unconscious bias, trainings on
13 microaggressions, disability etiquette training,
14 bystander intervention, structured intervening to
15 name a few so we are definitely open to enhancing the
16 "Everybody Matters" of course.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'll now
19 turn it over to my Co-Chair, Council Member Chi Osse
20 and then to some of my Colleagues who have questions.
21 Thank you so much.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Co-Chair
23 Williams. I only have a couple of questions because I
24 know DCLA is not in attendance this morning, but I
25 wanted to ask for is the Public Design Commission in

1 favor of removing or explaining public works of art
2 that fit the criteria outlined in the bill, Intro.
3 1085, that is art commemorating individuals who
4 promoted the slave trade or derived economic benefit
5 from slavery or who participated in systemic crimes
6 against indigenous people or other crimes against
7 humanity? Why or why not?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Thank you,
10 Chair Osse. I'm Sreoshy. I'm the Executive Director.
11 My pronouns are she/her.

12 The PDC is supportive of the City's
13 efforts to reckon with its complicated history and
14 the country's challenging legacy. We are committed to
15 promoting equity, dialogue, and healing and under-
16 represented narratives through art. As proposed, this
17 bill would require significant staffing and resources
18 and would change the nature of PDC's mandate of
19 reviewing City's capital projects. We have already
20 participated in the Mayoral Advisory Commission in
21 2017 and believe that for meaningful, positive, and
22 long-term change, dialogue is necessary so the
23 inclusion of outside expertise would be wonderful to
24 create such a plan so we believe additional review
25 should be guided by similar principles according to

1 the 2018 Mayoral Commission of Monuments. PDC is
2 supportive. The plan, itself, requires significant
3 staffing and resources, but I would like the
4 opportunity to discuss a little bit more about what
5 PDC does.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay. Is that a depends
8 on the case, it depends on the public work or
9 monument, or is that a no?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: In order to
11 explain it, I want to give you a case study example.
12 During the 2018 Monuments Commission, there was a
13 five-step evaluation process where PDC did not get
14 involved until the fifth step so the relevant agency
15 which had jurisdiction over the work in question had
16 to complete the first four steps. For example, Parks,
17 DOT, DCLA that own the artwork so what they would do,
18 they would consider what is being prioritized for
19 review, and the Commission in 2018 recommended that
20 evaluation should be prioritized for artwork that
21 sustained adverse public reaction, large-scale
22 community opposition, and, two, once they selected
23 the priorities, they would do a robust historical
24 analysis of the artwork at hand then seek public
25 input inclusive of multiple voices, and then release

1 the recommendation. Then the fifth process, for
2 example, Parks, they submitted to PDC and our
3 Commission approved so in order to create a plan for
4 removal, we would really recommend establishing an
5 inter-agency task force on monuments to review the
6 artwork, and it's very complex so it's not as easy to
7 say removal or recontextualization or relocation, but
8 it can be studied and multiple voices are required at
9 the table.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: The Commission is the
12 last step..

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: In terms of approving
15 if a work is removed or not. How often do you see
16 these proposals come across (INAUDIBLE)

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: That's a
18 great question. There were 61 submissions last year
19 around artwork, and 35 of those were unique artworks
20 so that included removal, conservation, and new
21 artworks, but PDC sees about 500 to 700 projects a
22 year, so it's around 8 percent of our current annual
23 workforce. In order for us to see an increased
24 number, it would require increased resources, but
25 typically we see 8.4 percent annually of artworks.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: But 65 came to your
3 attention last year?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: 35 unique
5 artworks.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: That's a lot, right? I
7 would say that's a lot.

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Yeah.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: How many of those do
10 you think the criteria of what this bill is trying to
11 address of individuals who promoted the slave trade?
12 There's a lot of them on the East Coast.

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Absolutely.
14 PDC and the Commission supports the City's efforts,
15 and, as a result of those recommendations, the New
16 York City Parks and Central Park Conservancy
17 submitted to relocate the statue of J. Marion Sims
18 which the PDC approved. It supported and approved the
19 proposal by American Museum of Natural History to
20 remove the equestrian statue of Roosevelt, and
21 recently, in July 2023, we approved the Shirley
22 Chisholm monument so sometimes it's a matter of also
23 proposing new and finding opportunities for expanding
24 the narrative in different ways.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What about that man in
3 Columbus Circle who they have a statue for him? Has
4 that come across your desk?

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: We haven't
6 had any submissions related to that, but, as a result
7 of the 2018 Monuments Commission, there were
8 recommendations around him, and it was recommended
9 that it be contextualized and new educational
10 opportunities be considered, but if ever such a
11 proposal were to come in front of us, there would
12 need to be extensive public outreach and input and a
13 vote by our Commission.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What you're saying is
15 that infrastructure doesn't exist yet for?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: For the?

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: For there to be more
18 public input on...

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: No, I think
20 the infrastructure is there. The Public Design
21 Commission is a very good place for proposals to come
22 and then the Commission vote by getting the
23 submissions from the agencies, but also the Monuments
24 Commission created a precedent that I think we'd be
25 happy to continue studying because if a similar type

1 of external group of stakeholders existed, there's a
2 way for us to think about how that may function for
3 this particular bill. We support the intent and want
4 to discuss how a structure could set it up for
5 success because there's been a lot of precedents, but
6 the personnel and resource issue and PDC's Charter
7 mandate involves that we'd have to work closely with
8 other agencies and they would submit to us.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I'll ask one more
11 question, but does the Commission support the removal
12 of the Christopher Columbus statue?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: That matter
14 has not been brought in front of the Commission...

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Really?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: As any
17 particular proposal. However, the Commission would
18 support increased dialogue about it and participation
19 in the Monuments task force.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I feel like that's the
21 hottest one.

22 I'll move on, but are you in favor of
23 explanatory plaques for schools that fit the criteria
24 outlined in this bill, Intro. 1095? That is schools
25 named for individuals who promoted the slave trade or

1 derived economic benefit from slavery or who
2 participated in systemic crimes against indigenous
3 people or other crimes against humanity? Why or why
4 not? Is this the same answer to the last question?
5

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Actually,
7 PDC does not have jurisdiction over school plaques,
8 but I will hand it over to Commissioner Sherman.

9 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. As noted, PDC
10 doesn't have jurisdiction over those plaques. I know
11 that the bill calls for DOT to create plaques. There
12 could potentially be an opportunity for those to be
13 on school buildings instead of actually on the
14 street, which would then become a matter for Public
15 Schools to consider. We certainly can have followup
16 and ensure that that's happening after today's
17 hearing. We know that they would also need to have a
18 public process and dialogue with the school
19 community.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Sure. Okay, and about
21 how many public works of art do you anticipate might
22 be identified under the criteria outlined in the
23 bill?

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Given that
25 there's 2,500 pieces, 800 of those are outdoor

1 sculptures and 1,700 indoors, there would have to be
2 extensive research to determine that, and the experts
3 required at the table would have to analyze. First
4 would be taking account of what exists and what
5 conditions they're in because they're located across
6 multiple buildings and multiple places around our
7 city and then it would require the complex evaluation
8 process, but I imagine given the time they were
9 created and the complex history that there would be
10 several, a lot.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: How many people are
13 part of the Commission?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: The PDC
15 staff are six full-time, one part-time, but there's
16 11 Commissioners that meet monthly and vote on our
17 projects. They're pro bono and they're experts
18 including an artist and a sculptor and, on a monthly
19 cycle, we have a public hearing and it's on the
20 website.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You said there are
22 2,500 works that are in your purview. Approximately
23 how long does it take to research if someone was
24 involved in the slave trade or the killing of
25 indigenous people?

1
2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: For the
3 Monuments Commission, PDC participated, and we hired
4 two full-time staff members for a span of a year to
5 help create a database of outdoor monuments so it
6 took a year to do just a subset of that so we can
7 have further dialogue and consider how long it might
8 take to create an account of it.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Would you say that
10 there's not really an appetite for doing that
11 research?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: I would
13 definitely not say there's not an appetite because
14 PDC already does a lot of that research. When
15 projects come to us, we ensure agencies do the
16 research. It would just be a matter of thinking about
17 how we staff up or partner or consider outside
18 advisors like a Monuments Commission to help support
19 us in doing that. We definitely support the intent
20 and the values behind it.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What would be some of
22 the reasons why PDC would decide not to remove such a
23 work of art?

24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: It's really
25 on a case-by-case basis so when somebody submits to

1 us, we take a lot of public testimony and in that
2 instance, if there's dialogue among the Commissioners
3 one way or the other, those decisions can be made,
4 but it's hard to say specifically what those reasons
5 are not knowing exactly what the artwork at hand is.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Do you have a case
8 study maybe of a particular public work that has come
9 across the Commission's desk where it was unclear on
10 if this work should be removed or not?

11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: That's a
12 very good question, and I can come back to answer
13 that, but one thing that I can just bring up, and
14 it's live, is that there's been matters like Marion
15 Sims where there was no one or the other and it was
16 approved, so most cases when agencies have enough
17 support and willingness to remove, we support our
18 agencies because PDC is here in support of agencies,
19 of DOT, DCLA, or Parks is aligned that they want to
20 remove, rarely does the Commission go against that
21 judgment so we look forward to the narratives
22 submitted to us.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I have more questions,
24 but I do want to pass it off to some of my
25 Colleagues.

1
2 I do want to acknowledge Council Member
3 Ung is here as well as Council Member Louis, and I
4 would like to pass it on to Council Member Marte for
5 some questions.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I just have a quick
7 simple question. I want to thank you for the support
8 of our legislation and working with the Council to
9 move it forward. We have these really awesome
10 pamphlets from Jacob Morris who's been working on
11 this for multiple years and in the previous Council,
12 and I'd love to hand one to you guys if you're okay
13 with that.

14 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you.
16 Honestly, this pamphlet was the inspiration of our
17 legislation. Imagine the areas and the landmarks that
18 we identified just in Lower Manhattan, but all the
19 unknown areas throughout the City and so as we
20 continue to work on this potential task force, maybe
21 we could use this as a role model or a guiding light
22 to figure out how this task force is going to look
23 and which areas we should acknowledge. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Co-Chair Williams, do
25 you have any more questions that you want to ask?

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I guess it's me
again.

Back to 1073, which is the creation of a
truth, healing, and reconciliation process. Public
awareness and participation is a critical element of
truth and reconciliation processes. Do you foresee
any particular challenges in engaging the public in
this type of process? If so, do you have suggestions
for public engagement that would account for these
challenges?

COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure, I can speak
generally to that question recognizing that this
calls for the Commission to do this work. I think
it's hard to have a truth and reconciliation process
where people can come forward and share their
testimony but also feel safe in doing so and feel
heard, and I know that the bill calls for the
Commission to create a space that's safe and that can
be affirming so that people feel comfortable doing
that. I think providing a variety of vehicles for
people to share their past harms or contemporary
harms and issues will be important so that we hear
from a variety of New Yorkers. I think I shared the
current composition of the Commission is really focus

1 on what it's been aligned to do in the Charter so
2 much more focus on supporting a racial equity
3 planning process, identifying community priorities. I
4 think it will be important to have an added layer of
5 expertise, another body of individuals who have
6 experience with truth and reconciliation commissions
7 to make sure that it's done well or commissions
8 specifically for that purpose.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Do you
11 know of any other jurisdictions doing similar work? I
12 know you mentioned California. If so, what are your
13 thoughts on their approach? Would you consider a
14 similar approach for New York City? Do you see any
15 potential coordination challenges if other
16 jurisdictions implement their own truth and
17 reconciliation processes in the near future? For
18 example, as is currently under consideration by the
19 New York State Legislature as also mentioned in your
20 testimony? If so, how would you approach those
21 challenges?

22 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. Again, I can
23 share recommendations for how we would envision the
24 Commission doing that work. Our office generally, as
25 we've rolled out our office and the work of

1
2 implementing the ballot measures, we certainly have
3 talked to many other jurisdictions that have racial
4 equity offices, human rights, I think we've joined
5 you, Council Member, in a meeting with San
6 Francisco's Human Rights Commission so there are many
7 great examples nationally of this work, and we're
8 happy to share some of what we've learned as well as
9 we know as the Commission stands up and has its
10 Commissioners and members, we also would look to draw
11 on their expertise, but there are certainly national
12 examples as well as international examples of
13 jurisdictions that have done this well.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I'm also interested
15 in your thoughts if the Governor finally signs the
16 state legislation how that will impact the work in
17 New York City. I have started some preliminary
18 conversations with them but just interested in
19 knowing how you think that would impact the work, do
20 you think it's something that we would just have to
21 like table or is there space to work somewhere
22 simultaneously or in congruence with what the State
23 is doing?

24 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. This is where
25 the question of timing becomes very important for us

1 and working closely to understand what's progressing
2 at the State. I think there could be an opportunity
3 for the City to leverage the research and the work
4 that's done at the State and further it in New York
5 City. There could also be an opportunity for the City
6 to recommend and shape what the State does, depending
7 on the timing. We do know if this is happening
8 simultaneously we will most likely be relying on many
9 of the same people and experts and so we'd want to
10 make sure that these are synced and aligned and feel
11 connected.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The next
14 question I have is just about resources, and I'll ask
15 about both bills at the same time. This is in regards
16 to anti-racism training for human services
17 contractors and City employees. Are there any
18 concerns regarding the amount or type of resources
19 needed? I know you both mentioned that it might be a
20 resource strain but if you could articulate in detail
21 what that would be to develop effective trainings for
22 different types of services and service provision
23 roles and similarly for the City. Obviously, we're a
24 very large and diverse city, and people are doing
25 different types of functions so how would you

1
2 envision and, if you can, articulate the amount and
3 type of resources you feel would be needed for both
4 trainings?

5 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: We don't have a
6 cost estimate to provide you, but I will say that
7 this legislation for the two trainings as well as
8 most of the bill package would require new resources
9 for the agencies involves, and so that's part of our
10 assessment in identifying what the resource need is
11 as well as the timing which is part of that
12 consideration. There's something to work from with
13 respect to training for City employees. My colleague
14 can share more on the "Everybody Matters" training. I
15 think for human service vendors, this is really
16 developing a brand new training, and, as I shared,
17 this would be something that we want to be a value
18 add and that actually starts with engaging the
19 providers first and foremost to really even
20 understand the need and so we can certainly share
21 what we envision that cost to be, but we know it will
22 certainly need to be a new cost.

23 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBAN: Definitely, and
24 to echo that, we don't really have any cost specifics
25 right now but, given our experience, we know that it

1 is a very prolonged process. It requires the vendor
2 bidding process to solicit the correct bids, the
3 ability to also engage subject matter experts to find
4 the way to develop the right content. It also
5 requires extensive testing of the content, etc. and
6 in the right platforms so it's quite an extensive
7 process that does turn out to be a bit of a challenge
8 and somewhat of a strain on the limited resources we
9 have right now, but, again, we would have to study it
10 further to be able to quantify what those costs and
11 strain on the resources would be. Again, just want to
12 emphasize that, of course, we're going to explore how
13 we can expand the existing training which may be a
14 bit more cost effective.
15

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.
17 Actually, just to piggyback on something you said
18 around extensive testing so through your experiences,
19 are there certain types of trainings, anti-racism,
20 diversity trainings, that are particularly effective
21 that could be considered in implementing the
22 requirements of either bill?

23 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBAN: When I mentioned
24 testing, I was mainly referring to the technical
25 aspects of it because we actually have to make sure

1 that the product is able to function on the platform
2 technologically, reach the audiences. We'd have to be
3 able to also test the way we can quantify the
4 completions, etc. That's really what I was referring
5 to.
6

7 As I mentioned before, we have an
8 extensive and growing portfolio of anti-
9 discrimination training, equity, and diversity and
10 inclusion tops, so we feel that with the complement
11 of that curricula, we can educate our workforce,
12 whether it's managers, supervisors, frontline staff
13 on the principles of anti-discrimination in the
14 workplace so this is really what we rely on to
15 perpetuate the sense of equality and safety in the
16 workplace right now.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thanks for the
18 clarification.

19 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: I would just add, I
20 think, and we noted in our testimony one of the
21 things that we would look to accomplish through this
22 expanded anti-racism component is also educating New
23 York City employees on the values that we now have in
24 our Charter, right, and their obligations as City
25 employees to advance a city that's more just and more

1 equitable and addressing racism, also understanding
2 our obligations with respect to racial equity
3 planning, etc. so that we are certainly understanding
4 anti-racism and discrimination within the workplace
5 but then also how we could potentially perpetuate in
6 our work and the ways to address that.
7

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah, I
9 was really just going to echo what the Commissioner
10 had mentioned earlier about knowing the audience. We
11 develop a lot of trainings at CCHR. It does take a
12 long time, especially if you're working with
13 community partners which I think makes them more
14 effective, and having interactive trainings. We do
15 ours live. We have a few that are web-based so I
16 think there's a lot of models, and it depends, but
17 definitely on the time front and the resources front,
18 just want to underscore agreement with DCAS
19 colleagues. Thanks.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Just to
21 piggyback and thanks for the clarification, you
22 mentioned that you have tons of models already that
23 exist so how are you testing the effectiveness of
24 those models? Do you have any thoughts on the success
25 of those models, how its been received, any best

1
2 practices that can be incorporated to maybe creating
3 or enhancing what already exists?

4 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBAN: Sure. I mean
5 those are very ambitious goals that we actually
6 strive to do every day through my office, Citywide
7 Equity and Inclusion. Again, our constituents are the
8 EEO officers of every agency so we disseminate the
9 information through them. We also partner with
10 Citywide Human Capital who also works with the
11 personnel officers as well on the importance of using
12 these kinds of trainings. We have a lot of tools
13 where we test what the workplace culture is like. For
14 example, the Citywide Climate Survey. We've issued
15 the Climate Survey. We've been able to assess through
16 the Climate Survey, which is voluntary, but we've
17 been able to assess the knowledge that employees have
18 and awareness they have about their rights, their
19 obligations, their protections under the EEO policy,
20 their awareness of anti-discrimination and sexual
21 harassment principles, etc. so by also having those
22 principals such as the EEO officers, the agency
23 personnel officers and leads promote these types of
24 trainings that I previously mentioned, we're able to
25 sort of buttress all of the educational efforts we

1 have on equity and anti-discrimination and so
2 basically that's how we try to assess the needs and
3 certainly our Learning and Development Department at
4 DCAS reacts directly to any types of specific needs
5 that agencies have in order to target a particular
6 population or maybe a hard to reach satellite
7 operation in order to get them the type of training
8 that they need or presented in a platform that's more
9 accessible to them so there are different ways, and
10 we try to adapt to the basic needs of the agencies,
11 but we see the reactions from the agencies and
12 therefore we could assess that there is an awareness
13 and a willingness to engage and keep learning about
14 topics and, as we also engage if there's an interest
15 in a particular topic, we try to then research how we
16 can develop the training, engage vendors, and develop
17 a content.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: This is like
20 somewhat of a off-topic-ish question, but do you
21 interact with EEPC at all?

22 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBÁN: Yes, on
23 occasion, we do interact with EEPC.

24 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: In what ways?
25

1
2 CHIEF OFFICER MONTALBAN: We have a very
3 good relationship with the EEPC. We actually engaged
4 them to give guidance to the agencies on their audit
5 structure and the expectations that they have for
6 conducting audits at the agencies about their
7 employment practices, and we actually partner with
8 them to disseminate those principles and expectations
9 to give more clarity to the agencies about that.
10 There are different ways in which we try to have a
11 conversation about how to work together to enlighten
12 agencies about expectations about employment
13 practices.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I was
15 just trying to figure out, because something you were
16 saying, I was like what does that mean for these
17 other agencies and the work that we do. I, for sure,
18 don't like duplicity, and I definitely think there
19 are a lot of things that are duplicative, and so at
20 the very least I try to make sure that some of the
21 things that we aren't doing more work or adding
22 something that might already be there. Maybe some
23 things need to be tweaked or refined so I do look
24 forward to working with you and talking to you about
25 how we can make some refinements to the trainings.

1
2 I have a quick question for the Public
3 Design Commission. You mentioned that you would have
4 to take inventory, so you don't currently have a list
5 of inventory of what the different public works are?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: Thank you
7 for your question. We do have a list. The list is
8 based on a survey done in the late '80s and early
9 '90s so buildings shift all the time, operations
10 change, so we'd need a new inventory of what exists
11 in the interior of buildings, and these buildings
12 could be schools, libraries, courthouses, and many
13 other places that we may not know if it's still there
14 in fact, but, for the outdoor monuments, we do have a
15 recent survey, and there's a publicly accessible
16 database on our website.

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So for the public
18 works inside, when was the last time you guys updated
19 the list?

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: The list is
21 updated in terms of administration but, from what I
22 understand, we also have a database and an archive
23 which takes consideration all the submissions so the
24 list is continuously updated for new submitted
25 artworks, but for artworks that are there from way

1
2 back, it's just that the latest survey we have is
3 from the '90s, and we would want to do a new one
4 based on how things have been shifting.

5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Whether or not this
6 bill passes, when does your Commission plan to refine
7 or update I guess the list?

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: That is a
9 very good question, and we can take it back and
10 discuss with our leadership and see how to proceed.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, just another
12 clarifying just for the record, so in your responses
13 to Council Member Osse's questions, you mentioned the
14 current process where people can essentially submit
15 for review possibly of having something removed so,
16 just to clarify, your office does not proactively do
17 any inventory of things that are currently within the
18 public works sphere? You only assess and review
19 things that people come to you about or people submit
20 applications about?

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: We have
22 curatorial and oversight over all that artwork so
23 whenever somebody may want to relocate, find a long-
24 term loan, we are involved and engaged in that
25 decision-making, but it's cyclical how often we do

1
2 the inventory aspect because sometimes we may have
3 the resources to do that or grants. The last time I
4 think we worked, in the Bloomberg administration or
5 the Koch administration because we had more
6 resources, and that's when we did the inventory.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Was I alive when he
8 was the Mayor? I don't even think so. Very long time
9 ago.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: We can
11 continue the dialogue and see if that's something.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think I
13 just need further clarity because, for instance, you
14 mentioned that the Sims monument was taken down
15 because there was some type of public outcry or
16 public opinions about it that then led to a review
17 and then when Council Member Osse mentioned the
18 Christopher Columbus statue, you said you haven't
19 received anything about it so I guess that's my
20 question, what is the actual process of the
21 Commission, reviewing or assessing or even thinking
22 about whether to remove something or even put up a
23 plaque explaining our own versions of the real
24 histories or just even explaining the history of said
25 person?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: To clarify,
the 2017 Monuments Commission was created in the de
Blasio administration, and a group of experts came
and did a four-month review of what they thought were
priorities of very controversial and complex artworks
including Marion Sims, but they didn't come up with
recommendations for removal with each of them. For
others like the Columbus statue, they advised
contextualization and education efforts, but for
Marion Sims they suggested removal. Parks then took
that and they submit it to us so that's why we were
able to take the public input, the public testimony,
and approve that. In terms of plaques, we currently
also review them and we approve them, but in terms of
being proactive we try and do that through our
strategic and special initiatives, like we partner
with the Black Gotham Experience and artist Kamau
Ware, he came in and he does a whole diverse tour of
City Hall so we're hoping to increase the narratives
through storytelling and through new partnerships
with DCLA and temporary artwork, but, when it comes
to the permanent collection, because it really
involves the partnership of other agencies coming
forth, they have to pay for the contextualization,

1 pay for the plaques, each plaque costs between 5,000
2 to 10,000 dollars, so you can imagine that's a
3 decision they need to consider.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You keep on referencing
6 the Monument Commission. Are they here today? They're
7 not here today, right?

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: It was a
9 group that was put forth to create the report and,
10 once they created the report, I believe they were
11 done. It was a task force.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: It was a task force,
13 but it seems like a lot of their work is being
14 referenced, but, if they're done, then there's no
15 levels of accountability on some of these issues that
16 we're trying to address today. Has the Public Design
17 Commission taken up some responsibility that the
18 Monument Commission may have had? Is that something
19 that is in talks at the Public Design Commission in
20 terms of being in tangent with a potential future
21 Monument Commission? I just feel like there's a lot
22 of things that are referencing the Monument
23 Commission, which seem to be like obstacles or
24 roadblocks in terms of some of the things that we're
25

1 trying to address, yet, from what I'm hearing,
2 they're dissolved and don't exist anymore.

3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: The
4 conversation has come up where should there be
5 another and then we are happy to continue that
6 dialogue to see how we can consider a similar task
7 force. That's something that was a recommendation out
8 of the report that there remain an inter-agency task
9 force so with additional time and resources we can
10 continue that dialogue.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: So the inter-agency
12 task force wasn't created though, right? It was a
13 recommendation, but it's not created though, right?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BONERJEA: It's not
15 formally created as I understand it.

16 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, just another
17 quick question because I think a lot of the work that
18 you might do or maybe other agencies might do in
19 reference to Council Member Nurse's bill has to do
20 with truth and reconciliation so do you foresee, and
21 maybe not being necessarily a question for you, but
22 for you, Commissioner, do you foresee any type of
23 overlap with that process because I think that also
24

1 has to do with retelling stories and truth around
2 stories and people and places?
3

4 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Sure. I think
5 there's a connective tissue, and a truth and
6 reconciliation commission is the vehicle for people
7 to express what has happened to them individually,
8 their communities, and the harms related to it.
9 Certainly, the art and monuments of our city also
10 reflect and can perpetuate that as well, and so I
11 think, and correct me if I'm wrong, Executive
12 Director, there's a level of independence that the
13 PDC has which requires it to take votes, right, but
14 it needs to respond to and have an action to vote on.
15 There certainly could be a connective tissue where
16 what is learned at the truth and reconciliation
17 commission propels applications that then go before
18 this body for it to consider in vote, and so there's
19 an opportunity to do that, which still allows the PDC
20 to have its independence, take an objective vote, but
21 the commission itself, the truth and reconciliation
22 commission, can certainly galvanize those stories and
23 those applications to bring to PDC.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: We're going to pass it
25 off to Council Member Farias for questions.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIAS: Thank you so much,
3 Chairs, and thank you folks for testifying. I
4 appreciate your response on 1101 and the support for
5 the bill.

6 I did just want to ask what do you folks
7 mean by allowing ample time for implementation? Is
8 there like an ideal timeframe?

9 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Apologies. I'm
10 trying to just reference the bill number.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIAS: 1101 in your
12 testimony.

13 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: The human services
14 contract. Sorry. We need to actually figure out that
15 timeline. We don't have that today. We're certainly
16 happy to follow up with your office. I think we are
17 aiming for the bills particularly that call in the
18 Office of Equity and the Commission on Racial Equity
19 to fall at least more than one year after the first
20 citywide equity plan because that's a Charter-
21 mandated timeline that we're all working to reach in
22 the near-term, and so we certainly can follow up with
23 you and share recommendation for timeline, and that
24 would include what we want to have some extensive
25 lead-up with human service contractors and having

1
2 their input before we would even go out to bid for a
3 vendor so we can share with you what a timeline would
4 be.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIAS: Sure. I'm sorry if
6 I missed it during the hearing. Do we have a timeline
7 for when the equity..

8 COMMISSIONER SHERMAN: Yes. Spring of
9 2024.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIAS: Okay, so ideally,
11 right now off the cuff, a year after that feels more
12 ideal, but we'll talk offline. Okay, thank you so
13 much.

14 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you so much
15 for your testimony and have a great day. We'll be
16 calling up the next panel shortly.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: All right.
18 Thank you, again, everyone.

19 We will now turn to public testimony, and
20 we will be calling individuals by name to testify.
21 How this portion will work is that you will please
22 begin once the Sergeant has started the timer.

23 Council Members who have questions for a
24 particular panelist should let me know, and we'll

1
2 make sure that everyone can ask their questions once
3 the panelist has completed their testimony.

4 For panelists, once your name is called,
5 a Member of our Staff will unmute you if you're on
6 Zoom, and the Sergeant-at-Arms will give you the go
7 ahead to begin. Please wait at that time for the
8 Sergeant to announce that you may begin before
9 delivering your testimony.

10 I think we're running slightly ahead of
11 schedule surprisingly, but if we have Assembly Member
12 Michaëlle Solages here?

13 All right, we can come back to her. In
14 that case, we can move to our next member of the
15 public, Jennifer Jones Austin.

16 One other note for everyone, there will
17 be two minutes for each member of the public to read
18 their testimony after which there may be questions.

19 All right, thank you.

20 All right, whenever you're ready.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You don't need to be
22 sworn in because you're not a City agency, right?

23 JENNIFER JONES AUSTIN: I've testified
24 through the years in the past, and I guess I always
25 testified as a public official so here I am in my

1 personal capacity, and I'm honored to be with you,
2 honored to be with you, Chair Osse, and I'll just
3 quickly let you know that I grew up with your mother
4 right around the street on Maple Street in Brooklyn,
5 New York so it's an honor to see you in this role and
6 just leading and serving. It's an honor to be here
7 with Chair Nantasha Williams and all of you.

9 I want to speak for just a couple of
10 minutes about Intro. 1101 and 1118, and I represent
11 the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, which
12 is an anti-social policy and advocacy organization
13 that was founded at a time when social services in
14 New York City were doled out based on race and
15 religion, so going back 101 years ago when FPWA was
16 founded, if you were white and you were Jewish, you
17 were cared for by Jewish faith organizations
18 affiliated with United Jewish Association, if you
19 were white, in most instances you were cared for by
20 Catholic charities, and if you were other, you were
21 cared for by organizations affiliated with the
22 Protestant community, and, as one would expect going
23 back 101 years, the services were not equal, and the
24 FPWA, the organization I lead, was founded to be a
25 voice at the table representing marginalized

1 communities, children, mothers, and the men who were
2 made vulnerable by institutional and structural
3 racism. We've continued that work for 100 years, and
4 I now serve an organization that is centered on
5 dismantling structural and institutional racism in
6 government functioning and in human services
7 delivery. I most recently served as the Chair of the
8 New York City Racial Justice Commission. I've served
9 as Chair of the New York City Board of Correction. I
10 presently serve as the Vice-Chair of the National
11 Action Network. I center a lot on racism, structural
12 and institutional racism. Passing 1101 and 1118 are
13 critical, they are essential because what we've
14 learned through the years, even with legislation
15 aimed at bringing in, outlawing discrimination, we
16 find that that doesn't change the attitudes, beliefs,
17 behaviors, and when you have people who are in
18 positions of power, whether they be in government,
19 whether they be supervisors, managers, commissioners,
20 frontline staff, and when you have people in human
21 services agencies, whether they be supervisors,
22 managers, or frontline staff, the power differential
23 is significant and whether they show up intentionally
24 or unintentionally, because racism and bias pervades
25

1 every pillar of society, they often show up with
2 those biases in place. If we as a City take the
3 critical step forward in ensuring that people have
4 knowledge and awareness of how racism and bias,
5 again, conscious and unconscious, kind of creeps into
6 and is a part of our fabric as a nation, if they have
7 greater awareness when it comes to carrying out their
8 required functions on a day-to-basis, that will go a
9 long way. We have to help people, much like we're
10 doing presently with anti-sexual harassment training,
11 to understand what racism and bias looks like. It
12 can't be enough that we say that we are not a racist
13 city. We have to actively practice anti-racism and
14 anti-bias practices. It has to be embedded in our
15 policies and in the ways that we show up and live out
16 those policies so I'm here to support Intro. 1101 and
17 1118 because that is a critical first step, and it
18 represents the City Council's commitment to upholding
19 what the New Yorkers, the overwhelming number of New
20 Yorkers just last November said they desire for this
21 city, that we be committed to and actively engage in
22 the work of bringing an end to structural and
23 institutional racism.
24
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you very
3 much.

4 JENNIFER JONES AUSTIN: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Once more I'll
6 ask in case the Assembly Member has arrived.

7 All right, we'll come back.

8 I think we do have at least a couple of
9 questions from the Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Hi. I know you just
11 testified, and I'm sure you spoke about your role as
12 the Chair of the Racial Justice Commission, and so
13 much of what was presented today came from the Racial
14 Justice Commission's recommendations that didn't make
15 the ballot like the truth and reconciliation so just
16 wanted to know from your experiences as Chair of the
17 Racial Justice Commission, what did you see, what did
18 you hear, how do you feel about how we could really
19 implement something like this in our city?

20 JENNIFER JONES AUSTIN: When the New York
21 City Racial Justice Commission commenced its work,
22 one of our primary interests was hearing from New
23 Yorkers all across the city, New Yorkers who had
24 experienced discrimination and bias and often at the
25 hands of New York government, and what we found

1 through those conversations as well as what I learned
2 when serving on the Board of Correction and even when
3 I served as Deputy Commissioner for the New York City
4 Administration of Children Services. Very often
5 government staff, again many instances
6 unintentionally bring forth the biases that have
7 lived inside of structural racism and racist policies
8 and practices, and so what we found was that people
9 were talking about being overlooked for hirings and
10 promotions in New York City just as the City Council
11 demonstrated with a report released just in 2021
12 centering on pay equity and lack of access to
13 opportunity. There were City employees who were not
14 afraid to come forward in these public hearings and
15 talk about being overlooked. We heard from a lot of
16 New Yorkers that sometimes when they would come to
17 apply for income supports or to apply for permits of
18 various types that they felt like they were being
19 treated differently, that they were not being seen
20 and heard, mainly because of their color. Sometimes
21 people talking about it because of their immigration
22 status or because of their gender, and so it was this
23 persistent outcry that it's not simply enough to say
24 that you are a city that seeks to undo racism. You
25

1 have to actively make sure that the workers
2 understand what that means. What I found from what
3 you all put forward as a necessity is the annual
4 element. We have to remember that people cycle
5 through government on a continuing basis. Some people
6 are lifers, and some come on in and then they leave.
7 People are always showing up new in their roles. If
8 we just train people once and not have it be ongoing,
9 we're going to miss people. Sometimes you train
10 people, you help them understand, appreciate what's
11 going on, but they don't get it the first time so you
12 have to keep at it and so what you all are doing
13 here, whether it be truth and reconciliation, whether
14 it be the trainings, it evidences what people are
15 saying they need, what is vital to New York City.
16 Very quickly about the truth and reconciliation, we
17 realized that we could not in bringing forth to the
18 New York City electorate an effort to undo structural
19 racism. We couldn't single out every particular
20 issue, but we understood that in order for New York
21 to change, much like the rest of the nation, we had
22 to look to what happened in South Africa with truth
23 and reconciliation. People coming forward, those who
24 had been harmed, and those who had willfully or
25

1
2 unintentionally exacted the harm to say we understand
3 what's happened here and we want to do things
4 differently so we were in support of truth and
5 reconciliation. We just knew that we could not put to
6 the New York City electorate 500 ballot measures so
7 we tried to do something that was broad and would
8 actually encapsulate everything which was in part
9 what the preamble was intended to do, the Office of
10 Racial Equity, and the ongoing Commission on Racial
11 Equity.

12 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, this guy
13 outside, I don't know if he's in the audience, just
14 asked a question about like who wants these things
15 and who really wants this to happen. I think
16 sometimes there's a common misperception that people
17 don't actually want this, and so I know you all did
18 extensive engagement and outreach so if you can talk
19 about, the fact that New York City, we overwhelmingly
20 voted for all of the ballot measures so if you can
21 just talk about like the work that you all did to
22 inform the ballot measures and truly what New Yorkers
23 want, and I remember specifically when you testified
24 before November last year you talked about we will
25 see how New Yorkers really feel and you were

1 optimistic that New Yorkers would want to see justice
2 and equity and reconciliation and want to see forms
3 of harm undone, but if you could just for the record
4 talk about a lot of the extensive work that you did
5 that really forms a lot of the bills we heard today?
6

7 JENNIFER JONES AUSTIN: Absolutely. Let me
8 first just pick up on the last point that you made.
9 When New Yorkers voted for these three racial justice
10 measures, we were told that it was the largest
11 flipping of the ballot, the largest number, greatest
12 number of people flipping the ballot for measures,
13 flipping to the back, and what we saw was that with
14 each of the measures more than 60 percent of persons
15 voted favorably for them, as much as 81 percent, so
16 this is not just one or two people saying oh, this
17 would be a nice thing to do. This is an overwhelming
18 majority of New Yorkers saying this is not only a
19 nice thing to do, it's a necessary thing to do. When
20 we engaged in work, when we commenced the work, it
21 was in the midst of the pandemic, in the height of
22 the pandemic. It was work that was brought about
23 because we were seeing throughout New York City and
24 beyond, all around this nation, the people were
25 saying it's not just enough to march in protest and

1 it's not just enough to believe that racism persists
2 in policing, excessive use of force in policing, but
3 rather people understood that racism is present in
4 healthcare, in education, in income and wages, in
5 human services, and more. They wanted to see change.
6 In the midst of the pandemic, we tried to stand up a
7 commission and get people to testify, come out and be
8 heard, we were delightfully surprised that when we
9 did this meetings, in aggregate we saw more than
10 3,000 people who wanted to come out and make their
11 voices be heard in the midst of a pandemic, and one
12 might say but what is 3,000 in comparison to 8
13 million people. Well, those 3,000 people must've told
14 somebody, and somebody must've been listening in
15 because we had more than 3,000 flip the ballot and
16 say they wanted these proposals.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, and I'll
20 tell my mom you say hi.

21 JENNIFER JONES AUSTIN: Thank you. Thank
22 you so much. Very much appreciated.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: All right, I'll
24 ask again if Assembly Member Michaelle Solages has
25 come?

1
2 All right, great. Next up, we will invite
3 to the table Jacob Morris, Jerry Mikorenda, Salonee
4 Bahman, and Mitchell Grubler.

5 Thank you. Again, everyone will have two
6 minutes to present their testimony.

7 Council Members, if you have questions,
8 please let me know.

9 Please introduce yourself. We can start
10 with the gentleman to my farthest left.

11 JERRY MIKORENDA: My name is Jerry
12 Mikorenda, and I'm an author.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: You may begin.

14 JERRY MIKORENDA: Oh, I'm going to begin.
15 Sorry. If I did this right, I should have about seven
16 seconds left.

17 Hi, my name's Jerry Mikorenda, author of
18 America's First Freedom Rider, Elizabeth Jennings,
19 Chester A. Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil
20 Rights.

21 I'd like to thank the Committee for this
22 opportunity to provide input on the development of a
23 Freedom Trail for Lower Manhattan.

24 People, especially the young, need to
25 see, hear, touch, walk history to claim it as their

1
2 own. Too many critical events and people from our
3 heritage have been bulldozed and nearly forgotten.
4 Let me tell you about one.

5 In 2019, Elizabeth Jennings Graham was
6 chosen by New Yorkers to have a statue placed in
7 Manhattan. Earlier this year, Community Board 1
8 passed a resolution urging "A suitable monument to
9 her in Lower Manhattan where this important
10 historical event took place." I'm here to suggest her
11 monument, the story of the early Civil Rights
12 Movement, can help anchor the rich saga that a Lower
13 Manhattan Freedom Trail can provide all New Yorkers.
14 For those of you not familiar with Elizabeth, she was
15 a New York City schoolteacher, an early feminist, and
16 a Civil Rights advocate. On Sunday, July 16, 1854,
17 she took a Chatham Street horsecar bound for church
18 where she led the choir. When Elizabeth refused to
19 leave because she was black, the conductor brutally
20 assaulted her and threw her off. Undeterred, she re-
21 entered the car, and the conductor tossed her out
22 again aided by a city policeman. In 1855, Elizabeth
23 won a landmark case that opened transit services to
24 all New Yorkers. Her fledgling lawyer was future U.S.
25 President, Chester A. Arthur. In 1895, she started

1 the first kindergarten for black children in the
2 country. I could go on and on, but I'll end on this
3 statement by late New York historian, John. H.
4 Hewitt, "if only because she started some larger than
5 herself, she deserves a place of honor in the history
6 of civil rights."
7

8 Thank you for your time and
9 consideration.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you. Go
11 ahead.

12 JACOB MORRIS: My name is Jacob Morris.
13 I'm the Director of the Harlem Historical Society and
14 the New York City Freedom Trail Foundation.

15 I came up with the idea for a Freedom
16 Trail for New York City in 2006 as part of writing a
17 grant, the first federal grant that was ever won by
18 the New York Historical Society for their Slavery in
19 New York exhibit, which created the sensation because
20 the subject of slavery is a very painful, painful
21 subject, but to reopen that story and tell it as well
22 as it did and then also to tell the flip side of the
23 story which was the struggle for freedom from chattel
24 slavery and so I felt that it was just incredibly
25 important for New Yorkers and the country and the

1 world to know New York City's great role in the
2 struggle for freedom from chattel slavery through the
3 underground railroad and through the abolitionist
4 movement. New York City was the funder of the
5 slaveocracy, that's what it was, the slaveocracy, the
6 south, the empire of cotton, and New York City and
7 Wall Street funded that slaveocracy, but yet there
8 was an incredible strong community here in New York
9 City that fought for freedom and for abolitionism,
10 the abolition of slavery, and the fight for equality
11 and people like Elizabeth Jennings Graham, and she
12 was a young woman, exemplify that. There were so many
13 others. I mean for Frederick Douglass, may I have a
14 little extra time? Thank you.

16 My first street naming was Frederick
17 Douglass Landing. That's where the dock was on
18 Chamber Street by the Hudson River when he was 20
19 years old, and that was the name I came up, Frederick
20 Douglass Landing. That was 2005, and his struggle to
21 escape from slavery, and then he met David Ruggles
22 who became a role model, people don't even know,
23 David Ruggles was a role model for Frederick
24 Douglass, and he was on Lispenard Street, and, after
25 Frederick Douglass hid among garbage cans because he

1 found out that New York City was full of
2 slavecatchers, which it was, in the 1830s, because
3 there were so many freedom-seeking blacks that were
4 seeking to escape slavery coming through New York
5 City. No, the path north was not through New Jersey.
6 No, freedom-seeking blacks didn't take a helicopter
7 from Philadelphia to northern New York or Vermont or
8 Canada. They went on the rivers and the back roads,
9 but they came through New York City, quite a lot of
10 percentage of these freedom-seeking blacks. This is
11 very profound, very inspirational, and there were so
12 many great people, Dr. James McCune Smith. We all
13 know about Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth and
14 just all throughout New York City and Brooklyn,
15 Weeksville was a major location, and Flushing Queens,
16 on and on. Location after location. A lot of them
17 aren't there anymore. The great creative destruction
18 of New York City. This history should be
19 commemorated, it should be honored. We establish a
20 Freedom Trail here in New York City that's citywide
21 as well as concentrated in downtown Manhattan, and we
22 will have done something really wonderful for New
23 York City and for America. Why should just Boston and
24 Philadelphia honor their history and struggle for
25

1 freedom and Constitution and stuff? Why can't we do
2 it here in New York City? We should, we need to, and
3 let's get it done today. Thank you.

4
5 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. You can
6 go.

7 SALONEE BAHMAN: Hi. Good morning. Thank
8 you for the Council for this time. My name is Salonee
9 Bahman, and I'm a post-doctoral fellow at the New
10 York Historical Society. I hold a PhD in history from
11 Yale and have led walking tours in New York City for
12 the last eight years. I'm here to speak in support of
13 1150.

14 The creation of a Lower Manhattan Freedom
15 Trail is an invaluable opportunity to emphasis the
16 centrality of struggles over slavery and freedom to
17 our City's story. As any walking tour guide worth
18 their salt will tell you, Lower Manhattan has a dense
19 concentration of institutions that are notable for
20 their place in the founding of the United States,
21 underscoring just how intimately this history is tied
22 to that of enslavement. For example, within a few
23 blocks of each other are the tavern where George
24 Washington bid farewell to his troops after the
25 Revolutionary War, New York's own open air slave

1 market, and the Tontine Coffee House where wealthy
2 men bought and sold human lives as commodities. The
3 first New York Stock Exchange was created in that
4 same place in 1792. Just one block north of City
5 Hall, workers excavating the foundation for the Ted
6 Weiss Federal Building in 1991 discovered the remains
7 that are now believed to have belonged to more than
8 400 free and enslaved Africans buried over 300 years
9 ago. However, without a unifying historical
10 narrative, these landmarks risk appearing to the
11 average viewer as just a form of trivia from the
12 past. A project like the Freedom Trail would make
13 sense of these disparate sites by connecting the dots
14 with what we in the biz call scaffolding, context,
15 detail, and narrative structure. It's my belief and
16 hope that someone might encounter a piece of
17 information inadvertently on the trail and become
18 interested enough to pursue learning more about the
19 past. Historical inquiry as we all know is under
20 attack across the United States. Book bans and state
21 curriculum mandates forbid teachers from discussing
22 topics as fundamental as slavery and reconstruction.
23 For historians, this is bad news. Our work at its
24 best is to rigorously account for the past in the
25

1 hope that a different future is possible. In 2022,
2 New York City hosted over 56 million tourists. If we
3 do it right, the creation of a Freedom Trail project
4 allows us the rare opportunity to speak to them about
5 the history of this country with truth, integrity,
6 and care. The New York Historical Society looks
7 forward to working collaboratively with other partner
8 institutions who will be involved in creating the
9 final version of this trail if this initiative
10 passes. Thank you.

12 MITCHELL GRUBLER: Good afternoon. I'm
13 Mitchell Grubler. I'm here representing the Bowery
14 Alliance of Neighbors, and I'm speaking about Intro.
15 1150, the Freedom Trail bill.

16 The Bowery and Lower Manhattan were
17 crucial in the anti-slavery movement and the
18 abolitionist movement. In particular, on the Bowery
19 is 134 and 136, just north of Grant Street, and there
20 are two very significant aspects to their history.
21 One is that they're still there. One was built in the
22 late 1700s and the other in the early 1800s, and for
23 schoolchildren going on the Freedom Trail, they're
24 not just going to see the site of what was there,
25 they're going to see these Federal houses with their

1 steeply pitched roofs and their dormer windows and
2 their regular fenestration, their end chimneys, and
3 all those aspects that characterize Federal Era
4 architecture. The second aspect of these houses that
5 is so important is their abolitionist history. Going
6 back to the late 1700s while living in his Bowery
7 property, now known as 136 Bowery, Samuel Delaplaine
8 wrote an anti-slavery manifesto in 1793. Still living
9 at 136 Bowery in 1795, Samuel and his wife, Phila
10 Delaplaine, were so committed to the plight of
11 African Americans that they donated property they
12 owned nearby for what became the second African
13 burial ground. The Reverend Spencer H. Cone, a
14 recognized and important abolitionist minister at the
15 Oliver Street Baptist Church lived at 136 Bowery from
16 1823 through 1825. From the 1830s to the 1860s, the
17 Delaplain family rented spaces in 134 Bowery to
18 circulating libraries, printers, publishers, and
19 booksellers who promoted abolitionist materials, and,
20 most importantly, many of them were women. Now 136
21 and 134 Bowery are still there. In 2015, we appealed
22 to the Landmarks Preservation Commission to consider
23 these two Federal houses. In 2021, we commissioned a
24 recognized historian, Suzanne Spellen to write an
25

1
2 extensive research and proposal to landmark these
3 buildings. The Landmarks Commission came back to us
4 saying that they need study. We're still waiting for
5 that study and the Landmarks Commission to act while
6 the buildings are still there. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I know
8 Council Member Marte had some questions or comments.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. First of
10 all, I want to thank all of you for being here and
11 for testifying. I especially want to thank the New
12 York Historic Society because I remember being a
13 junior in high school and going to the Slavery in New
14 York so that really just changed my mind about where
15 I lived in our history and kind of made me motivated
16 as an individual to learn more and do so thank you so
17 much, and I know probably hundreds of thousands of
18 people, maybe millions of people came, across the
19 country just for that one exhibit, and it brought so
20 much knowledge to folks.

21 On that point, I want to ask questions to
22 Jacob Morris. We know that Philadelphia has a Freedom
23 Trail. We know Boston has a Freedom Trail. This is
24 also an economic opportunity for our city when it
25 comes to tourism for people to understand our

1 connection to this history. Can you elaborate the
2 numbers of people that go specifically to enjoy these
3 and learn about these Freedom Trails.
4

5 JACOB MORRIS: The Boston Freedom Trail is
6 by far the number one tourist attraction in Boston.
7 It literally gets multi-millions of visitors every
8 year, has all sort of commercial and tourism tie-
9 insurance. Everybody loves it in Boston, and that's
10 the story of America's struggle for freedom from
11 England and our foundation as a republic.

12 Philadelphia copied the model of the
13 Boston Freedom Trail to establish the Philadelphia
14 Constitutional Trail. That was pretty recently, like
15 they thought of it about 10 years ago and then it
16 really got rolling about five years ago. It is now in
17 the top three in tourist attractions in Philadelphia.

18 For New York City to have a Freedom Trail
19 with the incredibly rich and powerful theme of the
20 struggle for freedom for chattel slavery and equality
21 that we could establish with the right task force
22 establishing all the locations and inspirational
23 stories that are here in New York City, who knows how
24 many millions of people would visit it every year,
25 but I believe it would be millions and millions of

1 people, and our school children and our society would
2 be enriched by these inspirational stories.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. No more
5 questions, Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. Can you
7 just please make sure you submit your testimonies so
8 we have them? We look forward to working with you.
9 Please feel free to reach out to my office or any
10 other Council Member who is sponsoring any particular
11 bills that you are also championing as we hope to
12 pass them in short order. Thank you very much, and I
13 look forward to working with you all.

14 JACOB MORRIS: Is it possible I could say
15 something on the bill regarding statues and the
16 Public Design Commission oversight very quickly?

17 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Like 20 seconds?

18 JACOB MORRIS: I can be brief.

19 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay, 20 seconds.

20 JACOB MORRIS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

22 JACOB MORRIS: As the panel and Committee
23 ascertained I think a little bit to its surprise, the
24 Public Design Commission is reactive. It is not
25 proactive. It responds to City agencies, not just

1 anybody, like I can't just go and say hey, Dr. Marion
2 Sims, let's get rid of him and get that before the
3 Public Design Commission. No, no, no. It has to come
4 from a City agency and, given that the Public Design
5 Commission is reactive and that's why there was, and
6 as your Co-Chair so eloquently brought out, it's like
7 gee, what happened to that Monuments Commission,
8 they're not around anymore, and, frankly, that
9 Monuments Commission, the one recommendation they
10 made was to get rid of Dr. Marion Sims. They still
11 haven't put up a plaque contextualizing a truly
12 despicable guy, Christopher Columbus, who introduced
13 chattel slavery to the western hemisphere, and he's
14 honored with this humongous statue. There's problems
15 with Peter Siverson (phonetic) too. He was a bad guy.
16 Historical research, resources. We need a new
17 Monuments Commission that actually works harder than
18 the last one did. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I
21 appreciate that.

22 We're going to have Assemblywoman Solages
23 who is also the Chair of the Black, Puerto Rican,
24 Hispanic, and Asian Caucus that I used to work for in
25 Albany to share some words as she is the sponsor of

1 the state legislation that was referenced earlier
2 during the Admin's testimony.

3
4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SOLAGES: Greetings. Once
5 again, my name is Assemblywoman Solages. I'm joined
6 here by Joshua Joseph who is the Executive Director
7 of the Black, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, and Asian
8 Caucus, and really homage to Council Member Williams
9 for her work and also to the Committee for the
10 invitation to discuss.

11 I stand here in support of the two pieces
12 of legislation, Intro. 1073 and 1082, because it's
13 vitally important. I am the proud sponsor of Assembly
14 Bill 7691 which establishes a New York State
15 Commission to study reparation remedies. This
16 Commission is going to hold various hearings around
17 the state, talk to stakeholders, and come up with a
18 nonbinding report which is going to be delivered to
19 the Legislature. It will entail recommendation for
20 the Legislature to suggest remedies in New York State
21 and respond to the injustices and wealth transfers
22 caused by slavery and its legacies. This bill has
23 passed the Legislature and we're awaiting the
24 Governor's signature.

1
2 Before I continue, I want to express my
3 deep gratitude to the legendary Charles Barron, a
4 former Colleague of ours, who with this would be
5 (INAUDIBLE) because he carried it prior to myself,
6 and I also want to thank the members of the BPH
7 Caucus for their steadfast support in this
8 legislation.

9 It's really been quite a learning journey
10 when we talk about reparations because there's a
11 confusion as to what actually reparations is. It's
12 really a process of repairing, healing, and restoring
13 a people injured because a group of people and their
14 identity and also their violation of fundamental
15 human rights by governments, corporations, and
16 institutions. Those groups have been injured and have
17 the right to obtain from government, corporations,
18 and institutions repair and healing, and so I'm not
19 going to go over the five points of reparations in
20 detail, but for the record I want to say,
21 acknowledgement of non-repetition, apologies,
22 restitution, rehabilitation, and institutional
23 reform.

24 I want to emphasize the critical
25 importance of reparations, especially in light of the

1 attack on black history. Reparations represents an
2 essential step towards rectifying historical
3 injustices and addressing ongoing impact of
4 systematic racism, and I want to emphasize the
5 current day lens that we need to look at and have
6 research and data looking at what's happening right
7 now to black communities and build on that
8 reparations conversation.
9

10 In conclusion, I just want to express my
11 gratitude to the Council, to each one of you as well,
12 for having this conversation, fleshing out the
13 concerns, and allowing everyday New Yorkers to look
14 at how we can improve the lives of each and every one
15 of us so on behalf of the BPH Caucus I thank you for
16 your eagerness, and I look forward to working with
17 you to ensure that we're addressing the debt owed to
18 black New Yorkers, and I'm happy to answer any
19 questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I have a few
21 questions because the Mayor's Office of Equity talked
22 a lot about the pending state legislation and wanting
23 to make sure that there are no overlaps, and we want
24 to make sure that there are no overlaps as well which
25 is why we invited you to testify. We really see this

1 as like a partnership and making sure there's synergy
2 so can you, from your experiences and getting the
3 bill passed and the visions you have when the bill
4 actually gets signed, can you share how you think we
5 could sort of work together synergistically to cover
6 out reparations, truth and reconciliation for New
7 Yorkers?
8

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SOLAGES: Yes, and I just
10 want to make sure that we understand there is no
11 overlap when we talk about the injustices. We can all
12 work together in tandem and build a path to solving
13 these historical injustices, and it's important on a
14 local level, a state level, and also on a federal
15 level that we are working in concert to making sure
16 that we have reconciliation and reparations, and so
17 the Assembly bill creates a Commission, it's nine
18 individuals, three appointed by the Governor, three
19 appointed by the Assembly, and three appointed by the
20 Senate, who are going to come together and write a
21 report and also do hearings and talk to New Yorkers
22 and work with the research institutions and
23 historically black institutions about reparations.
24 Whatever that entails. I'm not here to define that
25 because we want to make sure that this work is

1 organic, but New York State is a big place, from
2 Montauk to Buffalo, the report is going to have to
3 cover all of the issues so having a hyperfocus on a
4 local level, on a City Council level, will be helpful
5 because I'm sure there are things that are going to
6 be missed because, again, this is a statewide lens of
7 analyzing reparations. I want to know if the
8 Executive Director has any comment on that as well.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOSEPH: Thank you,
10 Madam Chair. Thank you for having me. Always excited
11 to see you.

12 I think the Chair spoke perfectly and
13 described the situation. Obviously, there is HR40 on
14 the federal level which there are still operations
15 happening in California, Evanston, Illinois, even
16 South Carolina, some parts of the cities are looking
17 at reparations so a lot of moving parts, but I think
18 all towards the same goal of a national reparations
19 push. Even past that, there's an international push.
20 You have CARICOM who is pushing for international
21 reparations because reparations is not just about
22 this one instance in history, it's about how it all
23 coincided and connected to lead to the dismantling
24 and destruction of black families, black wealth, etc.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I don't
3 have any more questions, but if you have anything
4 else you want to add. We do look forward to working
5 with you all, and we do hope the Governor signs your
6 bill expeditiously because it'll definitely help
7 shape what we do because we definitely, again, want
8 to be in alignment.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SOLAGES: Exactly. As I said
10 before, New York City has its own history when it
11 comes to enslavement and also its legacies. We can't
12 forget that we have to look at every point in history
13 and also emphasize the current day harms that are
14 happening, and so talking to, the other day I went to
15 a reparations meeting where all the localities that
16 have done something with reparations convened, and it
17 was the first federal convening of such body, and we
18 were discussing different aspects of reparations, and
19 the conversation was also geared and was emphasized
20 that we need to look at what's happening in modern
21 day history and make sure that we are highlighting
22 that with lots of facts and data to back us up so if
23 there is any sort of legal challenge, we are standing
24 on current day facts, and so that's what I emphasize
25 to the Council, we could look at what's happening in

1 the past and it's important to look at the past and
2 let that guide our conversation, but we are looking
3 to help modern day New Yorkers, we are looking to
4 advance those because, again, we are the arbiter of
5 their estate, our ancestor's estate. We have all
6 their information, and, unfortunately, we cannot help
7 our ancestors, but we can help our current day New
8 Yorkers today. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: I will now
12 invite Stephen Banes (phonetic) and Annette Wilcox.

13 Stephen, whenever you're ready.

14 STEPHEN BANES: Thank you for giving me
15 this opportunity to talk. I just wanted to say when
16 we're speaking about reparations. Anti-blackness. We
17 don't need more timelines. We do not need more
18 different committees of additional people coming into
19 power. The more we prolong disposition, the more
20 pessimistic we are about that, the more we're
21 actually (INAUDIBLE) and actually causing more
22 (INAUDIBLE) and more anti-blackness towards our
23 people. Our people are currently suffering in extreme
24 circumstances, poverty, the wealth gap is going to
25 harm our people even more so we have to be clear

1 about this. It's clear that New York City politicians
2 do not want to prioritize the issues of black
3 Americans right now. We need to recognize that, and
4 we need to acknowledge that because this issue of
5 reparations should have been handled a long time ago,
6 and every time we bring that up, every time we
7 prolong this issue, even though it might be
8 necessary, we need to acknowledge at the end of the
9 day we're contributing to additional anti-blackness
10 by not taking any action and not implementing it
11 asap. I'm the type of person to get things done now,
12 not next year, not 2025, but clear now. We are black
13 Americans. What are black Americans? Black Americans
14 are a combination of a lineage, right? We're talking
15 about natives, non-immigrant black people who descend
16 from slavery, chattel slavery, in America, nowhere
17 else. One parent of a person on either side of your
18 family. Either it's going to be your mother or your
19 father, then you are a black American. You're a
20 predominant black American if you have both parents,
21 right, but you drop that lineage if you're mixed. I
22 just want to also add we need lineage-based
23 reparations. We need to be careful of not to just
24 spread this (INAUDIBLE) We're not just talking about
25

1 black people in general. We're talking about a
2 particular lineage of people here in America. We need
3 to prioritize it and, like I said, if it's not the
4 priority, we don't want another building, I do not
5 want another statue. My children, the people in my
6 community, they can't eat statues, they can't eat
7 books, they can't diversity, they can't eat any of
8 this nonsense that's going on. They need tangible
9 resources now. I rest my case on that. Stephen Banes
10 for the record.
11

12 ANNETTE WILCOX: Good afternoon. First and
13 foremost, I would like to express gratitude to the
14 Committee for extending this invitation.

15 American freedmen, descendants, and their
16 ancestors have carved a unique narrative in U.S.
17 history. They have endured 89 years of chattel
18 slavery followed by 90 years of legal segregation and
19 discrimination followed by another 50 years of mass
20 incarceration. This unparalleled journey sets them
21 apart from all other groups in the United States.
22 These descendants make up approximately 90 percent of
23 the black African American community in our nation.

24 Turning our attention to New York City,
25 data reveals alarming disparities. The wealth gap in

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1 New York City, white households have 431,000 dollars
2 in wealth versus black households at 12,000. Black
3 American unemployment has consistently double or
4 triple that of white Americans. In March 2023, white
5 unemployment was 1.3 percent versus black New Yorkers
6 at 12.2 percent. The homeless crisis is concerning.
7 African American constituents make up 57 percent of
8 New York City's homeless population. With
9 incarceration, the numbers remain disheartening. 58.8
10 percent of those incarcerated are black Americans,
11 black New Yorkers. The fiscal implications are
12 immense with the annual cost of incarceration in New
13 York City standing at a staggering 556,539 dollars
14 per individual. Given this data and the unique
15 history of American freedmen, we believe it is vital
16 for New York City to not only recognize these
17 disparities but also to implement policies that
18 materially aid the lives of American freedmen. We
19 advocate for the establishment of the Office of
20 Freedmen Affairs. Echoing the sentiments of Historic
21 Freedmen Bureau of 1865, this office would prioritize
22 the distinct needs of the descendant of U.S. chattel
23 slavery. New York State's noteworthy strides in
24 separating the AAPI communities into distinct
25

1 subgroups. It is high time we channel similar
2 dedication towards the black community, especially
3 the American freedmen. While the historical scars of
4 slavery are frequently invoked in our discussions
5 about racism, sometimes even used to justify broader
6 community programs, the unique challenges faced by
7 American freedmen and their descendants often remain
8 in the shadows. We must transition from merely
9 referencing their suffering to actively centering
10 them in actionable policies that directly enhance
11 their material lives.
12

13 In closing, we fervently urge the City
14 Council to recognize and act on the necessity,
15 expediting a bill to establish the Office of Freedmen
16 Affairs. We are committed to this path of genuine
17 reform and healing and stand ready to assist in any
18 capacity.

19 Once again, thank you to the Committee
20 for the platform. Your commitment to justice and
21 equity is commendable.

22 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. I know
23 we've spoken before, and we look forward to talking
24 to you and working with you to see the bills get
25 passed. Thank you so much for coming.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you.

Next, we would like to welcome Devon Prince, Michael Myers, and Kate Madigan.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You can start.

KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Williams and Chair Osse. My name is Kate Madigan, the Government Affairs Coordinator from the Public Theater.

Since our inception, the Public Theater has had extensive social and artistic impacts on the theatrical community throughout the nation and the world. Our founder, Joe Papp, established the Public Theater as a civic institution to engage both on stage and off with some of the most important ideas in social issues. It seemed only right to show our support publicly and strongly for each Introduction before the Committee today. As stewards of City-owned property, the Public supports the Introduction 0934 and Introduction 1082 that deal with historical markers and past injustices. We currently operate two City-owned properties, the Public Theater on Astor Place, and the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, home to Free Shakespeare in the Park, both of which are part of the Lenape people's indigenous homeland,

1 Manahatta. In addition to operating on the homeland
2 of the Lenape people, the Delacorte Theater is
3 adjacent to the site of Seneca Village, the largest
4 community of free African American property owners in
5 pre-Civil War New York which existed from 1827 to
6 1857 when black property owners were forced to leave
7 and their houses torn down for the construction of
8 Central Park through eminent domain. The Public
9 honors the legacy of Seneca Village that previously
10 existed on the land nearby the Delacorte and supports
11 the Central Park Conservancy's efforts to bring
12 awareness to the history of this site through signage
13 and guided walks. While the Public has always been
14 guided on the principles of diversity and inclusion,
15 the Public Theater developed a formal equity,
16 diversity, and inclusion plan in 2019 which was
17 adopted by the Board and set a course for more
18 intentional goalsetting (INAUDIBLE) equity,
19 diversity, and inclusion work. Much like Introduction
20 1073, we are committed as an organization that
21 receives funding from the City of New York to change
22 the very wording of our Administrative Code. Since
23 then, the Public has made significant progress
24 towards implementing the plan including hiring Senior
25

1 Director of Anti-Racism, Equity, and Belonging, Alexa
2 Smith, developing a manger training program for
3 managing people with a DEI-centered approach, holding
4 curated all-staff sessions to create space for
5 learning on topics of race, gender, sexual
6 identities, disability, and concepts like the model
7 minority myth by a standard intervention training,
8 living land acknowledgements, and more. Finally, we
9 want to highlight that our action is not a temporary
10 performance. Rather, it is an intentional commitment
11 to ongoing work. Thank you so much.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

14 DEVINE PRINCE: Good afternoon. Hello
15 again, Chair Williams. I want to open with a
16 definition. Black or African American as defined by
17 the U.S. Census Bureau in the 1997 Office of
18 Management and Budget Standards as follows: a person
19 having origins in any of the black racial groups of
20 Africa. Again, African American is a person having
21 origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa,
22 and so when we're talking reparations, specifically
23 1082, here in the City Council, in order to repair a
24 thing, you have to accurately identify a thing.
25 Unfortunately, through no actions of the Council that

1 I know of or any other governing body, this
2 government took it upon itself to define African
3 Americans as any person having origins in any of the
4 black racial groups of Africa. So when you have a
5 reparations bill that is calling for remedies for
6 African Americans, who are they? African Americans
7 are any persons have origins in any of the black
8 racial groups of Africa so the descendants of those
9 who were formerly enslaved, they're African American.
10 Our Caribbean brothers and sisters that had no
11 ancestors that were a slave to the United States of
12 America, they're African American. Anyone who has
13 origins in Latin America that calls themselves Afro-
14 Latino, Afro-Hispanic, they're African American.
15 Anyone that has any origins in any of the black
16 racial groups of Africa is African American. So
17 therein lies a problem. How do we fix it if the
18 people are not accurately defined? My name is Devine
19 Prince. I am the President of the U.S. Freedmen
20 Project, and freedmen is the status that was given to
21 our ancestors after emancipation. When we look up at
22 the ceiling, it says a government of the people, by
23 the people, for the people, and that is attributed to
24 Lincoln. Lincoln also said if not for the black
25

1 freedmen, we would've lost the Civil War. We might be
2 sitting in the Confederate States of America, and so
3 those freedmen that were promised reparations through
4 the Special Field Order 15 are the same groups of
5 people that are the ones who deserve reparations now
6 because it is a promise that was reneged on. Andrew
7 Johnson, after President Lincoln was assassinated,
8 was able to come back into power and undo the
9 Freedmen's Bureau, essentially undo the Freedmen's
10 Bank, and all of the things that were promised to the
11 freedmen, and who are the freedmen? The freedmen are
12 those that are formerly enslaved and emancipated in
13 America by the Proclamation of 1863 and/or the 13th
14 Amendment of 1865. That's a very distinct people, and
15 I wish that the Assemblywoman stayed around because
16 she said some very important things, and we also went
17 to, as an organization, we taught on reparations at
18 the BPHA Caucus Weekend, and so we educated her and
19 other Assembly people and also State Senators on the
20 issue of having a reparations package that tries to
21 fix something that happened to a distinct group
22 people based on race. Unfortunately, as we see what
23 will happen in the affirmative action that went to
24 the Supreme Court, having policy based on race is
25

1 unconstitutional. We don't want to run into the same
2 problem here in the City Council so 1082 asks for
3 reparation remedies for African Americans. We feel
4 that language is insufficient. It has to be more
5 distinct than that. In fact, in California through
6 AB3121, they defined their community of eligibility
7 as African Americans who are descendants of persons
8 enslaved. I'm not in love with the language, but that
9 is definitely more distinct because we're talking
10 about exactly which African Americans we're talking
11 about because now we know African Americans are just
12 people that have an origin in any of the black racial
13 groups of Africa. If we're going to do something, we
14 have to do it right. Unfortunately, I would hate for
15 this governing body to copy what is going at the
16 State level because that bill is heavily flawed as
17 well. We don't know if the Governor is going to sign
18 it or not. We've had conversations with the Governor
19 and with the Assembly to let them know that saying
20 they want a bill to do reparations for people of
21 African descent, that's very problematic. That's
22 race, or it's going to turn into anybody of African
23 descent which means someone like Elon Musk or
24 Charlize Theron, they're of African descent, and so
25

1 we do not want this governing body to make the same
2 mistakes that are being made not only in the State of
3 New York but around the country because she said she
4 had a meeting with other individuals in other states
5 and localities that did reparations, and she's
6 correct, but if you look at the reparations package
7 in Providence, Rhode Island, white people can apply
8 for reparations. I have nothing against white people,
9 but they don't deserve reparations, and so if we're
10 going to do something like that, that has to be an
11 Equity task force that's separate, and even though
12 there's overlap, reparations has to be very distinct
13 because it's for a distinct harm done to a very
14 distinct group of people, and that group of people is
15 the American freedmen. Thank you. I'm here to take
16 any questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you.

19 Assemblywoman is actually still here.

20 DEVINE PRINCE: Oh, fantastic.

21 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: I see her in the
22 back. No, I don't have any questions. I know I had an
23 extensive conversation with you before the hearing,
24 and everybody knows that the real work in getting
25 bills done happens after hearings so I just look

1 forward to continuing to work with you and your
2 organization as we finetune the bills that were heard
3 today. Thank you so much.

4
5 DEVINE PRINCE: Thank you so much.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: All right, I'd
7 like to welcome Robert Briggs, Lisa Betty, and Markus
8 Burrell. This will be on Zoom.

9 ROBERT BRIGGS: Good afternoon and thank
10 you for the opportunity to testify in support of the
11 bills being heard today, especially Intro. 1083 and
12 Intro. 1073.

13 My name is Robert Briggs. My pronouns are
14 he/him, and I speak on behalf of a group of New York
15 City residents and congregants at Hope Church East
16 Village who are deeply interested in seeing
17 reparations paid to black Americans in New York City.
18 Given the centuries of federal inaction on this
19 topic, we formed this group to consider what
20 reparations could look like for us individually and
21 as a church community in New York City. As discussed
22 already, New York City actively participated in and
23 facilitated the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Large
24 corporations that currently call New York City home
25 earn unconscionable profits on goods produced by

1 slave labor, yet so many New Yorkers do not know or
2 understand our City's horrific inextricable
3 connection to slavery. As Council Member Marte
4 alluded to earlier, there is still much to be
5 uncovered. We are encouraged to see that Intro. 1082
6 would create a task force to consider the impact of
7 slavery and reparations for past injustices. It is
8 crucial to fully understand the extent of the loss
9 and harm caused by the institution of slavery to
10 properly address them. To that end, we also support
11 the intent of Intro. 1073 to establish historical
12 facts about slavery in New York City and recommend
13 changes for governments and institutions to prevent
14 perpetuation of harm. We agree that it is crucial for
15 this process to have robust public participation
16 where the experiences and recommendations of directly
17 impacted communities are centered. Further, we hope
18 that the report and its recommendations will lead to
19 actionable change and tangible economic benefit for
20 black New Yorkers.
21

22 In support of this, our church in the
23 Lower East Side is open to hosting a public forum as
24 described in 1073, Section 8-1104. Our facility
25 possesses capabilities for livestreaming, media

1 presentation, and convenient access to public
2 transportation.

3
4 We applaud the Committee's leadership on
5 taking these first step toward reconciling the
6 atrocities of slavery. We urge the Council to vote in
7 favor of the bills before it today, especially Intro.
8 1082 and Intro. 1073 so that the process of paying
9 reparations to black Americans may finally begin.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. The next
12 person we'll hear from is Lisa.

13 LISA BETTY: Hello. My name is Lisa Betty.
14 I am faculty at Queens College CUNY in the History
15 Department where I'm Associate Director of the
16 Africana Studies Program. I'm also a Community
17 Researcher for the Bronx African American History
18 Project at Fordham University where I am completing
19 my PhD, and I'm representing BAAHP at this moment.

20 I would like to thank Council Member
21 Christopher Marte and other Council Members for
22 allowing me to speak on behalf of my mentors,
23 colleagues, and students to advocate for the need of
24 a New York City Freedom Trail, bill 1150, and its
25 intersecting connection to the other bills on

1 reparations and the needs of black communities across
2 New York.

3
4 This Trail in particular would highlight
5 the abolition movement in New York City and the
6 profound work and influence of the Underground
7 Railroad, which like in Philadelphia and Boston, New
8 York City was a major stop and had a bustling network
9 to support 19th century refugees, exiles, and
10 freedom-seekers, and fugitives of slavery.

11 Abolitionism and the anti-slavery activism in New
12 York City is a hallmark of this City's history and
13 leadership against the fight of anti-black racism,
14 white supremacy, sexism, and then the general fight
15 against extractive economies, which at the base of
16 those economies (INAUDIBLE) human trafficking,
17 captivity, forced labor, and exploitation.

18 I think a Freedom Trail would give space
19 to figures like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman,
20 Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Anna and Frederick Douglass,
21 and David Ruggles. Those who lived, passed through,
22 and gave speeches in this city and actively...

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time is expired. Thank
24 you.

25 LISA BETTY: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: You can wrap up.
You can continue.

LISA BETTY: Okay. Activated this city and
the United States and the world against slavery. I
only have a little bit more.

It is my hope that this will be an
intersectional collaboration with New York City
Parks, the Department of Records, Libraries, Museums,
and Historical Landmark Spaces, and reparations
committees and councils such as Weeksville African
Burial Ground, Seneca Village. Passing this
legislation is essential and vital and very much
connected o the comparable legislations for anti-
racism, truth and reconciliation, reparations that we
have discussed today.

Thank you so much, and you have the full
support of a cadre of educators, community leaders,
scholars, historians, librarians, and archivists who
will help in the creation and sustainability of this
Freedom Trail. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Thank you. We look
forward to really building a nice coalition of
people.

Next, we'll have Markus. Hi, Markus.

1
2 MARKUS BURRELL: Hi. Good afternoon,
3 Chairperson Williams and Committee Members. I will be
4 testifying in support of bills 1082 and 1073.

5 New York City has never atoned for its
6 pivotal role in slavery. Enslaved Africans were the
7 backbone of colonial New York, comprising over 20
8 percent of the population. Their unpaid labor built
9 the City's financial might by driving the growth of
10 banking, shipping, sugar refining, refining, and
11 related industries. After emancipation, black
12 citizens faced race riots, redlining, police
13 brutality, and exclusion from quality jobs and
14 education. These injustices have compounded over
15 time. As a member of Generation X, coming of age
16 after the Civil Right Movement, I confronted unique
17 challenges despite being granted full citizenship
18 rights. Though legal victories were won, the economic
19 and social promises of that era remain largely
20 unfulfilled. I followed the path I was told would
21 lead to success. I attended an HBCU, earning multiple
22 degrees, and securing full-time employment. Yet
23 systemic barriers to equality persisted through heavy
24 student loan debt, lack of homeownership, reduced
25 access to capital, and the damaging effects of mass

1 incarceration and the crack epidemic which
2 disproportionately devastated black communities. It
3 is time to break this cycle. I urge the Committee to
4 establish a task force, empower it to study
5 reparation proposals for African Americans in New
6 York City. The task force should be housed in the New
7 York City Commission on Human Rights, an agency born
8 out of the early civil rights struggles of African
9 Americans in 1943. Input should come primarily from
10 descendants across all walks of life as their lived
11 experiences must shape the process. The task force
12 should quantify the economic injury of slavery and
13 discrimination and propose redress methods including,
14 but not limited to, direct payments, homeownership
15 assistance, healthcare credits, educational
16 scholarships, justice system reforms, and
17 preferential contracting for affected businesses. It
18 should also consider designating descendants of
19 American chattel slavery as a separate protected
20 class under the anti-discrimination protections
21 enforced by the New York City Commission on Human
22 Rights. Additionally, I support creating a truth,
23 healing, and reconciliation process regarding the
24 City's role in slavery...

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SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

MARKUS BURRELL: Just a few more things to say, really quickly. Led by and centered on descendants of the enslaved, similar to the proposed task force. The New York City Commission on Human Rights should development a slavery labor acknowledgement like the indigenous land acknowledgement to recognize the full scope of injustice. Over 2 million African Americans currently live in New York City, many descendants of the great migration. I ask you to bear these sentiments in mind as the legislation proceeds through Committee review. Justice and repair are long overdue but not impossible. We must act now to remedy this unjust legacy. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Thank you. I believe there's one other person that we have signed up that I know of on Zoom. Zee Dempster.

ZEE DEMPSTER: Yes, can you hear me?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL BOULET: Yes, we can hear you.

ZEE DEMPSTER: Okay, thank you for giving me this opportunity to voice my support for the

1 formation of a New York City Freedom Trail task
2 force.
3

4 My name is Zee Dempster. I am President
5 of the New York Ramblers Hiking Club, I work at the
6 CUNY Graduate Center as an Assistant Director for
7 IRADAC, and also for AFCP, the African Studies
8 Certificate Program, and I am also on the Board of
9 Trustees for the PSC CUNY Welfare Fund.

10 I became an avid hiker in 2012 when I
11 joined the New York Ramblers. I speak from experience
12 when I say one of the highlights of hiking in the
13 Tri-State area has been discovering all the historic
14 sites intertwined within the numerous hiking trails
15 like the Old Croton Aqueduct and the Old Erie Path
16 and the Walkway Over the Hudson. Individual New York
17 Rambler hike members have already pieced together
18 specialty hikes honoring the area's prominent African
19 Americans. As a trustee for the Welfare Fund, our
20 mission is to ensure solid healthcare coverage for
21 30,000 union members so they can engage in a healthy,
22 active lifestyle, and for many years of the past 13
23 years, I've had the privilege of working with the top
24 researchers of African scholarship and American
25 scholarship at IRADAC and AFCP. The timely

1 establishment of the New York City Freedom Trail task
2 force is imperative. Its creation has the immediate
3 effect of giving the trail credibility and making the
4 formation of the trail a reality. The rapidly
5 changing nature of New York City's real estate
6 development threatens to permanently erase these
7 landmark locations. They can begin immediately
8 researching and identifying the areas that need to be
9 preserved. Post-pandemic New York City may look very
10 different. The timely establishment of the task force
11 is crucial to preserving the trail before its
12 pathways are lost forever. The task force immediately
13 begins to establish an archive by documenting what is
14 found and present proof of the historical past and
15 give evidence of American history. They bring to
16 light an otherwise forgotten past. The task force
17 would be a counterbalance to the negativity
18 surrounding the truth and the (INAUDIBLE) history. A
19 diverse and well-established task force...

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is expired.

22 ZEE DEMPSTER: Okay, so I just want to say
23 that it will also improve the economic quality of New
24 York City. It'll bring tourists and people back to

25

1 New York year and year and year again, and it's very
2 important that this task force is created. Thank you.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON WILLIAMS: Okay. Does anybody
5 else want to testify?

6 Great. Awesome. I am very encouraged by
7 all the testimony today. I know these are very
8 difficult conversations. It shouldn't be that
9 difficult, but these are difficult conversations that
10 we're having as a city, as a state, and definitely
11 nationally and with the rise of revisionist history,
12 the attack on critical race theory and black history,
13 I think it's so important now more than ever that we
14 continue to have these conversations and not just
15 speak but do the necessary thing that should have
16 been done very long ago.

17 Thank you all, to those who have
18 testified and, of course, to the wonderful Staff here
19 who have helped to facilitate the Committee hearing.

20 With that, we're done. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date September 25, 2023