

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL  
WELFARE

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September 27, 2023  
Start: 10:17 a.m.  
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HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Tiffany Cabán  
Linda Lee  
Chi A. Ossé  
Lincoln Restler  
Kevin C. Riley  
Althea V. Stevens  
Alexa Avilés  
Carmen De La Rosa

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

Diana Ramos  
Citizen of New York

Will Woods  
Consumer Advocate  
Urban Pathways

Ethel Brown  
Citizen of New York

Travis Preston  
Citizen of New York

Marricka Scott-McFadden  
Deputy Commissioner  
Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs  
Department of Social Services

Rebecca Chew  
Chief Program Officer  
Human Resources Administration

Angela Johnson  
Executive Deputy Commissioner  
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Jozette Dowdell  
Deputy Administrator  
Local 1549

Tyece Grant  
Eligibility Specialist II  
Local 1549, SNAP

Helen Chandler  
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Local 1549, SNAP

Lucy Perez  
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Supportive Housing Network of New York

Jenna Coudin  
Attorney  
Government Benefits Unit  
Manhattan Legal Services

Alex Malescio  
Urban Upbound

2 Good morning, everyone and welcome to today's New  
3 York City Council hearing for the Committee on  
4 General Welfare. At this time, we ask that you  
5 please silence all cell phones and electronic devices  
6 to minimize disruptions throughout the hearing. If  
7 you have testimony you wish to submit for the record,  
8 you may do so via email, at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov)  
9 once again that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). We  
10 thank you for your cooperation. Chair, we are ready  
11 to begin.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and good morning  
13 everyone and welcome to today's hearing. And I  
14 apologize I have a little bit of candy in my mouth,  
15 but allergy season is not gone, apparently. I don't  
16 want to be rude.

17 So good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's  
18 hearing. My name is Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy  
19 Speaker of the New York City Council and Chair of the  
20 General Welfare Committee. Today our committee is  
21 holding an oversight hearing on public benefits  
22 delays. We will also be hearing seven bills, three--  
23 Intro-- I think that's a typo. Intro 653, which I  
24 have sponsored would require the Department of Social  
25 Services to provide drug treatment services. These

2 services are critical to saving lives in shelter and  
3 in hostel facilities.

4 Intro 651, which I have also sponsored, would  
5 preclude the Department of Homeless Services from  
6 requiring a child's presence at the Intake Center  
7 when a family with children applies for shelter.

8 There is no reason why your child needs to be present  
9 during a long, drawn-out process at PATH. My bill  
10 seeks to end this practice.

11 Intro 902, which I have sponsored, would also--  
12 would require the Department of Homeless Services to  
13 provide a process navigator service to every family  
14 with children entering intake. These services would  
15 also make PATH intake process easier for families  
16 seeking shelter.

17 Intro 910, sponsored by councilmember Hudson,  
18 would establish a universal benefits application for  
19 city benefits, and would codify ACCESS NYC.

20 Intro 741, sponsored by Councilmember Salamanca,  
21 would require radiator inspections in homeless  
22 shelters.

23 Intro 647, sponsored by Councilmember Avilés,  
24 would require sheriffs and city marshals to report  
25

2 housing displacement to the Department of Social  
3 Services to evaluate eligibility for legal counsel.

4 Finally, Intro 567, sponsored by Councilmember  
5 Feliz, would prohibit homeless families with children  
6 from being housed in private buildings with multiple  
7 Class C housing maintenance code violations.

8 Now on to our oversight topic: Recently released  
9 data from the mayor's management report showed  
10 terrible trends when it comes to processing rates of  
11 cash assistance and SNAP benefit applications. While  
12 the report did not call this a crisis, it absolutely  
13 is a crisis. Under federal law-- federal and state  
14 law, all SNAP and cash assistance applications and  
15 recertifications must be processed by HRA within 30  
16 days. Anything that goes beyond the 30-day threshold  
17 is considered delayed. According to the MMR, the  
18 rate of timely response in SNAP applications fell  
19 20.4% from 60.1% in fiscal year 2022 to 39.7% in  
20 fiscal year 2023. And the report cites an  
21 unprecedented increase in applications.

22 Fewer staff, due to attrition and retirements,  
23 and the end of New York State waivers has suspended  
24 recertifications for eligibility as reasons for the  
25 decrease in timely processing. According to the MMR,

2 the rate of timely process cash assistance  
3 applications fell 54% from 82.8% in fiscal year 22 to  
4 28% in fiscal year 23. Similarly as a SNAP  
5 application processing, HRA cited an unprecedented  
6 increase in applications, fewer staff due to  
7 attrition and retirements, and the end of the New  
8 York State waivers does suspend the recertifications  
9 and other requirements leading to a backlog.

10 Together HRA's rate of processing SNAP and cash  
11 assistance applications in fiscal year 2023  
12 represented the worst record for the agency in over  
13 one decade. SNAP is the nation's most important  
14 anti-hunger program. Families in need can be  
15 immediately impacted by even the shortest delays in  
16 the processing of this important benefit. Cash  
17 assistance is also a lifeline for so many New  
18 Yorkers. Today, we want to understand why it has  
19 taken the administration as long as it has to figure  
20 out these significant backlogs. It is hard to  
21 understand the delays have increased as much as they  
22 have, when we have a state when we as a city have  
23 adequately allocated funding to protect against this.  
24 We've taken the administration at their word that  
25 they will reduce the backlogs. We've been partners



2 in government working together in hiring halls to  
3 ensure more staff are brought on to meet the needs of  
4 New Yorkers.

5 Today, we want to hear what corrective action  
6 plans would be in place if these delays continue. I  
7 look forward to hearing from the Administration and  
8 the advocates today, and gathering feedback on this  
9 oversight topic, and on all of the important bills  
10 today. At this time, I'd like to acknowledge my  
11 colleagues who are here today Councilmembers Cabán,  
12 Avilés, and Stevens.

13 And I'd also like to thank my committee staff who  
14 worked really hard to prepare this hearing, Aminta  
15 Kilawan, Senior Legislative Counsel, David Romero,  
16 Legislative Counsel, Julia Haramis, Unit Head, Rosa  
17 Martinez, Assistant Deputy Director, Jillian Keyes,  
18 Legal Extern, and finally my staff, Elsie Encarnacion,  
19 Chief of Staff. We're going to begin today's hearing  
20 with testimony from impacted individuals. But first,  
21 we're going to hear from Councilmember Avilés, who  
22 will share a few words on her bill.

23 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: Okay, good morning. Thank  
24 you so much, Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair of this  
25 committee. Thank you, committee members and the

2 public for bringing Intro 647 up for discussion today  
3 at this hearing.

4 This bill is a reintroduction from former  
5 Councilmember Rosenthal. And the reason why we chose  
6 to reintroduce this bill is because, in my district  
7 like other districts across New York City, housing  
8 displacement, especially among our non-English-  
9 speaking residents is a regular occurrence. Those  
10 being evicted are often not aware of their ability to  
11 access legal counsel, and particularly if they are  
12 non-English-speaking residents may not know how to  
13 even access this information regarding their rights  
14 during the eviction process.

15 So this bill, in my view, just aims to streamline  
16 access to information. We should not have to  
17 legislate these kinds of things. Our city agencies  
18 should be working towards streamlining and  
19 integrating services so that residents understand  
20 fully the tools that we make available to them. But  
21 unfortunately, we are in this place of having to make  
22 sure and mandate that agencies are connecting the  
23 dots and providing a full comprehensive picture of  
24 the services that are available to residents,

2 including when these services should be accessible in  
3 the various languages spoken by New Yorkers.

4 So, we just need to ensure that, you know, as a  
5 part of regular eviction proceedings that tenants are  
6 formed. And for the record, I do believe evictions  
7 are violent, having experienced that in my lifetime,  
8 and we should be doing everything in our power to  
9 reduce evictions. They should not be happening.

10 But as a part of these proceedings, that tenants  
11 are informed of their eligibility to receive legal  
12 counsel and informed of their eligibility in a  
13 language they could understand so that we can better  
14 serve New Yorkers. So, access to this kind of  
15 information basically is critical, and especially for  
16 our immigrant community members.

17 I look forward to the discussion today. Thank  
18 you, Deputy Speaker and thank you to the Committee  
19 members and to the public for all the work and the  
20 advocates for all the work that you have done for New  
21 Yorkers.

22 COUNSEL: Thank you Councilmember. My name is  
23 Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel to the Committee on  
24 General Welfare at the New York City Council. I'm  
25 going to be moderating today's hearing and calling on

2 panelists to testify. We are going to begin today's  
3 hearing with a public panel of benefits recipients.

4 The first panel will be a hybrid panel, so some  
5 will be joining us in person others on Zoom. The  
6 panel will be comprised of Diana Ramos testifying in  
7 person, Will Woods, Ethel Brown, and Travis Preston.  
8 If those of you who are in person can come sit, and  
9 we will get started with the first panel.

10 And we will begin with Diana Ramos followed by  
11 Will Woods

12 MS. RAMOS: Ah. There we go. Thank you for  
13 allowing me to testify. My name is Diana Ramos. I  
14 am a 46-year-old, type two diabetic who had a very  
15 stressful month this month. I normally do my  
16 recertification in July. I did everything I was  
17 supposed to do, made sure they had all the paperwork.  
18 I usually check my HRA, to-- my HRA app to see when I  
19 get my benefits, so I can plan out meal plans,  
20 shopping trips, get all the good sales, you know.  
21 Things are expensive. So the 29th of August, I had  
22 to call, because the night before I had checked to  
23 see, and all it showed is my cash assistance, not my  
24 EBT benefits. That scares me. Because I am a type  
25 two diabetic and I have to eat a certain diet to keep

2 myself healthy and to make sure that, you know, not  
3 only my-- my physical health, but my mental health is  
4 good as well, because I also suffer from depression  
5 and anxiety.

6       So I call the 29th, and I put in an email, and I  
7 thought, okay. Because last year, we had a SNAFU,  
8 and it was fixed in a couple days. It wasn't fixed.  
9 I got my cash assistance on September 5. It wasn't  
10 fixed. So I called the next day. They said I had to  
11 wait until the 12th. If after the 12th, it wasn't  
12 done, then to call them back.

13       Now, all this calling, you think, you're going to  
14 you're going to wait a little bit on the phone. At  
15 one point, I literally waited for four and a half  
16 hours to get a hold of somebody. There was other  
17 weights of two hours where I just said, "I'm getting  
18 too frustrated, I have to hang up. I don't want to  
19 yell at the worker. It's not their fault. They're  
20 just there to give me information, put in whatever."  
21 So, I completely understand that. I've worked in the  
22 customer service industry for years and completely  
23 understand that it's not their fault. It's whoever's  
24 in charge.

2       So finally, when I did get a hold of somebody, it  
3 finally got fixed. But I literally was three weeks  
4 without proper nutrition and food. Yes, I went to  
5 the food pantries, but sometimes the food pantries  
6 give us high starchy foods such as rice, macaroni and  
7 cheese. What is the one thing they tell you as  
8 diabetic to stay away from?

9       So, I was like, "Oh, okay, I'm going to figure  
10 this out." I managed, but I was only eating one meal  
11 a day. And in order to keep my sugar at least at a  
12 steady level, I was literally drinking powdered  
13 lemonade. Sorry, I laugh when I get a little tense.  
14 But it was-- it was stressful. And it was causing my  
15 mental health not to go well. I was snapping at  
16 people I usually don't snap at. My father who is  
17 himself a veteran, and he lives in Mississippi, he  
18 sent me money to help me out. He shouldn't have to  
19 do that. You know, I should be okay. You know,  
20 maybe \$5 or \$10 if I might have to go to an  
21 appointment or something, but not what he sent me  
22 which was \$40. And that was \$40 out of his household  
23 budget. And he is a pensioner.

24       My boyfriend, who's on SSI sent me some money to  
25 help me out to get groceries, because he could tell

2 that I was just not doing well. I'm just now getting  
3 back to the health I was before. But my sugar levels  
4 aren't still-- aren't leveled out. My-- Because I had  
5 eaten quite a bit of sodium filled stuff, my-- my  
6 blood pressure's a little is a little off kilter, and  
7 because of no proper nutrition.

8 I'm feeling not like I'm getting sick, but just  
9 sort of that rundown, gross feeling.

10 It's not fair. I don't-- I don't blame the HRA  
11 workers, because I know that they're understaffed.  
12 And they get yelled at enough as it is. And it's not  
13 their fault. I do-- I would like the people in  
14 charge to take accountability, because it's not--  
15 it's not fair. I'm not the only person. I just  
16 happen to be one person out of thousands maybe. And  
17 I also happen to have a medical condition and there's  
18 other people out there who have medical conditions,  
19 who have families to feed that need proper nutrition,  
20 and the delays, they're ridiculous.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, I--

22 MS. RAMOS: And Chair, thank you for letting me  
23 share my story.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I can understand. How long  
3 were you waiting from the time that you stopped  
4 receiving SNAP benefits to when they finally--?

5 MS. RAMOS: It was about two and a half weeks. I  
6 received them on September 20th.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So you didn't get the August?

8 MS. RAMOS: I got the August. I didn't get the  
9 September.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Until two weeks later. Okay.

11 MS. RAMOS: Mm-hmm. About two, two and a half  
12 weeks later. Yeah. So that two and a half weeks I,  
13 you know-- because I eat a lot of fresh stuff. So--

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, Yeah.

15 MS. RAMOS: It doesn't usually last too long. So  
16 I went a little crazy, and I went ahead and bought  
17 like a case of chili, just in case, you know?

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, no. What you have-- What  
19 you've described is pretty consistent with, you know,  
20 some of the feedback that we have been hearing, so I  
21 really appreciate you coming here today to testify.

22 MS. RAMOS: Thank you. Thank you for allowing me  
23 to share.

24

25



2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Because it lends clarity to a  
3 situation that we think, you know, carries a certain  
4 level of urgency. Thank you.

5 MS. RAMOS: All right. Thank you for hearing my  
6 story.

7 COUNSEL: Thank you, Diana. And before we move  
8 to Will, I just want to remind everybody that all  
9 testimony is going to be limited to two minutes for  
10 public-- public witnesses. And for those who are  
11 joining us on Zoom, please remember that there will  
12 be a few seconds of delay when you're unmuted before  
13 we can actually hear you. So just take note for  
14 those who are on Zoom.

15 So we're going to move now to Will, followed by  
16 Ethel Brown, followed by Travis Preston. Over to you  
17 Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Will, just so that you can  
19 keep track, we have a timer there. So when you hear  
20 "ding-ding", that means that your time is up, right?  
21 I want to recognize that we've also been joined by  
22 Councilmember Lee and Williams, and Ung online.  
23 Thank you. You may begin.

24 MR. WOOD: Good morning, Deputy Speaker Ayala and  
25 members of the Committee. Thank you for the

2 opportunity to testify today. My name is Willie  
3 Woods, and I'm an Consumer Advocate with Urban  
4 Pathways and I also work in various capacities as an  
5 advocate for folks experiencing homelessness.

6 I too, had an outstanding issue with HRA,  
7 starting with my recertification in May, and as a  
8 result I have gone from being current on my rent to  
9 being over \$2,000 in rent arrears, due to the rent  
10 not being paid by the City, I've gone for months  
11 without EBT or cash benefits, and received no  
12 documentation or final documentation with which I  
13 could extend my right for a fair hearing.

14 In addition, you know, specifically to my office-  
15 - my local HR office and cleans, it's known that you  
16 have to get there before 10 a.m. if you want to get  
17 seen by the end of business. There's been nights  
18 where I know for a fact folks have been there to 8:00  
19 trying to get things done. I've spent days,  
20 literally, on the phone, nine to four, waiting to  
21 speak to someone which is remarkably easy to do when  
22 the system also hangs up on you every hour or so and  
23 you have to start over at the end of the queue.

24 Personally, I have Crohn's disease, and that  
25 condition requires me to be on a rather specific

2 diet, if I'm going to maintain my health. Right now,  
3 I'm kind of lucky, and I get to visit my mom to get  
4 extra cooking. But right now, for the last couple of  
5 months, I've been on about two meals a day. And I've  
6 had to cut back on volunteer and advocacy efforts  
7 because I can't afford to travel. It's aggravated my  
8 anxiety and my depression. And all of that is really  
9 exacerbated by the lack of urgency when dealing with  
10 HRA.

11       Simply put, when you are going through  
12 homelessness, one thing you learn to identify pretty  
13 quickly are those that care and those that don't.  
14 And one of the things that you fervently hope is that  
15 you get treated the same way that someone else would  
16 want to be treated in a similar situation. The  
17 reality, is if folks had a different option from HRA,  
18 they would have long since taken their business  
19 elsewhere. And, you know, these issues will only  
20 worsen as the number of people the agency has to  
21 service grows.

22       It's hard enough as an adult to have to reach out  
23 and ask for help. It's much more difficult to need  
24 that help and then to have to grovel to get it. And  
25 that's what a lot of us are down to right now,

2 groveling, and we're still not getting the help we  
3 need. Thank you for your time.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate your testimony  
5 here today. Thank you.

6 COUNSEL: Thank you, Will. We're now going to  
7 turn to those on Zoom. Over now to Ethel Brown.  
8 Ethel Brown, you can begin your testimony once  
9 unmuted.

10 MS. BROWN: Good morning. My name is Ethel  
11 Brown, and I'm here today with the same situations  
12 that the former speakers, Diana Ramos, and Will Wood  
13 spoke about, and the many others after.

14 I thank you, City Council members and Deputy for  
15 allowing me to speak today. My daughter had the same  
16 issues, and so did I, in terms of public assistance  
17 and waiting. But thank God for the good advocates  
18 that are out there. They helped direct us to the  
19 right personnel and social services. She did not  
20 have to wait the hours, days, nor months that people  
21 usually have those types of problems with delays.  
22 It's like you're there sometimes-- I remember there  
23 being two to eight hours, like I was on a work shift,  
24 and I had to make sure I have food not just for  
25 myself, but my grandkid at the time. You sit there

2 waiting on the phones for hours, killing your phone  
3 batteries. Sometimes you don't have a place to plug  
4 it in, because it's blocked in those offices. You  
5 have to try to maintain and sustain your health,  
6 because you come into the system with no issues, you  
7 come out with issues, which I do have some health  
8 problems now, because of the stress that you've gone  
9 through the mental stress, the physical and  
10 emotional, of what you have to go through what you  
11 shouldn't have to go through when you're trying to go  
12 in to get help.

13 The mayor has to stop these budget cuts because  
14 social services is very important. What needs to be  
15 done, as people have stated before, as Deputy Ayala  
16 said, there should be a way to not have people be  
17 delayed, in terms of getting assistance. Hire more  
18 staff, plain and simple. Have priority sets. No  
19 more budget cuts. Social service is a necessity not  
20 just for the people here but also the immigrants and  
21 refugees. We're in a crisis. Many people are in  
22 need of help. This is why we have the Statue of  
23 Liberty, which represents that. This is our duty.  
24 We are here to help each other.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

2 MS. BROWN: Yes, thank you. Thank you.

3 COUNSEL: Thank you, Ethel. We will now turn to  
4 Travis Preston for testimony. Over now to Travis  
5 Preston.

6 MR. PRESTON: Hello?

7 COUNSEL: We can hear you.

8 MR. PRESTON: I'm at my job right now. So, I've  
9 got to keep it short and simple. All I'm going to  
10 say is that, um, like the HRA situation-- like, they  
11 never sent me a form telling me that I had to  
12 recertify. And then when I went to go check my card,  
13 it said-- it said my food stamps was up there. But  
14 then when I-- the day of my food stamps, I was  
15 supposed to get it, it wasn't there. And then when  
16 you do go back to HRA, or you call them, they have  
17 you on the phone for like 5, 6, or 7 hours. And then  
18 when you go in person, the people are rude and very  
19 disrespectful. And then when you say something bad  
20 to them, it's your fault.

21 You know-- that's all I wanted to say. I don't  
22 want to say too much because my patient is right  
23 here, so...

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Travis.

25 MR. PRESTON: You're welcome.

2 COUNSEL: Thank you, Travis, for your testimony,  
3 and to this entire panel for your testimony.

4 We are now going to move to testimony from  
5 members of the Administration, Marricka Scott-  
6 McFadden, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental  
7 and Legislative Affairs, Rebecca Chew, Chief Program  
8 Officer at HRA, and Angela Johnson, Executive Deputy  
9 Commissioner at the Family Independence  
10 Administration.

11 Before you begin, will you all please raise your  
12 right hand?

13 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth  
14 and nothing but the truth before this Committee and  
15 to respond honestly to Councilmember questions?

16 ALL: I do.

17 COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin when ready.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Good  
19 morning. I want to thank the City Council's  
20 Committee on General Welfare.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry, Marrickca, is your  
22 mic on?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yeah,  
24 better?

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Okay.

3 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Good  
5 morning. I want to thank the City Council's  
6 Committee on General Welfare and Deputy Speaker Ayala  
7 for today's hearing on public benefits access and  
8 processing. We look forward to discussing with  
9 council our work to connect New Yorkers to much-  
10 needed public access benefits programs.

11 My name is Marricka Scott-McFadden, and I am the  
12 Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and  
13 Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social  
14 Services. I'm joined today by Chief Program Officer  
15 at the Human Resources Administration, Rebecca Chew,  
16 and Family Independence Administration Executive  
17 Deputy Commissioner Angela Johnson.

18 The New York City Department of Social Services,  
19 Human Resource Administration, is the nation's  
20 largest social service agency. Each year we connect  
21 more than 3 million New Yorkers to benefits through  
22 the administration of 14 benefit programs. Every day  
23 in all five boroughs, DSS HRA provides essential  
24 programs and supports to low-income New Yorkers. In  
25 administering these programs, HRA is at the forefront



2 of this administration's efforts to combat poverty  
3 and income inequality.

4 At DSS HRA, we are mindful of the real-life  
5 impact benefit processing timeliness has on  
6 households. We recognize that programs like cash  
7 assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance  
8 Program, SNAP, can make the difference in providing  
9 economic and food security. As stewards of these  
10 critical public benefits, we are conscious of the  
11 care, compassion, and urgency with which we must  
12 treat each application.

13 Only four months ago marked the official end of  
14 the COVID 19 pandemic, and the federal public health  
15 emergency declaration. But we must bear in mind that  
16 not all communities are recovering at the same rate.  
17 When we last testified in December of 2022, DSS First  
18 Deputy Commissioner, Jill Berry, highlighted that we  
19 were seeing extraordinary demand for public benefits  
20 from New Yorkers across the five boroughs.

21 At the height of the pandemic and April 2020, the  
22 agency received 84,000 SNAP applications in that  
23 month alone. That was the highest number of SNAP  
24 application in modern history, reflecting a more than  
25 200% increase compared to the previous year.

2 The trends for cash assistance are just as  
3 unparalleled. In March of 2020 DSS HRA received  
4 12,745 more cash assistance applications than March  
5 of 2019, a 53% increase. This increased need for  
6 cash assistance and SNAP has continued over the last  
7 several years into today.

8 In fiscal year 24, the average number of  
9 applications per month is more than 36,000, and over  
10 48,000 for SNAP and cash assistance respectively,  
11 showing that New Yorkers have a sustained need for  
12 economic supports and food security. In addition to  
13 economic drivers, we also believe that increasing  
14 access to benefits has led to an increased number of  
15 applications. As HRA continues to break down  
16 barriers and modernize our service model, we have  
17 seen an increasing client utilization of our online  
18 platform and mobile app, Access HRA. New Yorkers no  
19 longer need to apply in-person at brick-and-mortar  
20 centers. They can simply apply on their computers  
21 and smartphones.

22 DSS HRA has worked to keep up with the increased  
23 volume of applications by employing several  
24 strategies. First, we have utilized existing staff  
25 to redeployment and reassignment, as well as overtime

2 on evenings and weekends. Our human resources team  
3 has pursued an aggressive strategy around  
4 recruitment, hiring, onboarding and retention, which  
5 has resulted in 728 positions onboarded since we last  
6 testify on this topic in December of 2022.

7 We continue to look to our state and federal  
8 partners to extend or expand waivers that increase  
9 efficiency and allow processing to move along more  
10 quickly. Unprecedented need has outpaced our  
11 resources, and we are using every tool and strategy  
12 at our disposal to meet the demand. For example,  
13 state and federal waivers were used to improve client  
14 access by transitioning from only in-person  
15 interviews as part of the cash assistance application  
16 process, to allowing these interviews to occur by  
17 phone at the client's chosen time, just as we were  
18 permitted to offer SNAP clients.

19 Following advocacy by DSS, a state law has made  
20 this remote cash assistance option permanent, meaning  
21 that clients can conduct our business online and by  
22 phone, making it more convenient for New Yorkers to  
23 access the services they are entitled to.

24 I would also like to update Council on a concern  
25 expressed by many councilmembers at last December's

2 hearing: Fraud and scamming from EBT cards. At that  
3 time theft of benefits would result in permanent loss  
4 of funds with no chance of reimbursement. However,  
5 because of recent state and federal action, that is  
6 no longer the case, and we have stood up a program to  
7 assist victims of this crime.

8 As of September 19, 2023, we have received over  
9 19,000 claims for reimbursement of SNAP and/or cash  
10 assistance benefits. We have processed about 15,000  
11 applications. 100% of these claims have been  
12 processed timely. To date, about two thirds of  
13 approved replacement benefits have been added to  
14 clients EBT cards, restoring over \$4.5 million in  
15 benefits to New Yorkers.

16 Before I discuss the legislation under  
17 consideration, I would like to take a moment to  
18 highlight the incredible work of DSS HRA staff. In  
19 the face of a global health emergency and pandemic,  
20 staff has worked tirelessly to process benefit  
21 applications to ensure their fellow New Yorkers have  
22 access to essential benefits and supports. Their  
23 work continues to this day to support New Yorkers  
24 impacted by economic realities, and we thank each and

2 every one of them for their dedication to the needs  
3 of the vulnerable among us.

4 Moving to legislation: We give careful and  
5 thoughtful consideration to proposed legislation and  
6 are mindful of our role as the safety net of the  
7 safety net, and our obligation to provide essential  
8 benefits to New Yorkers. Further we ask counsel to  
9 keep in front of mind the legal and regulatory  
10 obligations DSS HRA and DHS is subject to at both the  
11 state and federal level. We also encourage you to  
12 consider the fiscal impacts of proposals that would  
13 require significant staff and facilities investment.

14 Intro 647 would require that the sheriff and city  
15 marshals contact the Department of Social Service HRA  
16 when they receive an order that would result in  
17 housing displacement. When HRA receives notice from  
18 the sheriff or city Marshal about an order that would  
19 lead to housing displacement HRA would be required to  
20 respond by examining the person's eligibility for  
21 legal counsel, provide the person with contact for  
22 legal counsel, and connect individuals to such  
23 counsel.

24 We recognize the importance of focusing resources  
25 at the early stages of the legal process. Examples

2 of this include connecting tenants to legal services  
3 through right to counsel attorneys at housing court,  
4 and connecting tenants to rental assistance  
5 resources.

6 We believe focusing the Office of Civil Justice's  
7 and legal provider's finite resources earlier in the  
8 process, delivers more value to the tenants and gives  
9 them the most opportunity to remain in their homes.  
10 This legislation also would not curtail the marshal's  
11 or sheriff's authority to execute the eviction order.

12 We look forward to working with council and the  
13 bill sponsor to reach our shared goal to continue to  
14 bring legal services to tenants.

15 Intro 567 would prohibit homeless families with  
16 children from being temporarily housed in private  
17 buildings with more than five Class C housing  
18 maintenance code violations. Current homeless  
19 families with children in such buildings would be  
20 permitted to remain, but no additional families with  
21 children would be housed in such buildings until  
22 corrective action has been certified by the  
23 Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

24 Safety is a continued concern and priority for  
25 all our DSS DHS clients. Currently, shelters are

2 subject to rigorous inspections of habitability both  
3 before shelters are occupied by families, and on a  
4 regular basis. We acknowledge the shared goal of  
5 safety and protection of our clients and private  
6 building tenants. However this proposed legislation  
7 may have an unintended consequence of duplicating  
8 inspection requirements, and perhaps most  
9 importantly, slowing DHS's ability to rapidly provide  
10 shelter space for homeless families.

11 Intro 651 would preclude the Department of  
12 Homeless Services from requiring that every member of  
13 the family be present at its' intake center when the  
14 family seeks placement at shelter. DHS's Prevention  
15 Assistance and Temporary Housing PATH Intake Center  
16 plays a critical screening role when connecting  
17 families with children experiencing homelessness with  
18 assistance. Screenings and connections to assistance  
19 undertaken PATH include Child Protective and Family  
20 Support Services, domestic violence assistance,  
21 medical assistance, and school-related supports.

22 Currently, all members of the household are  
23 required to appear, and children under the age of 18  
24 can appear either in person or remotely at intake,  
25 but are not required for any subsequent visits.

2 We again look forward to consultation with  
3 counsel and the bill sponsors toward a shared goal of  
4 protecting young children and their families  
5 experiencing in crisis.

6 Intro 653 would, in an effort to combat the  
7 city's opioid epidemic, require the Department of  
8 Social Services to offer access to drug treatment  
9 services at hostel facilities, and the Department of  
10 Homeless Services to offer access to drug treatment  
11 services at all shelters.

12 Tackling the opioid epidemic and providing  
13 necessary services to assist those facing substance  
14 use disorder or critical shared goals. However,  
15 mandating on-site facilities as this legislation  
16 envisions would have significant impact on our  
17 facilities and programs. We strongly urge a delivery  
18 model that focuses on connecting clients to  
19 clinicians and health facilities that can deliver the  
20 services this legislation seeks to prescribe through  
21 referrals in the community. This ensures that  
22 clients who need assistance are referred to quality  
23 and specialized clinicians but does not make a broad  
24 assumption that all those in DHS facilities are  
25 living with HIV or managing a substance use disorder.



2 Referrals in community also have the advantage of  
3 avoiding potential privacy concerns that arise from  
4 on-site services. We believe the goal of providing  
5 services to this population of New Yorkers are  
6 contained are currently being met through in-  
7 community referrals.

8 Intro 741 would require Department of Homeless  
9 Services to inspect radiators during any inspection  
10 related to health, safety, or the fiscal condition of  
11 a homeless shelter. DHS already inspects radiators  
12 as part of an annual health and safety inspection,  
13 and manages specific concerns or issues with units  
14 when they arise.

15 Intro 901 would require Department of Homeless  
16 Services to provide process navigator services to  
17 every family with children at an intake center. The  
18 process navigator would provide assistance to shelter  
19 applicants in understanding all the procedures,  
20 meetings, interviews, and documents necessary to the  
21 application process and respond to questions.

22 We acknowledge the clear goal to ease challenges  
23 of clients as they navigate the process of obtaining  
24 temporary housing. This is a stressful time, and our  
25 intake staff are trained to seamlessly work with

2 clients at every point during the process. The  
3 Intake Center at PATH is the unique front door that  
4 families must walk through. It is unique because, by  
5 design, it is tailored to meet families where they  
6 are and provide individualized tools, services and  
7 connections for families. We are concerned that  
8 adding a navigator to this process would impact this  
9 carefully-designed process and represent a costly  
10 budget expansion.

11 We look forward to the continued dialogue  
12 regarding fully realizing the intent of this proposed  
13 legislation.

14 Intro 910 would mandate a report on the  
15 feasibility of creating a universal benefits  
16 application for local public benefit programs, and  
17 mandate the creation of a universal benefits  
18 application as determined feasible by the  
19 Commissioner of Department of Social Services.

20 This bill would also codify Access NYC, which is  
21 a screening tool for public access programs, direct  
22 incorporation of new and existing programs as deemed  
23 possible and require increased public awareness  
24 efforts of such tools.

2 We appreciate the goal of streamlining and  
3 simplifying the public benefits application process.  
4 It is important to recognize that benefit  
5 applications are subject to both federal and state  
6 laws and regulations. These forms are subject to  
7 approval by both federal and state oversight  
8 authorities. In addition, assessment of eligibility  
9 of public benefits in a preliminary way is prohibited  
10 by state and federal regulations. And DSS always  
11 wants to encourage anyone who believes that they are  
12 eligible to apply. We perceive the goal of this  
13 proposed legislation is to join up public benefits to  
14 streamline access for clients. However, we see  
15 obstacles to fully reaching the goals of this  
16 legislation as written, and are happy to speak  
17 further with Council regarding these challenges.

18 I will conclude by again recognizing our  
19 frontline staff has played a critical role in working  
20 towards more timely processing benefits. Their  
21 dedication to the tasks, willingness to take up over  
22 time, and adaptability to adapting to new workflows  
23 have all been critical to the success we have had  
24 thus far. We have made important strides forward in  
25 our processing of public benefits. We acknowledge

2 the urgency, and the seriousness with which we must  
3 continue to take on these challenges. We also wholly  
4 acknowledge that we have further work to do. Our  
5 frontline staff's continued diligent work on this  
6 issue will see us through to successful timely  
7 processing of benefits.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.  
9 We are happy to take your questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And I want to  
11 acknowledge that we've also been joined by  
12 Councilmember Restler.

13 I was looking forward to this hearing, because I  
14 don't believe that I have ever, in my time in the  
15 Council, and even in my time as a staffer for a  
16 former Councilmember, received as many complaints  
17 that I have in the last few weeks regarding folks  
18 that have not received their SNAP benefits. People  
19 who have expressed that they are receiving cash  
20 benefits, but for some reason, they didn't get their  
21 food stamps, and there was no explanation, and they  
22 couldn't really pinpoint what the actual problem was,  
23 whether they had this-- whether their case had been,  
24 you know, closed or, you know, benefits were

2 discontinued, or the dates were change. Like, there  
3 was no information provided to these families.

4 And so when I get one call, you know, okay. When  
5 I start to get upwards of 10, and sometimes from the  
6 same family, you know, living in different  
7 apartments, and they're all telling me the same  
8 thing. That's alarming to me.

9 I think, you know, we've discussed the-- the need  
10 to truly, you know, address the issue of food  
11 insecurity in this city, and that in certain  
12 communities (and you guys, you know, know this very  
13 well by virtue of the work that you do) we have  
14 created what I call pockets of severe poverty. And  
15 there are families that, you know, rely on these  
16 public benefits.

17 And somebody mentioned at the December hearing,  
18 families cannot eat retroactively right? It doesn't  
19 matter if I-- if I'm getting those food stamps. That  
20 was-- was that you? I give you credit. I-- We  
21 can't-- if you're getting-- if you're getting your  
22 benefits three weeks after the fact, right?, that's  
23 three weeks too late. And although I love and  
24 appreciate, you know, my food pantries. I've also,  
25 you know, seen, right?, and I know that the type of

2 food that we get in our-- in a box distribution is  
3 great.

4 And, listen, my mother would cook a nice stew  
5 with the meat that we would get in a can, and it was  
6 delicious. She fed us with-- you know, she was able  
7 to supplement our meals with food pantry meals, but  
8 it's not enough, right?

9 And so I'm concerned. I'm really concerned. And  
10 I know that we were here in December, and we were  
11 already in trouble. And I know that back then, the  
12 rationale was that we were not getting the same level  
13 of exemptions that we had been receiving throughout  
14 the pandemic to extend the recertification dates to  
15 allow more time, and that way there wouldn't be an  
16 interruption of services.

17 But here we are, you know, now almost a year, you  
18 know, later, in an even worse situation than we were  
19 last year. And so, I would really want to steer away  
20 from using the pandemic as a reason for why we're  
21 here, because it's three years later, and we're--  
22 we're just trending downward at this point. And I  
23 really need to understand why.

24 So that's the question.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So thank  
3 you. Thank you, Councilmember, Deputy Speaker. You  
4 know, I think that we highlight the pandemic because  
5 we know that out of our collective experience, there  
6 were needs that came up at that time. You know,  
7 there were certain reliefs that were afforded at that  
8 time, and that express helped a lot of people. And  
9 coming out of the pandemic, those people still need  
10 help. So we highlight that for that reason.

11 And then also, we continue to work with our state  
12 partners to be able to receive waivers that are  
13 effective in moving us through the collective process  
14 of recertification. As I highlighted in the  
15 testimony, one example being that we are now able to  
16 take interviews by phone and by on demand, so clients  
17 can-- we can reach them at the time that they are  
18 available, instead of just calling.

19 Now just add also, that now our calls, say HRA as  
20 opposed to being blocked numbers, so folks can  
21 identify what that they're getting a call and the  
22 call that they've been waiting for. So that is  
23 helpful.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But that doesn't explain why  
25 folks are waiting, why the delays are so significant,

2 and why we're in a worse-off position than we were  
3 almost a year ago. I mean, I-- I had to-- You know,  
4 I have a constituent services staffer in my office.  
5 We saw an influx of people coming in. After the  
6 pandemic, we hired a second one, you know? If there  
7 are-- If there's a demand for even more, then we get  
8 somebody else to ensure that we're still able to meet  
9 our mandate. It's very simple thing, you know? The  
10 money is in the budget to hire folks. We had all of  
11 these hiring halls. So, you know, I'm just trying to  
12 make sense of it.

13       So let me-- I think-- Let me backtrack a little  
14 bit. What-- Can you explain to me what the-- the  
15 unit that is in charge with the recertification  
16 process looks like? How many-- How many staff are  
17 assigned to that specific division?

18       And I really want to just emphasize that I am  
19 very appreciative of the work-- of all of the workers  
20 that show up every single day. I understand that it  
21 is very stressful work. And I und-- And it's a  
22 really big deal when you have somebody's, like,  
23 livelihood in your hands. And you're responsible now  
24 for ensuring that somebody's eating. And I respect  
25 that work. So, I don't want anyone to feel like this



2 is an attack on the work, but rather an attack on a  
3 process that obviously is failing. And the fact that  
4 it hasn't been rectified, and that a corrective  
5 action plan hasn't been presented is bothersome.

6 This to us is a serious emergency. And so, you  
7 know, if you could explain who handles that? How  
8 many staffers? I know that we do some hiring halls,  
9 but it's not very clear how many people, you know, we  
10 lost through attrition, and whether or not that kind  
11 of kept us at the same level. What does that look  
12 like? Walk me through it.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I'll just  
14 begin by saying that we do realize that there are  
15 challenges. And as I said in the testimony, we've  
16 been able to onboard over 700 staff that-- but--  
17 including-- Onboarding includes training, and making  
18 sure that folks are properly acquainted with what the  
19 work that they must-- they must do. So, where we  
20 acknowledged that they are-- that the challenge still  
21 exists, and we still are got we're still going  
22 through the process, we're still doing what we what  
23 did-- we feel are efforts to get past the delays in  
24 processing? I'll ask my colleague to chime in with  
25 the specifics on that.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

3 MS. CHEW: Good morning, Deputy Speaker. And  
4 thank you for your questions.

5 I think to frame it-- To answer your question  
6 around what is driving this is there is an incredible  
7 need that has started in the epidemic and has not  
8 abated in the city.

9 So just to give you some numbers to understand  
10 it: For cash assistance applications, so far-- just  
11 for-- well, for fiscal year 23, the average is about  
12 40,000. During the height of the pandemic, it was  
13 35,000. In fiscal year 19, it was 23,000. So you  
14 can see that's an average 7000 more cash assistance  
15 applications.

16 Similarly, for SNAP, fiscal year 23, the average  
17 was about 40,000. For March through April, it was  
18 71,000. In fiscal year 19, it was 25,000. So, we  
19 have addressed that, by understanding there's a, you  
20 know, we were faced with attrition rates, just like,  
21 I guess, the rest of the country. And so we've  
22 undertaken very aggressive measures. And I'm glad  
23 you mentioned the hiring halls, because HRS attended  
24 19, just from March to August, and many  
25 councilmembers supported and attended those as well.

2 We work with Business Link, and that's actively  
3 supporting our cash and SNAP benefit recipients in  
4 finding employment and better employment, including  
5 opportunities through HRS. And so with all those  
6 extra efforts along with things like LinkedIn. So  
7 when a city flyer gets posted, it gets posted on  
8 LinkedIn at the same time. And we develop those  
9 partnerships. We work with faith-based  
10 organizations, CBOs. Last time you had asked about  
11 community colleges. We do partner also with CUNY and  
12 Columbia, to-- again, we want to broadcast our  
13 positions, aggressively fill these positions, and--  
14 and thanks to those efforts, we are making progress.  
15 We are making progress.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So in 2019, where we were  
17 seeing 23,000 applications, how many staffers were  
18 assigned to SNAP benefit recertification cases, as  
19 opposed to the number today? What is-- How does that  
20 compare?

21 MS. CHEW: We'll have to get back to you on that  
22 comparison. But we can look at the--

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I know that  
24 we don't have that specific number. We can,  
25 obviously, get back to you with a comparison of 2019

2 positions as opposed to now. What we all want to  
3 stress, of course, is the efforts that we've made  
4 since our last testimony, where we really have  
5 listened to counsel and we've listened to our needs,  
6 and we've been working to get hired up and onboard  
7 that great number of folks. So, I can-- I understand  
8 the question, I follow it.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I understand, and I'm  
10 acknowledging that, you know, that you guys were very  
11 present in the hiring halls. But we're still worse  
12 off today than we were almost a year ago, and I still  
13 haven't really heard what the justification for that  
14 is, other than it might be staffing related? I mean,  
15 I'm not really understanding.

16 And I'm, you know, again, I respect the work that  
17 you do. But, you know, I'm expecting that when you  
18 guys are coming here to testify that you're going to  
19 have, you know, the information that we're going to  
20 require of you, right? And we understand that the  
21 number of applicants has grown significantly.  
22 Obviously, the questions are going to be primarily  
23 around, "Well, you know, how are you addressing  
24 that?" And so, I'm hoping that you would be able to  
25 tell me, "Councilmember, we have a department of, you

2 know, 100 staffers that are assigned to work  
3 specifically on SNAP benefits. We've increased from  
4 the previous 50 because of the influx." Like, that  
5 is the type of data that helps us better understand  
6 what is happening on your end, right? Because other  
7 than that, there's a lot of ambiguity and a lot of  
8 space for us to kind of, you know, make up our own--  
9 in our own imagination, right?, scenario of what's  
10 happening. And it seems like just, you know, the  
11 agency is not prioritizing SNAP benefit applicants in  
12 the way that they should be. And that's-- that's  
13 worrisome.

14 And I don't want to assume that. I really don't  
15 want to assume that. I want to give you the benefit  
16 of the doubt. But we're talking about, you know, a  
17 substantial amount of applications that have not been  
18 completed. You know, we're at-- is it 29% completion  
19 rate? Like, that's horrible. I mean, that's like an  
20 F, you know, capital F with a whole bunch of red  
21 lines under it. Like, how do you justify that?  
22 That's-- That's not something that I would be proud  
23 of.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Well, I'm  
25 going to allow my colleagues to add on. But I will

2 say that this is not taken lightly within the HRA.  
3 Daily, weekly, conversations and meetings are had in  
4 order to try to do better at this. We acknowledge  
5 that we do need to do better. Some of the tactics,  
6 just to-- just that we've used in terms of strategy  
7 (redeployment, reassignment of internal staff),  
8 we've, of course, done voluntary overtime for  
9 evenings and weekends, and we've been doing that  
10 regularly as we-- as we've seen this challenge occur.

11 And then onboarding and hiring as well. We feel  
12 like we-- we're doing a multifaceted approach to a  
13 problem that increases monthly. What do I mean by  
14 that? We're getting higher numbers of applications  
15 monthly. So it's a bit of trying to put all of it  
16 together, and we're not-- but we're not at the same  
17 number. We have this increased need. We acknowledge  
18 that. And we are looking forward to seeing all of  
19 these efforts come to a completion where we are  
20 timely and our numbers are back up.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So you have some  
22 homework to do. You owe me some-- some numbers here.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Absolutely.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Now, in terms of-- So, I'm  
25 just going to just ask you some general questions.

2 And I hope that you know, we get we get some answers  
3 for these. But regarding the cash and-- the SNAP  
4 and cash assistance: How many delayed SNAP cases are  
5 overdue? And how many cash assistance cases are  
6 overdue? And how long have clients had to wait to  
7 receive their food stamps?

8 MS. CHEW: Thank you for your question. And  
9 noting, you know, we do have 1 million SNAP cases,  
10 which is including 1.7 million individuals in receipt  
11 of SNAP, about 275,000 cash cases, which equals about  
12 half a million recipients of cash assistance  
13 benefits.

14 Our most recent data from August 31 of this year,  
15 indicates that there are a total of 1,000-- oh,  
16 sorry-- 1,574 overdue SNAP cases that we are  
17 prioritizing to resolve and make sure that those  
18 cases are looked at carefully and processed, and that  
19 clients get every single benefit they are entitled to  
20 when we process that case.

21 For cash assistance, the number is 30,722 that  
22 are overdue. Though again, we are laser focused.  
23 And as my colleague pointed out, you know, you have  
24 employed several measures to increase our capacity  
25 and bandwidth to process each and every one of these

2 cases, including overtime projects, a call to action  
3 agency wide, aggressive, aggressive recruitment and  
4 onboarding and training of our new staff, and many  
5 mentoring programs in place, and staff morale  
6 boosting programs, because we also want to retain the  
7 excellent, wonderful frontline staff we have that do  
8 this work day in and day out.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: If they're working nights and  
10 weekends, good luck with that, especially at the  
11 rates that they get paid. You know, that's another  
12 conversation for another day. But, you know-- Why  
13 is there-- Why is there such a big disparity between  
14 cash assistance and SNAP benefits? Is it that you  
15 process them differently? Are they, like-- Are they--  
16 - Because if I have a-- If I have a case where I'm  
17 getting both cash benefits and food stamps in one  
18 case, why are they processed?

19 MS. CHEW: So, in that way, the cash cases can  
20 either be cash only cases, or cash with a SNAP  
21 component. So that number I cited earlier with half  
22 a million individuals receiving cash assistance, that  
23 could be cash assistance only, or cash with a SNAP  
24 component, whereas the 1.7 million SNAP only, that's



2 the SNAP only recipient cases. I hope that answered  
3 your question, Deputy Speaker.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And how delinquent are  
5 you? Like, what is the average amount of time that a  
6 client is waiting to actually receive those benefits?  
7 The ones that are delayed?

8 MS. CHEW: Yeah our-- By federal and state  
9 regulations, you know, we are to complete processing  
10 applications within 30 days or a shorter timeframe,  
11 if it's an immediate need application. We'll have to  
12 look into average times for you and circle back

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is that 30 days prior to  
14 expiration, or 30 days after?

15 MS. CHEW: Um, it's from the date of application

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: From the date of the  
17 application? But these are recertifications. So  
18 theoretically, I'm at a-- so, I don't know-- so it  
19 would be probably nice to know how many of these are  
20 new applicants, versus how many of them are  
21 recertifications? Are we seeing that the delay on  
22 the new applicants' side are a little bit higher than  
23 the ones on the recertifications?

24 MS. CHEW: Oh, sure. So it's actually higher on  
25 the application side, so--

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On the new applicants?

3 MS. CHEW: Parton?

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On new applicants?

5 MS. CHEW: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. How-- Do you know how--  
7 - Do you know what the difference is?

8 MS. CHEW: Yes. So for cash assistance, again,  
9 going back to August 31 of this year, the overdue  
10 application volume is about 27,000. Whereas for the  
11 recerts, it's about 3,000. On the SNAP side, the  
12 overdue applications is in the 1,400 range. And then  
13 the recert overdue for SNAP is 96, under 100.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

15 MS. CHEW: So it's-- yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Whew, guys. You're  
17 not making this easy for me. I'm just-- I, you know,  
18 again, I think we're ill-prepared with information,  
19 but also with a plan of action, you know, to really,  
20 truly address this.

21 So I'm going to-- I'm going to just move on. I'm  
22 not going to ask you about, you know, the corrective  
23 action plan, because I think is pretty obvious that  
24 the corrective action plan includes more hiring.

2 I would suggest that you really seriously have a  
3 conversation with OMB about maybe decreasing the  
4 headcount and increasing the pay rate for, you know,  
5 the time being, if that, you know, or increasing the  
6 pay rate without having to decrease the work force,  
7 but something has to give, you know? These-- Many of  
8 these workers, you know, I don't-- you know, I don't  
9 know if the agency really, you know, understands that  
10 the level of dedication.

11 A lot of your staff, you know, has been around  
12 for 20 or 30 years. Like, these are people that have  
13 a, you know, a vested interest in doing the work that  
14 they do. They should be compensated accordingly.  
15 They should be able to continue to live, you know, in  
16 the city and, you know, make-- make ends meet. They  
17 shouldn't have to work, you know, around the clock,  
18 to be able to make that up, right?, with overtime.  
19 And I just-- You know, I think it has to be said,  
20 because I keep hearing from every agency, "Well,  
21 we're understaffed, understaffed." Yeah, but you're  
22 also underpaying your, you know, employees. And I  
23 don't see there being a real call to action on the,  
24 you know, administrative side, asking for an increase  
25 in pay. You know, we recently went through this

2 whole human services, you know, contracts, and you  
3 know, how we're paying our nonprofits barely nothing  
4 to do this work. And the same applies to the city  
5 workforce. It's really is-- And this is through no  
6 fault of anyone sitting here, but you know, it has to  
7 be said.

8 All right, I'm going to take a little pause,  
9 while I kind of gather my thoughts, and I'm going to  
10 call on couple of members. Five minutes per member,  
11 please.

12 So we're going to start with Councilmember  
13 Stevens, followed by Cabán, followed by Avilés, and  
14 then followed by Councilmember Restler.  
15 Councilmember Stevens?

16 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Good morning. I'm  
17 feeling kind of similar to the Deputy Speaker. I'm  
18 just a little I'm taken aback by, like, the lack of  
19 clarity around numbers and feeling like we're  
20 constantly in this cycle of not getting all the  
21 information, which is why we keep coming back to the  
22 same type of hearings.

23 And so, one, I just want to start just with the  
24 vacancies, because-- in staffing, because I hear  
25 that you guys are going to the hiring halls and

2 that's been a big thing for the agencies, but I'm  
3 also hearing that a lot of people, who even when they  
4 are told at the hiring halls are going to be called  
5 back, are left in limbo for months and haven't heard  
6 anything.

7 So, can you tell me: How many people from these  
8 hiring halls (you said you went to 19) from the 19,  
9 how many were hired, and are they still on staff  
10 currently?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, just to  
12 reiterate, from-- from my testimony, we've been able  
13 to onboard over 700 folks, including folks that we've  
14 received applications that have gone through the  
15 hiring halls, our increased efforts through LinkedIn  
16 and other-- other avenues. And we think we've had  
17 some great success with that.

18 Similar to the point-- Or to also add in the  
19 point that Deputy Speaker Ayala made in terms of pay  
20 rate, we are now able to hire folks at the incumbent  
21 rate. So, that is a bit higher than before. So, it  
22 speaks to the Deputy Speaker's point of being able to  
23 hire at a higher-- higher rate, and then have that  
24 position be more attractive for folks who we are  
25 hiring.

2 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: Part of-- Part of my  
3 question too was out of the 700, how many that you  
4 hired are still there currently? Because we're also  
5 hearing that people are quitting. And to even go  
6 with that, how many-- Yeah, how many people from  
7 that 700 are still there?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I can't  
9 speak to the retention rate. I don't have that  
10 number. I'm happy to circle back, and I understand  
11 the Councilmember's point, in terms of just this  
12 being very difficult work. This is hard work. We're  
13 asking a lot of our folks, and they have delivered  
14 for us in many ways. So I'll get back to you.

15 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: So even-- even with the  
16 700, you don't have that number, but how many  
17 employees in the past month have quit from HRA? Do  
18 you have that number?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I absolutely  
20 do not have that number, but I can get that for you.  
21 Absolutely.

22 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: So I just-- It's  
23 disappointing, right? Like so you guys are coming  
24 here to talk about the deficiencies and the things  
25 and we're in a crisis, but you don't have the numbers

2 of how many people are-- who left in the past month  
3 or in the past quarter. So that's-- that's also  
4 telling, right? So then how do we then do our  
5 oversight, and get this information? So that's  
6 really telling and really disappointing.

7 Another question I have is just around--

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: If I might  
9 add--

10 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: From other agencies--  
11 From other agencies-- Have you considered deploying  
12 staff from other agencies to assist with the backlog?  
13 If not why? And this should be all-hands-on-deck.  
14 So, if there are other agencies, have you like  
15 reached out to other agency throughout the city and  
16 working with other Deputy Mayors and other  
17 Commissioners, to get folks to come and support this,  
18 so we can address the backlog? Has that happened?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, there  
20 are-- I know that there are restrictions on the-- the  
21 processing of these applications, and they are  
22 specific who and how they are processed. And so  
23 unfortunately, I don't have the-- the exact  
24 parameters that would maybe even perhaps prohibit  
25 what you're-- what you're suggesting. But I will

2 certainly take this idea in and work it through  
3 internally.

4 And you know, we're looking for what you said, a  
5 "all hands on deck", and we've certainly been-- been  
6 doing that internally.

7 And I'd like to also highlight that,  
8 unfortunately, when we do come to-- to testify,  
9 sometimes we don't have data-specific questions in  
10 which they have to be run in advance, and we don't  
11 have that information because they we don't have that  
12 sort of, you know, front of mind, or right at hand.

13 So whenever possible, when we can have data  
14 questions in advance for specific numbers, we  
15 obviously want to be partners with Council, and bring  
16 that information so that we can have clarity and  
17 transparency.

18 COUNCILMEMBER STEVENS: So even with the-- Could  
19 you talked about the backlog, and being all hands on  
20 deck, and trying to get other people from other parts  
21 of administration. This was done with the prior  
22 administration, so why can't we do this now? Because  
23 it is a crisis. We have a huge backlog. So I don't  
24 necessarily understand why we would have to, you



2 know, figure this out when it's been done in previous  
3 administrations.

4 And if you allow me just one more question: What  
5 is the number of positions that HRA needs in order to  
6 eliminate the current processing delay for  
7 applications and recertification? Because I know you  
8 said you don't have all data points, but in your  
9 opinion, what do you guys think that you need in  
10 order to get up to speed with hiring and staffing?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think at  
12 this-- at this point, we-- again, as I spoke to  
13 before, this is more than just a staffing issue. We  
14 do have an increased demand. I don't think that we  
15 can-- we have a specific number of how many new hires  
16 would relinquish that backlog.

17 We continue to work with the folks that we have.  
18 We continue to have a lot of conversation about what  
19 we can do to highlight the work that our staff is  
20 doing. And it's-- it's important work. And I know  
21 Council knows that. But in terms of specific  
22 numbers, we-- we don't know what that number might  
23 be.

24 So I just want to say I'm a little bit, just,  
25 disappointed, right? Like, this means you guys have

2 no idea how-- what staff you need in order to clear  
3 the backlog, you don't know how many staff has been  
4 retained in the last month. It's at this point, it's  
5 like we actually don't-- it kind of sounds like you  
6 guys don't know how to get out of this crisis.

7 And so that, to me, is really unacceptable. And  
8 so thinking about what is the plan, and especially  
9 when coming to testify about such a crisis, and we  
10 have people talking about how they are literally  
11 starving because they don't have the food that they  
12 need, it's really, really sad. And we really need to  
13 really think about what that plan is to really move  
14 out of this. Because saying that you don't know how  
15 many staff or what you need to get out the crisis. I  
16 just-- I'm done. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Councilmember  
18 Cabán.

19 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, and thank you  
20 for being in the hot seat. I-- I don't doubt for a  
21 second that you all and every single person working  
22 at your-- at your agencies care deeply about the  
23 provision of services, because of how like critical  
24 and essential that they are.

2       You know, I just want to take something that you  
3       said on the record a moment ago that-- that it's more  
4       than just a staffing issue. And even that statement  
5       alone acknowledges the fact that there is a staffing  
6       issue. There is no getting around it. And this will  
7       not be solved without an increase in capacity, an  
8       increase in manpower, and an increase in staffing.

9       And I think that this Administration, and  
10       particularly this Mayor has made it impossible for  
11       you to do that with 15% pegs and hiring freezes. So,  
12       I mean, if we're processing at 29% -- And I actually  
13       want to focus on the skimming numbers for a second.  
14       Because now, you all are being charged with tackling  
15       this really, really big problem, as well. And  
16       unfortunately, in your testimony, it tells a little  
17       bit of a different story about the-- the agency's  
18       capacity to address this than what is actually the  
19       reality that we're experiencing in our communities,  
20       right?

21       In your testimony, you wrote that as of September  
22       19, 2023, we received over 19 claims for replacement,  
23       we've processed about 15,000, 100% have been  
24       processed timely, two thirds of the replacement  
25       benefits have been added to EBT cards.

2 But my office met with the Community Engagement  
3 Unit plus the Deputy Director of Administration to  
4 get additional (like, what, two weeks ago?) to get  
5 additional skimming facts. And the information we  
6 were provided by HRA was that 22,000, at that time,  
7 New Yorkers they knew to be have been impacted by  
8 skimming. So that's above the 19,000. But that--  
9 But that the Agency estimates the actual number is  
10 closer to 60,000. And so if we have-- have helped  
11 15,000, but there are 60,000 out there, potentially,  
12 who have had their-- their benefits, skimmed.  
13 There's a huge gap in rectifying-- in rectifying  
14 that. We were told that in our district, 10% to 15%  
15 % of all constituents with cash assistance in several  
16 of my zip codes have experienced skimming in the past  
17 few months. And so that means that if-- if our  
18 office speaks to somebody about their-- their SNAP  
19 benefits, there is a really high likelihood that  
20 their benefits have been skimmed.

21 And so now we have this claims process. And I  
22 promise I'm going to get to a question. But you're  
23 saying that you're working on the EBT and cash  
24 assistance clinics, and we're doing a clinic with you  
25 all. But we've only just learned about the rolling

2 out of the program. And we have this October 31st as  
3 the final date to submit claims. It's not a-- not a  
4 lot of time. Is that going to be extended? Will  
5 there be waivers available so that we can extend the  
6 time that we can submit claims? Especially when you  
7 all are acknowledging that the number of people  
8 affected is what two, three, maybe four times what we  
9 know concretely to be the case.

10 MS. CHEW: Thank you, Councilmember. You know,  
11 we are incredibly grateful that there is an  
12 opportunity now, through changes in law on the  
13 federal level and state level, that clients who have  
14 been the victims of skimming or fraud now can have an  
15 opportunity to get replacement benefits for those  
16 much, much needed critical, food on the table.

17 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: I'm sorry to interrupt, but  
18 time is super precious. There's not a lot of time  
19 left. So my direct question is: Are you going to,  
20 like, allow issues of waivers or extend this timeline  
21 to submit claims? Because it sounds like we haven't  
22 yet even begun to scratch the surface on reaching the  
23 people who have been affected by this. And so, if it  
24 closes on October 31, there are going to be a lot of  
25 people who don't get made whole. That's my question:

2 Will there be a waiver or an extension of this  
3 timeline, acknowledging the fact that that the agency  
4 has said that this number is likely to be three or  
5 four times what has been recorded?

6 MS. CHEW: Right. So thank you. I can say that  
7 of the initial 22,000 that we, you know, thought had  
8 been skimmed, based on, you know, claims submitted  
9 or, you know, information we received, there was an  
10 outreach effort to those 22,000 with our partners and  
11 outreach partners to support and make sure that they  
12 were aware of the process and to provide support in  
13 applying for those benefits.

14 Our process of replacing skimmed benefits is only  
15 a barely a month old into-- into it, and we are very  
16 pleased with the fact that over 19,000 claims have  
17 been submitted, and over 4.5--

18 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: Do you have plans to extend  
19 it? I just-- I have like no time left. And I just--  
20 My question is simple. Do you have plans to extend  
21 the waiver? Because it seems really, really clear  
22 that helping the number of people we need to help is  
23 not going to happen without an extension? Are there  
24 plans to extend that that October 31st deadline? And

2 then, Chair, if I could ask one more question in  
3 addition to that.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yeah, thank  
5 you for that question. I think that at this time, we  
6 are not aware of the waiver-- waiver having been put  
7 into process and we will absolutely have-- circle  
8 back to council when we are have confirmation of any  
9 waivers that are put into process. We understand the  
10 need, as-- as we've-- as you stated that there is an  
11 additional need. And we're not at this, at this time  
12 aware of how that will be accomplished, whether it's  
13 through a waiver or some other process.

14 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: I know my other my other  
15 colleagues will hit some of the questions I was  
16 hoping to be able to ask with my time. So, I'm going  
17 to ask a totally separate question: The-- The  
18 federal farm bill is currently being debated in  
19 Congress. And so the people of Puerto Rico are  
20 excluded from accessing SNAP. Has the administration  
21 taken a position on this? And would HRA, and City  
22 Hall by extension, support the inclusion of the  
23 people of Puerto Rico since we'd like to say that  
24 Puerto Rico is the fifth borough, in SNAP? Do you  
25 guys-- have you taken a position? Do you support

2 that? Would you support the extension of support for  
3 that inclusion?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN:

5 Unfortunately, we-- I don't think that we were able  
6 to take a position on that today. I'm not 100%  
7 familiar with where that process is. And so we would  
8 absolutely have to review that as an agency before we  
9 can take a position.

10 COUNCILMEMBER CABÁN: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Councilmember Avilés?

12 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you, Chair. Thank  
13 you to all the representatives of the agency here.  
14 And you know, it is important to note that our  
15 inquiry, our passion, our upset, is not-- is not  
16 directed at the workers, whom we know are underwater.  
17 It is directed at a system that is, right now, as we  
18 all very well know-- the Mayor announced a fifth  
19 round of cuts to agencies. And we see firsthand in  
20 our offices, and also work with-- with constituents  
21 reapplying over and over and over again for benefits,  
22 and sitting with them when-- when they can't get the  
23 food that they need, and trying to find food for  
24 folks on an everyday basis.

25



2 So, this is-- this is not about the workers.

3 This is about a system that is setting us up to fail

4 over and over again and continuously proposing cuts.

5 This administration has proposed even more cuts to

6 this agency, when we can't even keep up with the pace

7 of need for New Yorkers.

8 So-- So, our upset and anger is certainly is

9 certainly directed there. But also wanting answers

10 in earnest.

11 So I wanted to-- In terms of-- Um, I didn't hear.

12 What-- What would the agency need in terms of

13 staffing to be able to manage this current caseload?

14 And-- And how many cases do the staffers who manage

15 benefits are currently holding?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I'm sorry.

17 I didn't hear the last part of your question.

18 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: What's-- What's the

19 caseload for each staff member that are processing

20 these cases currently?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Um, so

22 they're-- In regards to caseload, there is no

23 caseload. The applications are processed as they

24 come in. So, workers are not assigned to a caseload.

25

2           You didn't hear a number because we did not have  
3 a number to share at this time. We don't have a  
4 specific number that we can say, but will be the  
5 golden bullet, or that will get us there.

6           COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: So in 20, you cited-- you  
7 cited, you know, the case numbers over the past  
8 several years and showing how they ballooned  
9 currently. What was the peak of HRA staffing under  
10 some of those other years where they had even lower  
11 case loads. Because we can extrapolate that you need  
12 more, right?, to manage properly a certain level of--  
13 of cases that you have been processing historically,  
14 so...

15           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, yes. So  
16 we didn't have those numbers. We will assign them  
17 according to how we've reported today, where we  
18 looked at our peak number, in April of 2020. We're  
19 happy to share what our staffing was at that time  
20 versus our current staffing. We'll follow up with  
21 that.

22           COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: It is-- It is truly  
23 alarming that an agency that has historically  
24 processed SNAP cases, has followed trends of boom and

2 bust, has no sense of its staffing need and capacity  
3 during this time. It is truly alarming.

4 In terms of-- In terms of the bill that's  
5 introduced, you noted that-- You know, I agree that  
6 it's very important for Intro (what is it)-- Intro  
7 647. We noted certainly that it is important,  
8 obviously, to get residents information much earlier  
9 on in the process, especially if we as a city are--  
10 are committed to stopping evictions. Would you say  
11 that the current process is sufficient?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think that  
13 it-- the process that we're, you know, utilizing  
14 right to counsel at-- at Housing Court is one that  
15 is-- that we're working through the process and we're  
16 meeting tenants there. We've had the opportunity to  
17 launch a pilot in the Brooklyn Housing Court, where  
18 we've placed HRA resources within the court system.  
19 We've co-located there, and we'll be expanding that  
20 throughout the Housing Courts throughout the five  
21 boroughs.

22 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: Are you are you aware of  
23 how many evictions are taking place on a monthly  
24 basis over the past year?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I don't have  
3 the number of how many evictions are on a monthly  
4 basis.

5 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: Are you aware of the  
6 ballooning number of evictions that we are currently  
7 facing in the city?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Absolutely.  
9 This-- This agency as it stands is-- and the mission  
10 statement is anti-poverty and anti-homelessness, and  
11 we seek at every turn to make sure that folks remain  
12 in their homes.

13 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: And so just for the  
14 record: I mean, the bill essentially says "inform",  
15 to inform people of the resources that they should  
16 have at their disposal that can potentially help  
17 them, which from, you know, cost-saving, cost-cutting  
18 measure, if we don't inform our residents of their  
19 rights and resources, we pay triple. Because what  
20 will happen is residents will then become part of the  
21 housing-- the homeless shelter system, and we  
22 continue to create trap doors as opposed to circling  
23 the wagons around people. So, I just-- I find it  
24 surprising that informing residents feels too cost  
25 prohibitive, or that it's too downstream. There is

2 no moment in time that is inopportune to inform  
3 residents of their right, and resources that we as a  
4 city are working so hard to marshal.

5 So I just, you know, want to note that we should  
6 be making this attempt at every part of this process  
7 very early on. I agree: Right to counsel. Clearly,  
8 we need to fund that even more. In fact, there are  
9 many improvements we can make to this system. But to  
10 say at the point of eviction, as a family is going  
11 through that, that our city cannot inform residents,  
12 or it feels redundant, or not the best value for the  
13 buck, I would-- I would argue that every point to  
14 save a family from having to experience violent  
15 evictions is an important and worthwhile effort.

16 And lastly, for the record, we need to fully fund  
17 social services. So we are here in support,  
18 obviously, of that effort. But what we are seeing is  
19 a continuous defunding, and depending on other  
20 unsupported agencies, namely the nonprofits to fill  
21 that void, our government has a responsibility to do  
22 right by New Yorkers fully and unequivocally. So,  
23 thank you.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I would just  
25 like to say that have shared goals and keeping folks

2 in their homes. The Council, the bill sponsor, as  
3 well as the agency, we enjoy those shared goals.  
4 We're happy to continue having conversations with  
5 you. We just simply highlight the front end where we  
6 feel the finite resources are-- are getting value.  
7 But again, happy to continue conversation.

8 COUNCILMEMBER AVILÉS: No, that's fair. But with  
9 thousands of evictions, actually proceeding and  
10 ballooning numbers, I think we need to think about  
11 all parts of the process. Thank you so much for your  
12 partnership.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I want to recognize that  
15 we've also been joined by Councilmembers Riley, Osee,  
16 and De La Rosa. Councilmember Restler?

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much, Deputy  
18 Speaker Ayala, and for your leadership and attention  
19 to this matter and the staff that support the General  
20 Welfare Committee. I want to just firstly strongly  
21 echo the sentiments of Councilmember Stevens and  
22 Avilés. I strongly, strongly agree with the points  
23 that they raised.

24 You know, we were here 10 months ago when this  
25 situation was very bad. And we had more senior staff

2 from HRA before us than we do today. And yet, the  
3 situation has gotten catastrophic.

4 10 years ago, I was working in the Mayor's  
5 office, and was helping to launch the IDNYC program.  
6 We selected HRA as the home agency for that  
7 initiative, because it was the get-stuff-done agency.  
8 But it's not anymore, not under this Mayor, not when  
9 six out of 10 people who are applying for cash  
10 assistance aren't getting it on time, when seven out  
11 of 10 people who are applying for food stamps aren't  
12 getting it on time. I used to be nearly 100% on both  
13 fronts when he entered office.

14 I walk out the door every day in my house. There  
15 are three different HRA centers in the downtown  
16 Brooklyn area. All of them have lines around the  
17 corner, down the block. People are struggling people  
18 are suffering. And it is most of all because we  
19 don't have the staff.

20 I believe in the work that HRA can do, but you  
21 can't do it without people. And this Administration  
22 has done an absolutely inadequate job in staffing the  
23 agency to meet the needs of the most vulnerable New  
24 Yorkers. It is beyond disheartening and disturbing.  
25 It is causing anguish for our neighbors each and

2 every day. We see it as the councilmembers who are  
3 helping constituents navigate your bureaucracy, and  
4 we can't get anyone's attention because you don't  
5 have staff.

6 So I just want to come back to Councilmember  
7 Stevens's point to start. And I have to say how  
8 disappointed I am and your inability to answer  
9 questions. I'm hoping you're going to do a little  
10 better now.

11 Legal Aid Society sued you all, rightly, because  
12 you are failing to deliver for the basic needs of New  
13 Yorkers. Over the course of this year, what is the  
14 net increase in the HRA headcount?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: That was the  
16 number that we stated in our testimony.

17 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 720 positions were hired.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Were  
19 onboarded since December.

20 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: And how many left? How  
21 many people left? Net increase?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: How many?

23 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: We want the retention  
24 data. The staff for the General Welfare Committee  
25 sent you the questions a week in advance, and you



2 have a court order-- or you're working with a judge  
3 where you have said staffing is the biggest challenge  
4 for you all to catch up and do your work. I assume  
5 that HRA leadership is tracking the headcount of the  
6 agency on a daily basis. Is that right? Is that  
7 right? The leadership of the agency is tracking  
8 headcount on a daily basis?

9 Okay. Thank you.

10 Nice to see you.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Hi, Councilmember.

12 And thank you for your questions. I just want to  
13 provide a little clarity as relates to staffing. So  
14 over the last year, HRA has aggressively hired again  
15 700 staff members, 700-plus.

16 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: How many have left during  
17 that time? That was my question, if you don't mind.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Okay. The-- You  
19 want the attrition numbers?

20 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: I'm looking for the net  
21 increase in staffing over the course of the year.  
22 You said you hired 720 people. How many people left?  
23 Because my understanding is about the same number of  
24 left, and we're in the exact same position that we  
25 were at the start of the year. But if you want to

2 tell me that I'm wrong, I'm happy to have it. We're  
3 just looking for the information.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Right. That's not  
5 correct. 700 have not left based on the data that we  
6 have currently.

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: How many have left?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: But we will  
9 absolutely get you--

10 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay. But you all said--  
11 told the court that staffing was critical to the  
12 agency's plans to come into compliance and address  
13 the backlog? Is the information being reviewed on a  
14 daily basis by agency leadership? Your headcount?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Correct.

16 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: So why are you not able  
17 to provide it, when we gave it to you-- asked for  
18 this a week in advance? Why would you not come  
19 prepared to answer the questions? Why would you  
20 bring more junior staff than you did 10 months ago,  
21 when this situation has only gone from bad to worse?  
22 First Deputy Commissioner Jil Berry, Administrator  
23 Lisa Fitzpatrick were here answering questions when  
24 we were concerned about these issues. Now, as the  
25 MMR shows, things are dire, truly dire. And you

2 can't answer basic questions. I'm incredibly  
3 disappointed by this Administration, hiding the ball,  
4 and really being disingenuous in not working and  
5 taking the work of this council and our oversight  
6 responsibility seriously.

7 My next question is the hiring freeze: As a  
8 result of the hiring freeze that takes effect in  
9 three days, you will not be able to fill one vacant  
10 position that is unfilled as of today, correct?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: The information  
12 that we have is the jobs in the SNAP staff--

13 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Those are a one-for-one  
14 replacement when somebody leaves. But any position  
15 that is vacant as of October 1 will not be able to be  
16 filled, correct?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: That is--

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Well--

19 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: That's a yes or no  
20 answer.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: We've--  
22 We've hired up at a rapid pace, as we've just said,  
23 over the course of the year.

24 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: But you're not answering  
25 my question, ma'am.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: And our--  
3 right now our vacancy rates are negligible.

4 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Excuse me? Your vacancy  
5 rates are...?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: They're  
7 negligible vacancy rates.

8 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Your vacancy rates are  
9 negligible?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yes.

11 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Is that what you're  
12 trying to tell me?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yes.

14 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: That's the data that I  
15 have is that there are-- 3,266 for-- sorry. Agency  
16 wide, there is over a 10% vacancy rate. That's a  
17 negligible vacancy? Is that what you just said on  
18 the record? Under oath? That's your-- That's the  
19 statement you want to say. I just want to make sure  
20 you've got your facts right on that one.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: We've--  
22 We've hired. I was just handed information. We've  
23 hired--

24

25

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: The vacancy rate is  
3 negligible? You're sticking by that statement?  
4 Just--

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Excuse me?

6 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: You're sticking by the  
7 statement that the vacancy rate of HRA is negligible?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: What I'm  
9 saying-- you began your question speaking about the  
10 hiring freeze.

11 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay. That was my  
12 question. It was a yes or no question that the  
13 hiring freeze only that means that every vacant  
14 position in the agency that is vacant as of today  
15 cannot be replaced on October 1st. It's only  
16 additional people that leave after October 1st for  
17 certain positions that can really be replaced on a  
18 one-to-one basis. It's just a yes or no question.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I was making  
20 a reference to vacancies that are connected to SNAP  
21 and cash assistance. And, and of course, we will  
22 continue to be in conversations with OMB around  
23 hiring. These are ongoing questions.

24

25

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: The data I have on  
3 vacancies for cash assistance is 626 vacancies, 19%  
4 vacancy rate for cash assistance. Is that accurate?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I didn't  
6 hear you.

7 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 626 vacancies, 19%  
8 vacancy from cash assistance, is that correct?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I can't  
10 confirm those numbers. Sorry.

11 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Okay. This is-- This is  
12 what I know. Oh, well, how about-- What's the  
13 current backlog on the cash assistance applications?

14 [SEVERAL VOICES ON PANEL]

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: 27,000.

16 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: 27,000? That's what I  
17 saw. So that means over the last four months, we've  
18 reduced the backlog by about 10,000 cases. Is that  
19 right?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Yeah. Our front-  
21 line staff--

22 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Yes, thank you. And so  
23 how is HRA going to address the next 25,000 backlog  
24 in cases--

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Councilmember--

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: If I could just finish  
3 this question chair, please. I'm so sorry. -- over  
4 the next four months, as is required by the court  
5 injunction, when you're reducing the headcount  
6 further as a result of the hiring freeze? Could you  
7 lay out the plan for how that will happen?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: So we're not  
9 reducing the headcount further based upon the  
10 information that we have. And please understand that  
11 while we're hiring, staff are not proficient the day  
12 at the hiring. It takes a little while to be trained  
13 to become proficient in the process. So that's  
14 what's happening.

15 And then also the volume that is coming in every  
16 month is contributing to the continued backlog. So  
17 the staff are again working extremely hard,  
18 tirelessly to bring this backlog down. But we are  
19 faced with historical volumes coming in each month.  
20 So we are making progress. Staff are being trained,  
21 they're getting to the point where they will become  
22 proficient. So OMB has allowed us to hire. HRA does  
23 not have huge vacancies in the SNAP and cash program.  
24 So we--

2 COUNCILMEMBER RESTLER: Deputy Commissioner  
3 Johnson, I appreciate your being here. And I  
4 appreciate your work leading FIA. It is a critically  
5 important and challenging job. And we thank you for  
6 the work that you do. But if we've cut the backlog  
7 by 10,000 over the last four months, and we have  
8 27,000, to go over the next four month, as is  
9 required by the court injunction, but with the hiring  
10 freeze, we're going to have fewer staff able to do  
11 the work, which is absolutely the case, there is no  
12 way that you'll be able to comply.

13 And that means that things are going to get worse  
14 and worse and worse. And the dire situation that New  
15 Yorkers are facing today, unable to access the  
16 essential benefits that they need just to get by, is  
17 going to be absolutely catastrophic in the months to  
18 come. And I, for one, am profoundly concerned about  
19 the mis-prioritization of this Administration. And  
20 to cut, cut, and cut on the backs of the most  
21 vulnerable New Yorkers. And we as this Council need  
22 to do everything we can to push back. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Councilmember. We  
24 want to hear from Councilmember Ossé, followed by  
25 Councilmember De La Rosa.



2 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much Chair, and  
3 good afternoon-- or good morning. Wow. It's been a  
4 long day.

5 I'm probably going to ask some questions that  
6 have already been asked before. But I just want to  
7 say that I-- and I don't want to speak for everyone,  
8 but I truly appreciate the work that you three, and  
9 many of view within the agency do for the people of  
10 New York. You do not have an easy job.

11 I hear the concerns that come through my office,  
12 and I'm sure many of the offices of my colleagues,  
13 and it's-- it's not easy, right? That's why we're  
14 seeing the high vacancy rates. You're not being paid  
15 nearly as much as I think you should be for the  
16 amount of work that you are doing. You are frontline  
17 services that so many of our constituents and New  
18 Yorkers need. So, I thank you. And Marricka, you  
19 know, we've corresponded many times about certain  
20 issues within our office. I'm greatly appreciative  
21 of the work that you do. I just want to just get a  
22 couple of answers on-- and I'm sure that they've been  
23 asked before. But approximately how many  
24 applications does each staff member work on per  
25 month, let's say?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Well,  
3 applications, they are not caseload. So they come in  
4 as they come in.

5 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Sure.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Workers take  
7 them on and work them through. So they don't reside  
8 at one-- with one caseworker.

9 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Okay.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So there's  
11 no caseload. It's round-robin.

12 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Okay. Is there an  
13 approximate amount at all? Do we know? Do we  
14 quantify that?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I would  
16 imagine that, that as you know, more-- more senior  
17 would get through more applications more quickly than  
18 others who are still training up and getting versed  
19 in that. That's how it is with us.

20 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: I hear you. And I think  
21 this number is so important, because, again, like I  
22 think your-- your work needs to be quantified. It  
23 provides, you know, supporters and advocates within  
24 the Council and any body of government to continue  
25 pushing for you, so that your work is not subsidized

2 with nonprofits and privatized in the direction that  
3 I perceive that this Administration is trying to go  
4 in. I'm not sure if you are legislated to quantify  
5 the amount of cases and the amount of workload that  
6 that you-- you undergo, but we need to have a picture  
7 of the amount of work that, you know, our public  
8 service employees are working on, right? Again,  
9 like, I really want to emphasize... Yeah, go ahead.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: We have  
11 monthly numbers of applications that come in.

12 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Sure. Okay.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: But per--  
14 per worker, we don't have those numbers. So you can  
15 repeat those-- those numbers per month, which are the  
16 monthly average.

17 MS. CHEW: Yes. So for cash assistance  
18 applications, this is as of August 31, 2023, the  
19 average-- sorry. For city fiscal year 23, it was  
20 approximately 40,000 cash applications per month.  
21 And then for SNAP, it was 30...

22 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Yeah, no worries. Was the  
23 Commissioner here earlier? No? Oh. Honest  
24 question.

2 MS. CHEW: Thank you for your patience. And then  
3 for SNAP for city fiscal year 23, the average is also  
4 about 40,000. And comparing and contrasting, pre  
5 pandemic in fiscal year 19 for cash, it was 25,629,  
6 and for SNAP, it was 25,717.

7 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: That's a lot.

8 MS. CHEW: And-- And also Councilmember, you  
9 know, every family is unique. So a family that may  
10 have a household size of one or two, that interview--  
11 that review of all, you know, responses and  
12 information associated with case may be accomplished  
13 and thoroughly looked at faster than, say, a larger  
14 family size with complexities involved in the case.  
15 You know, so we definitely want to give each and  
16 every family and individual seeking services that  
17 attention and level of attention they deserve.

18 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: And approximately-- and I'm  
19 sure that I can look this this number up, but what is  
20 the average salary for a caseworker within your  
21 agency?

22 MS. CHEW: So, for the cash program, we have the  
23 job opportunity specialist and the starting salary  
24 has actually reached an all-time high of \$53,000.  
25 It's still entry level.

2 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: That's not enough money.

3 MS. CHEW: You know, we understand that. It is  
4 considerably higher than-- than what it had been a  
5 few years ago. And we understand that, you know,  
6 it's entry level. And we're fortunate that, you  
7 know, we have been able to recruit and identify some  
8 very talented people. Myself and Angela will speak  
9 with, you know, brand new classes of hires to rah-  
10 rah-rah, and kind of get them, you know, to  
11 understand what HRA has to offer, and that they'll  
12 have mentorship opportunities. I kind of talk  
13 through how you can start entry level and kind of  
14 gradually work your way up within the ranks of HRA  
15 because there's a lot opportunity, and we believe in  
16 their abilities and grooming and growing them.

17 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Yeah.

18 MS. CHEW: You know, as part of the organization  
19 and part of the team.

20 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Well, listen, I, I feel for  
21 you guys. And I'm sure that it's, you know,  
22 sometimes rough to come up here. The Commissioner  
23 should be in the seats that that you are in today. I  
24 know you can't respond to that. But you know, the  
25 more information that that you give us in terms of

2 how-- how much pressure you're going through with the  
3 crisis, the many crises that exists in the city, the  
4 more we can advocate for-- for us to create a more  
5 robust public service field within the city, right?

6 I'm not sure what the intentions of this  
7 Administration are, but cuts year in and year out is  
8 whittling down our public services. And we're  
9 putting that money into contractors sometimes that  
10 exist out of state.

11 So, I appreciate the work that you do, I'm sorry,  
12 that you have to sometimes take the beating for a lot  
13 of the decisions that are not made by you. But I  
14 hope that you know that that you do have allies  
15 within this Council that are pushing for you to have  
16 more resources, more staff, to continue serving the  
17 people of our city.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: And thank  
19 you for that. And we're always happy to come and be  
20 in front of Council. But we also are happy to have  
21 continued conversations outside of the hearing on  
22 various topics.

23 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: Yeah, I'm just saying like  
24 if I if I was dealing with thousands of cases a month  
25 or whatever, hundreds of cases a month and then had

2 to come up here and get, you know, bonked over the  
3 head a couple of times. I'd quit. Don't quit,  
4 please.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: This is a  
6 serious issue. It's a serious matter. The Council  
7 is it's obviously concerned. The agency continues to  
8 be concerned. We're putting forward efforts and we  
9 don't mind discussing those efforts.

10 COUNCILMEMBER OSSÉ: I appreciate that. Thank  
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And I just wanted  
13 to just to share that we will have testimony from  
14 some workers at HRA that could probably better  
15 respond to the caseload questions. Councilmember De  
16 La Rosa?

17 COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you, Deputy  
18 Speaker. And I want to thank you for this important  
19 hearing. I want to thank you all for coming. I  
20 share-- I share Councilmember Ossé's sentiments in  
21 feeling horrible about the predicament that you three  
22 have been placed in. The Commissioner should be  
23 here. The Council is a partner, but it's also a  
24 legislative body that deserves the respect of having  
25 the Commissioner here in order to answer questions.

2 And I agree with the frustration that has been  
3 expressed here, although I won't go into so much  
4 detail. But, you know, we know that there's a crisis  
5 at hand. The vacancy rates-- I'm the Chair of the  
6 Civil Service and Labor Committee. We've been  
7 talking about this for well over a year. The fact  
8 that the numbers are not being provided to this body  
9 does feel as though transparency isn't present. And  
10 the reason why it matters is, as you all know, is  
11 because there are critical services that communities  
12 across the city need delivered, that aren't being  
13 delivered.

14 So with that, I'm going to ask a few questions  
15 that actually come directly from my Constituent  
16 Services Staff.

17 So my district office has been working on many  
18 HRA benefit cases. And there's a few barriers  
19 towards being able to assist our constituents. One,  
20 HRA continuously closes cases without explanation,  
21 without a full understanding of why the cases are  
22 being closed. Two, when it's time for  
23 recertification, my staff, for example, would upload  
24 necessary documentation. By the time HRA caseworkers  
25 begin working on a case the documents are considered



2 old and would have to be resubmitted, delaying the  
3 delivery of benefits, even though the information  
4 remains the same. The HRA system is consistently  
5 down.

6 So these are just three examples (there's way  
7 more on this list) of challenges that our staff has  
8 had to take on. In my community, we have an HRA  
9 center. The lines are around the corner. In  
10 addition to the lines being around the corner, 90% of  
11 the cases that are walking into our office are HRA  
12 related. And so I want to get an understanding of,  
13 one, what is happening on the other end of a system  
14 when cases are continuously closed? Two, why isn't  
15 there flexibility, given the staffing shortages with  
16 the documentation that has been asked to be provided,  
17 so people can stay on life-saving services? And  
18 three, what is going on with the system as a whole,  
19 that it is consistently down? If you could answer  
20 those three questions, then I have a few more.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Well, first,  
22 I know that my colleagues will have input on the  
23 questions. I want to thank you for that feedback.  
24 It's important to have connections to get that  
25 feedback, not just in this forum, but otherwise. It

2 means-- If there's-- If there are things that are  
3 redundant and happening with it coming into your  
4 office, we want to hear about them, we want to make  
5 sure that we have the appropriate information to make  
6 the right corrections.

7       That being said, in terms of lines, we do know  
8 that there are issues in terms of, like, in the  
9 mornings and, and pacing of lines, that happens where  
10 people start queuing up a little bit earlier than the  
11 office opens. And then as a result of that they have  
12 waits that dissipate throughout the day. We-- We  
13 also know, you know, there are times that they would--  
14 - that folks are getting more services at that time.

15       I think when my colleagues can talk about the  
16 process of-- the queuing up process. So, would you  
17 like to--

18       COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: And I don't  
19 necessarily need to know like what the process is for  
20 applying, because I understand that. More, what is  
21 the process when a case is closed without  
22 explanation? What-- what recourse is there?

23       The other thing I would like to say that it would  
24 be so important for us to have a direct contact to  
25 our local centers. And I know I'm not the only

2 Councilmember that has this problem. But literally,  
3 the center in my community is referring people to our  
4 office to fill out applications that should be filled  
5 out in the center. And I have four staffers that do  
6 this work. And we're all overburdened. The entire  
7 system is overburdened. But if we could get  
8 literally on a phone call with a manager at the  
9 Dyckman (because I'm going to mention the name, the  
10 Dyckman Job Center, the Dyckman Center), we could  
11 literally unblock some backlogs that are stuck for no  
12 other reason than there's not a human being that we  
13 can actually talk to, to get it unblocked.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Okay, so in each  
15 borough, we have regional managers and regional  
16 offices. And what we can do is supply the Council  
17 with those numbers and names of those individuals,  
18 and that will be your contact if there are challenges  
19 or concerns, right?

20 You asked a question about documentation. And  
21 the reason why we would-- you wanted to know if  
22 there's a way to eliminate requiring documentation?

23 COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: Not eliminate, but if  
24 there's a document that has been asked for three  
25 times, and the person has supplied it three times,

2 and by the time a caseworker gets to it, the document  
3 is considered old by your standards, but nothing has  
4 changed. Why is there not flexibility?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: There should be,  
6 and that's something that we will take back to  
7 training. And if those situations are happening, we  
8 will address that. The only documentation that would  
9 require to be updated is employment information. And  
10 unfortunately, because we do have backlogs, sometimes  
11 documentation related to employment will have to be  
12 updated. But anything outside of that, if it remains  
13 the same, nothing changes, we should not be asking  
14 for repeated documentation. But we'll definitely  
15 take that back.

16 COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: Just one more  
17 question, Madam Chair, if I may. Um, there is an  
18 issue with IT. I don't know who runs your IT  
19 department, or how the IT situation works. But for  
20 example, if a constituent (and this happens often,  
21 especially think about the population that we're  
22 serving-- language access is not you know, always  
23 ready)-- a person has an e-mail address. They no  
24 longer have access to that email address. They need  
25 to change or reset a password. We're not able to do

2 that in the system. If a constituent uses a  
3 different e-mail in order to, you know, keep their  
4 account secure, they're not able to switch the e-mail  
5 in the system.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: You're talking  
7 about to access HRA?

8 COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: Correct. Their HRA  
9 account.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Okay. Okay, we'll  
11 definitely care of that.

12 COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: And the other thing  
13 that also happens that is language access related in  
14 constituent services is that if a person has clicked  
15 that they need another language, they're waiting  
16 hours on the phone for someone to pick up the phone,  
17 when they pick up the phone, it's still an English  
18 speaker-- speaker, they have to wait again. And so  
19 what this is causing is massive wait times for a  
20 person to get access to someone who will speak to  
21 them in their language.

22 So I'd like for us to understand as a Council,  
23 sort of, like, are these contracted out services?  
24 What is happening in terms of, of being able to  
25 provide constituents with direct access to the type

2 of language that they need? There's some-- some very  
3 severe issues with the way that constituents are  
4 interfacing with the HRA system.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: So we do have staff  
6 that speak multiple languages, but you don't have a  
7 whole-- a whole body of staff. So, what we have  
8 contracted out is to our language line. So is the  
9 individual calls and they speak a language, and we  
10 don't have staff that actually speaks that language,  
11 we connect them to our language line.

12 So the language line contracted person is on the  
13 phone along with the worker to help through that  
14 interview process. So, we do connect individuals for  
15 access to language-- other languages.

16 COUNCILMEMBER DE LA ROSA: I'd welcome a  
17 conversation-- maybe we can also bring some of our  
18 constituents services staff. There are a lot-- I  
19 have pages of issues that our constituents staff is  
20 coming across, and obstacles to getting people to  
21 services. When we have a family who comes into the  
22 office and they need emergency food stamps, or  
23 they're not going to eat, we've had no other option,  
24 but to either refer them to a local food pantry,  
25 because the process for them getting an emergency

2 benefit has just taken too long. And as you know,  
3 this is the difference between a family going with or  
4 without a meal. So, I welcome the conversation. And  
5 I look forward to us spending more time. I have a  
6 whole lot of questions about staffing, but I'll go  
7 for the next round. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Councilmember.  
9 Now, I have a little bit of time to kind of gather  
10 some-- I want to just to go back on some of the  
11 things-- just because I need clarity on some of the--  
12 the testimony that we heard earlier.

13 So, in regards to the redeployment of staff:  
14 When you're reassigning, are those staffers that  
15 you're reassigning already trained in recertification  
16 application processing?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: So when we reassign  
18 or redeploy staff to FIA operations, the job centers  
19 are SNAP. They're trained. They receive training  
20 on-- if they're interviewing on the phones, or if  
21 they're processing. So they do receive training.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Because we're hearing from,  
23 you know, a lot of the advocates that not all staff  
24 is trained, and that that's also leading to a lot of

2 errors in the completion of the recertifications.  
3 And-- and that's further impacting the backlog.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: You know, we  
5 absolutely provide training, because staff are coming  
6 from other areas of HRA, that they're not familiar at  
7 all with the processes as it relates to cash and  
8 SNAP. So we have to train them.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So they have to be trained?  
10 Okay.

11 MS. CHEW: There's also monthly trainings that  
12 target-- You know, say, you know, common errors. So  
13 that way we know what they are, and then we can focus  
14 in on that and give training to all the staff,  
15 including the redeployed staff who are assisting in  
16 handling those cases.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And now, in regards  
18 to-- hold on a second, I had another question here  
19 before I move on, because I'm all over the place.  
20 Thank you. Sorry.

21 But in regards to-- And we also-- I just want  
22 you to-- Again, I want to just reiterate that we do  
23 have staff that will be testifying a little later on.  
24 So it would be nice if somebody from the



2 administration could stay to hear that testimony as  
3 well.

4 In regard to the skimming, you know, situation  
5 and a loss of-- the theft of benefits, we've received  
6 a number of these applications-- of these complaints.  
7 And I specifically have a friend who happens to be a  
8 senior citizen at one of-- she's a constituent in  
9 East Harlem, who had her food stamps stolen as part  
10 of this scam. She informed me of it. I explained at  
11 that-- at that time where you know, there was no way  
12 of reimbursing her that we were waiting to hear back  
13 from the state. When that became a thing, and we  
14 were able to then apply for reimbursement of the  
15 benefits, I immediately called her. I sat there  
16 personally at my computer in my office and I went  
17 through the whole application process for her. I  
18 sent it. She got a confirmation. I made sure that  
19 she got the confirmation. She has the app on her  
20 phone, so she could tell me when exactly her benefits  
21 were stolen. The application was processed very  
22 expeditiously. You know, I appreciate that. But she  
23 was denied. Why was she denied? There was a  
24 discrepancy between the date that the-- the food  
25 stamps were actually used, and the date that it was

2 posted on the actual card-- on the statement. And so  
3 I said that the-- the food stamps-- I put on the  
4 application that they were stolen on the seventh,  
5 because that's what the app was saying. But I guess  
6 that they were used on the sixth, and then it went  
7 to-- you know, it was posted on the seventh.

8 How many of the 15,000 applicants that have  
9 applied so far have been denied? Do we know how  
10 many-- how many of those applications have already  
11 been approved, versus how many have been denied? I  
12 know it's fairly new. But I also want to recognize  
13 that we did submit all of these questions to the  
14 administration a week ago. So there's really--  
15 that's my understanding. Right? If you didn't get  
16 them, you need to have a conversation with somebody  
17 back home.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Thank you for  
19 Deputy Speaker. And for that individual case, we're  
20 happy to follow up directly with the constituent to  
21 find out and provide any additional--

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: On no. I got it fixed. I  
23 had to call the Commissioner myself, and she-- she  
24 fixed it. But you have the Deputy Speaker and the  
25 Commissioner fixing something that shouldn't have

2 been fixable, because, you know, the information that  
3 she got was from the, you know, the-- the app.

4 And so we, you know, we put in everything that  
5 needed to be, you know, submitted, and that could  
6 have easily been verified. But the fact that her  
7 food stamps had been stolen. I mean, somebody should  
8 have called. But she was, you know-- So she was  
9 denied. And my concern is that, long story short,  
10 you know, that this has, you know, the propensity of  
11 continuing to happen. So I'm curious to know, out of  
12 the 15,000-- well, you received 19,000 claims,  
13 processed 15,000, which we're very proud of. I'm  
14 proud of-- You know, I'm happy for you. But out of  
15 those 15,000, I need to know specifically how many  
16 have been approved, how many have been denied, and  
17 why?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Well, this  
19 is-- This is a new-- As we discussed this a new  
20 process, and thank you so much for bringing to our  
21 attention and highlighting the issue that you had  
22 with your friend, so we have the opportunity to make--  
23 - to take that back to examine the use of the dates  
24 and how they align. And that makes quite a bit of  
25 sense. I have in front of me that 72% of SNAP cases

2 have been approved. That number is 7254.  
3 Extrapolating out that the-- the other 28% would have  
4 been declined, denied. We don't have-- currently  
5 have a list of what the reasons would have been for  
6 those denials, and they could include things like  
7 errors, and-- and certainly not being able to verify  
8 the actual claim. So that was SNAP. And 48% have  
9 been approved within cash assistance that, and that  
10 number is 2519. So the other 52% at that number of  
11 cash assistance have been denied. And again, I don't  
12 have in front of me what those-- what errors or what  
13 issues could have caused denial of that benefit. But  
14 we could look into sharing that.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That would be-- That would be  
16 great if you could give us an idea because I think it  
17 also gives you an idea of you know, any hiccups in  
18 the system that are preventing folks from getting,  
19 you know, benefits. So these are-- these are folks  
20 that have theoretically lost their benefits several  
21 months ago, you know, and are still kind of trying to  
22 catch up. And now we're imposing a further, you  
23 know, delay by not processing the applic-- well  
24 processing the application in a way that is going to

2 lead to an automatic denial. It's not-- You know,  
3 it's not it's not helpful.

4 In regards to the-- and I'm sorry if I jump  
5 around here a little bit, but I just have so many  
6 things that I want to get to. But in regards to some  
7 of the-- the Intros. On Intro 567, you testified  
8 that the proposal decision may lead to unintended  
9 consequences of duplicating inspection requirements,  
10 and perhaps most importantly, slowing DHS's ability  
11 to rapidly provide shelter space for families. I  
12 don't-- I don't necessarily-- You know, I can't  
13 accept that as a response, because the alternative  
14 means that we're putting families in situations that  
15 are unsafe, and oftentimes families with children,  
16 and we've seen, you know, several high profile cases  
17 where, you know, children have died in such  
18 situations. And so I would hope that, you know, the  
19 administration would work with, you know, the  
20 sponsoring member to try to figure out the best route  
21 forward without, you know-- Because I think that we  
22 both, I'm assuming we both have the same shared goal,  
23 right, we want to make sure the folks that are  
24 housed, you know, in safe units, and, you know, the  
25 fact that, you know, some of these landlords have

2 notoriously been cited for, you know, rat  
3 infestations, you know, leaking and faulty heaters,  
4 gas situations. I mean, these are pretty egregious,  
5 serious complaints that should be addressed for any  
6 resident, you know. But if we are contracting, and  
7 somebody is actually making money off of the city to  
8 have somebody in those conditions, that's  
9 unacceptable.

10 Intro 651: I just want to clarify that children  
11 are not required to be at PATH the entire stay of the  
12 process? Throughout the duration of the processing?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: They can be  
14 remote at the first--

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: At the initial?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: The initial.  
17 Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, yeah, so if I'm there,  
19 I don't know, if I'm there the whole day, I'm  
20 assuming sometimes people have-- may have to come  
21 back, right?, if they're put in temporary, and they  
22 might have to come back the next day for whatever  
23 reason. The-- I have, you know, I can show-- I can  
24 show the child remotely the first hour, the rest of  
25

2 the day, like, I'm not required to bring this kid  
3 back, right? Like--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Right. The  
5 remote-- The process of assessment at the PATH center  
6 where-- at the point where there's an acknowledgement  
7 of all the family members, that's when they can  
8 appear remotely, and they are not required to come to  
9 subsequent visits.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So then this law  
11 should just kind of codify what's-- your you're  
12 expressing kind of somewhat exists already.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I do feel  
14 like, you know, we, again, share goals and making  
15 sure that the young people who are going through this  
16 process, have the opportunity to do so in a seamless  
17 manner. I'm sure that there's more discussion that  
18 we can have about the details of the bill.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, yeah, we're not trying  
20 to hinder. We're trying to make it so that children  
21 don't have to wait around, you know, for hours, which  
22 makes it also a very unpleasant experience for the  
23 parents are now, you know, dealing with children that  
24 are restless and hungry and tired and, you know,

2 tired of being-- sitting there. It's not a good  
3 situation. I've been there.

4       Regarding Intro 902, you referenced that there  
5 was a concern that adding a navigator to this process  
6 would impact a carefully designed process and  
7 represent a costly budget expansion. Could you  
8 please explain what you mean by costly? Because if  
9 we're hiring a navigator or two, I don't understand  
10 how that will be such a huge hindrance to-- to the  
11 budget.

12       DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think,  
13 again, we have shared goals, and there's further  
14 conversation that can be had for clarity. I think,  
15 at this point, in the reading of, and review of the  
16 legislation, it-- we're not exactly sure where this  
17 would end up in terms of the numeric requirement or  
18 whatever. And we want to make sure that we continue  
19 to have conversations around that. As well as we  
20 feel that the PATH process in itself is unique, and  
21 it allows for our clients to get the exact process  
22 that is being envisioned by the legislation.

23       So again, lots more conversation that we can have  
24 in terms of the details of the bill.



2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I have some questions  
3 that I will reiterate at the end of my questioning so  
4 that you can then report back on.

5 Regarding the on-demand line, what is the  
6 capacity for the info line, and how many calls get  
7 dropped by the system on average? I know my staff is  
8 texting me, "I have a constituent services staff that  
9 is testing me, you know like a crazy person"--  
10 (She's watching now. Hi. Hello. [Waves]) --and is  
11 you know complaining about this and, you know, the  
12 fact that it takes so long right to make these calls  
13 on behalf of the constituents when they use the  
14 regular info line. It is taking them sometimes hours  
15 and then they get dropped, and then they have to  
16 start all over again. What is the capacity there?

17 Regarding capacity, we haven't-- we've not  
18 experienced any busy-- busy signals since the  
19 inception of one-- the info line of one number. Then  
20 we've offered nearly 6 million calls. We've covered  
21 nearly 6 million calls from February of 2023 to  
22 August of 2023. So it's quite a number. We  
23 acknowledge that there are wait times on that-- on  
24 that line.

2 Also, there is an opportunity to have a call  
3 back, where you keep your place in line and you're  
4 able to, um...

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And how many workers are  
6 assigned to-- to manage the info line? Do we know?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I don't have  
8 the headcount for...

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can we-- I'm going to  
10 add that to the list.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Add that to  
12 the list. Yes. We are happy to follow up.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Sorry, I've got to  
14 write it down immediately, or it goes away.

15 And also we could include what the average call  
16 wait time is, that would be fantastic.

17 Can you share with us, in regard to the CityFHEPS  
18 application-- and congratulations on yesterday's  
19 announcement. You know, I know that the expansion  
20 is, you know, one of the ways that we can utilize the  
21 existing resources to help give families choice. So,  
22 you know, it's a good thing that people get to  
23 decide, right? If they want to leave this day or,  
24 you know, they have family elsewhere, they're--  
25 they're able to get there.

2           Obviously, we have a bunch of questions on that.  
3       But I'm going to start with the-- the number of  
4       applications for CityFHEPS that are taking longer  
5       than 60 days to process. Do you know how many-- how  
6       many applications are delayed, to date?

7           And, quite frankly, I've been hearing from a lot  
8       of providers as well that the number of cases--  
9       eviction cases that are being processed to date is  
10      pretty-- is continuing to grow because CityFHEPS  
11      disbursement of checks are not happening on a timely  
12      basis. So you know, landlords are not getting paid.  
13      As a matter of fact, I have a family now that the  
14      Commissioner is helping me with who has the same, you  
15      know, the same situation. And this is the second  
16      time that I've had to call on her behalf in the last  
17      year. This is the second time that her landlord has  
18      served her with, you know, notification. She was a  
19      former shelter resident, she has a beautiful  
20      apartment and one of those brand new, you know,  
21      buildings that has a set-aside for homeless families.  
22      And she continuously gets threatened with eviction,  
23      because DHS or HRA, whoever's in charge of  
24      processing, you know, payments to the landlord is not

2 doing so. So would love to-- to kind of understand  
3 what the deficiencies are there and why.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So, in terms  
5 of-- in terms of CityFHEPS, the application process  
6 itself, is (as you're very familiar with this) each  
7 case is unique. It's unique processing. We don't  
8 [inaudible]. I believe that at this point where  
9 we're not tracking the 30-day number. I would be  
10 happy to circle back on that with exact numbers. We  
11 do understand that in specific cases, there are some  
12 payment delays as well. And so we're-- we're always  
13 looking to correct that. So, we have opportunities  
14 within the agency to respond to any delays in terms  
15 of, like, just working through our specific units.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And I you know, I would love  
17 to see some sort of a corrective action plan there as  
18 well, because, you know, the agency that is tasked  
19 with ensuring that people are not homeless is now  
20 contributing to a large number of people being  
21 threatened, you know, with eviction because of lack  
22 of payment.

23 And this is what I mean, when I say that, you  
24 know, a lot of our issues are internal. We have  
25 funding. You know, we have the resources that we're

2 supposed-- you know, that we need to ensure that  
3 these things don't happen. And I don't know how the  
4 agency operates their internal, you know, staffing  
5 processes. But, you know, in my office, I tell my  
6 staff if-- if there is an emergency, if somebody has  
7 no food, if somebody has no shelter, if somebody has  
8 no gas, if somebody's refrigerators broken, those are  
9 all things that, you know, present a real, you know,  
10 challenge for families. Like, we're not going to go  
11 home until we know exactly what's going to happen,  
12 right? So, by five o'clock, if you don't have a  
13 response, then you need to communicate that to me,  
14 and I will gladly take that case over. But we do not  
15 abandon it until we get it, you know, rectified as  
16 quickly as possible, because we don't want families  
17 to be sleeping on sidewalks or in public spaces. And  
18 we don't want people going without food. So we also  
19 make sure that if a person had a skimming issue,  
20 right?, somebody whose benefits were stolen. Okay,  
21 well, what is-- what resources do we have available  
22 to ensure that you have food until we're able to  
23 rectify this? Like, those are conversations that  
24 we're having, and I expect that this agency that is  
25 taxed with this, is doing the same.

2           And I get that there are a lot of you know,  
3 emergencies and things that are happening, and  
4 competing priorities. But we cannot, especially in  
5 light of a housing crisis, be speaking out of both  
6 sides of our mouths, right? We cannot say we have a  
7 housing crisis, and we're not doing enough to, you  
8 know, to rectify this, or units are not available,  
9 but then can, you know, we're contributing to the,  
10 you know, growing eviction cases, because we're not  
11 processing applications on time, right?

12           If that means-- If there's a delay, then there  
13 has to be maybe an MOU between the, you know, the  
14 Housing Courts that, you know, can help flag and  
15 identify clients who are recipients of these  
16 programs, who should be receiving payments, so that  
17 they're not having to worry about going there.  
18 Because I get it, I understand the system well. But  
19 when you get a notice that you're being evicted, I  
20 mean, it's-- it's pretty alarming, you know? It's a  
21 scary process to go through, and we shouldn't be-- we  
22 should-- at least the people in this room should not  
23 be a part of that equation. Like we should not be  
24 participating in that.

2           So in terms of the home base locations, we're  
3 contracted to process the CityFHEPS to move--  
4 CityFHEPS to stay, FEPS to move applications. We're  
5 hearing from constituents that the wait time to get  
6 an appointment at home-based locations is still very  
7 long. Some home bases are not able to provide an  
8 appointment until 2024. These delays are causing  
9 evictions because households cannot get shopping  
10 letters, and cannot get their applications processed  
11 once they find an apartment.

12           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: We're  
13 working with Home Base Programs in whatever ways we  
14 can as-- as they are experiencing large demands, you  
15 know, due to cases with arrears for the last few  
16 years. So, there's a huge demand, and we're-- we're  
17 partnering with them, which we're enhancing  
18 technology, we're working on cases with the programs  
19 at HRA, and expand our CityFHEPS processing  
20 application process.

21           So we're partnering with them as-- as we feel  
22 like we do. They're seeing a larger demand which is  
23 causing their backlogs. So we're able to help them  
24 navigate.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What-- What does that help  
3 look like?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: To my notes,  
5 it looks like we're working with keeping abreast of  
6 the of the challenges, as well as working through  
7 technology with them. So, we're trying to help them  
8 get through their process.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Have we-- Has has HRA grown  
10 the-- attempted to grow the network to meet, you  
11 know, the demand?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: In terms of  
13 the number of home base facilities.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I'm not  
16 familiar with any growth at this time.

17 [INAUDIBLE CONVERSATION BETWEEN PANEL MEMBERS]

18 Oh, thank you. We'll get back to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yes. Thank  
21 you, colleagues. We will have to get back to you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Yeah, that's a--  
23 that's a pretty big deal, guys. So. Whew. All  
24 right. I'm going to try to attempt to get through  
25



2 the other questions. Oh, I am sorry. I just want to  
3 make sure that I did ask all of these.

4 In terms of indexing. Are you still indexing  
5 cases by hand?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Indexing  
7 when a person uploads a document? So we have staff  
8 that indexes the documents once it's scanned by the  
9 client or the applicant.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So if somebody's submitting  
11 the-- submitting the application electronically is  
12 the back end process still by paper?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: It's not by  
14 paper. When it's uploaded electronically, the worker  
15 gets it in a queue (and primarily it's clerical  
16 staff, and we also have redeploy staff helping there  
17 as well) and they just index the documents  
18 electronically. Nothing is done on paper.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. And constituents  
20 obviously keep reporting that they're being asked to  
21 upload the same documents time and time again. Are  
22 you aware of this issue? And are you tracking these  
23 complaints?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think that  
25 we are hearing anecdotally that that's happening,

2 either through councilmembers who have shared those  
3 anecdotal index-- We don't feel like it's a systemic  
4 issue, and we're looking to address them individually  
5 as they come-- come to our attention.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Regarding one-shot  
7 deals, how many cases can RAU staff process on an  
8 average per-week or month basis with current  
9 headcount, versus fully staffed without overtime or  
10 reassigning staff from other units?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: So that--  
12 Thank you for the question. We don't track data in  
13 that way, in terms of how many per week per  
14 headcount. So unfortunately, we don't have a number  
15 that we can assign to that value.

16 We currently have approximately-- we currently on  
17 boarded approximately 185 staff members in that role.  
18 So I can offer that in terms of our current  
19 headcount. And-- and that has done quite a bit to  
20 help us get through our processing.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Does HRA have to have a  
22 person or a unit that is this that is specifically  
23 designed to work in collaboration with legal services  
24 and nonprofit groups that are helping folks navigate  
25 eviction, to get, you know, to kind of lend some

2 clarity, right?, when these things are happening,  
3 right?, so that you're not hearing about them after  
4 the fact and are creating, you know, correction  
5 action plans, or, you know, really allow yourself the  
6 ability to make the changes, right?, in real time?  
7 Because there always seems to be a disconnect between  
8 what we hear at the hearings and what we're hearing,  
9 you know, from our nonprofit partners, and, you know--  
10 - So I-- It makes me wonder, you know. And I've  
11 had, you know, meetings where we bring in the  
12 collective, right?, of stakeholders to hear from them  
13 and to get input, right?, because they're doing this  
14 work, you know, day in and day out. They better  
15 understand, like, where the nuances are, where the  
16 hiccups are, where we need to be doing more, where we  
17 need to be doing less. Is that something that HRA  
18 does. Is there-- Like, is there a space for  
19 community partners to provide input and feedback?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I think  
21 they're-- Do you want to it, Angela?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Okay, so elected--  
23 elected officials can contact us via the one number  
24 and follow the prompts. It will help them-- to be  
25 queued up to someone from constituent services that

2 will assist them. And we require authorization and--  
3 whether verbal or written to speak on behalf of a  
4 client from the elected official or the person who's  
5 advocating for the client. But you also can e-mail  
6 constituentaffairs@dss.nyc.gov.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And somebody's responsible  
8 for manning that--

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: --e-mail and responding?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I mean, listen, I  
13 appreciate any level of, you know, of access, but I  
14 think that there's a-- that that system lacks that  
15 personal, you know, connection for real-time  
16 communication with your partners that are seeing  
17 this. Because sometimes when we're, you know, in--  
18 in it, we don't necessarily see, right?, like, the,  
19 the issues that they're identifying, right? And  
20 they're real. So, I just, you know, I find it-- I  
21 find is helpful.

22 Now, regarding the, the announcement yesterday,  
23 when -- I don't know if all of the details have been  
24 ironed out yet in regard to the CityFHEPS  
25 authorization to go outside of the state. If an

2 individual-- to your knowledge, if an individual  
3 decides that they wanted to come back, and transfer  
4 back to New York City, is that something that's  
5 possible?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I'm not  
7 sure. I mean, as you-- as you stated, it's a new-- a  
8 new thing, a new announcement. It makes sense that  
9 the voucher being available throughout the state  
10 would continue to be accessible in New York City.  
11 That makes sense to me now. I'm not sure what-- how  
12 we would move forward. Yes, they can ask for a  
13 transfer.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: They can ask for a transfer.  
15 Okay. And the amount of time that the voucher will  
16 be paid out: Is that like in perpetuity, so long as  
17 the person is continuing to qualify? Or is there  
18 like a time frame for which there-- they have access  
19 to this voucher?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Again: It's  
21 new. It makes sense at this point to-- that it would  
22 continue with the traditional requirements with  
23 eligibility.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Okay. Hold on, give  
25 me one second.

2

3           Okay, can you tell-- I don't know that you're  
4 going to have this response, this answer yet, but I  
5 would really like to know-- as HRA is the one that  
6 does the-- is responsible for doing the apartment  
7 inspections. Like, who's going to be doing the  
8 inspections for out-of-state units? And the  
9 administrative capacity for staff to handle-- to  
10 handle that when there are already delays in the  
11 processing of the rental assistance and benefits?  
12 And also, what is the city's oversight, right?,  
13 ability, you know, for these out of state vouchers?  
14 Out of city. Sorry.

15           Okay. We're going to send these to you as well.

16           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Yes. Yes.  
17 We would appreciate the-- those-- the program being  
18 as new as it is, we would appreciate a little time to  
19 get that information to you.

20           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry. We want to make  
21 sure that-- that we are seamlessly transitioning, you  
22 know, resources to our constituency, and ensuring  
23 that folks are getting, you know, benefits that they  
24 need with these safety net programs that are there  
25 for emergency use. And so, we should be treating

2 them that way. And I understand again the staffing  
3 shortages issue, but as part of the questions, I  
4 think, you know, I am-- that we're going to be  
5 submitting, we would like-- I would like contingency--  
6 - a breakdown-- a plan of, you know, what is what is  
7 the contingency plan to address the staffing  
8 shortages in real time?

9 I don't, you know, I think we've had more than  
10 enough time to kind of figure out and reassess what--  
11 You know, how we move forward. And I think-- And I  
12 want to clarify that when I said earlier about  
13 reducing the headcount, what I mean is that we have  
14 100 vacancies, and nobody's taking them because the  
15 pay rate is so, you know, is so low. Why not reduce  
16 that maybe to 70, and increase right, with the funds  
17 that we're saving on that that extra 30? Like, why  
18 not just increase the pay rate, to attract more  
19 workers to the field.

20 It's very difficult work to do. Customer service  
21 skills, you know, are hard at work every single day,  
22 and we don't want to also overwhelm and burn out the  
23 staff that we do have at our disposal, because we  
24 rely on them, right?, to provide a very valuable  
25 service.

2 So with that, I you know, thank you for, you  
3 know, coming to today's hearing, and we will submit  
4 those questions to you, and hopefully we will be able  
5 to hear back soon.

6 And again, I encourage somebody to stay in and  
7 listen to the public testimony from some of the  
8 staff.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: We just-- We  
10 always sent have someone either viewing online or  
11 present in the gallery. So thank you. We will have  
12 someone.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank you.

15 COUNSEL: Now I'm going to call on the next  
16 panel, which we comprised of members of DC 37,  
17 Jozette Dowdell, Helen Chandler, Tyece Grant (and I  
18 apologize if I'm mispronouncing your name) and Lucy  
19 Perez.

20 MS. DOWDELL. Good afternoon, Chair and members  
21 of the Committee. I am grateful for the opportunity  
22 to testify today. My name is Jozette Dowdell. Thank  
23 you. My name is Jozette Dowdell and I am the Deputy  
24 Administrator of Local 1549, AFSCME District Council  
25 37 here in New York.



2 We represent hundreds of employees of New York  
3 City's Supplemental Nutrition Program Assistance  
4 Program. Our members work on the frontline of SNAP  
5 to connect the most vulnerable New Yorkers to life-  
6 saving food assistance. In their roles across the  
7 program, our members determine eligibility for the  
8 program, they answer calls from applicants and  
9 participants, and they connect individuals and  
10 families to SNAP, and in some cases other benefits.

11 Our members and I are here to testify today with  
12 the goal of working with the city to improve the SNAP  
13 operations, and in-time delivery of the SNAP benefits  
14 for more than 1.7 million New Yorkers who have  
15 participated in SNAP in the fiscal year of 2022, and  
16 to the other New Yorkers who have qualified but do  
17 not yet participate in the program.

18 You will hear from our members today as they  
19 describe the challenges that they have encountered in  
20 their work areas. These challenges include the Angi  
21 Case Management System that has proven to be a  
22 barrier in time the benefits and in timely delivery  
23 of benefits, our retention problem, and keeping  
24 experienced, merit-based staff, and the significant  
25 training gap that causes retention problems.

2 I would like to thank the members of Local 1549  
3 for their tireless work in delivering SNAP benefits  
4 and services to millions of New Yorkers during the  
5 pandemic, and for decades before that.

6 Unfortunately, yesterday, we were told our  
7 members would not be able to be released from their  
8 assignments at the last minute to attend this  
9 hearing. But true to form, they understood the  
10 importance of this hearing today and they took their  
11 own time to be here.

12 We attend these hearings in an attempt to partner  
13 with the City on solutions. As you will hear, these  
14 are truly frontline heroes who keep the word "human"  
15 in human services.

16 And now I'll turn it over.

17 MS. GRANT: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and  
18 members of the committee. I am grateful for the  
19 opportunity to testify today. My name is Tyece  
20 Grant. I'm an Eligibility Specialist II and a member  
21 of AFSCME Local 1549, District Council 37 in New  
22 York. I have worked in SNAP for 11 years, and a  
23 significant barrier in my work is the Angi Case  
24 Processing System, which is ineffective for SNAP

2 applicants and prevents the timely delivery of  
3 benefits.

4 This flawed case management system was intended  
5 to decrease the workload. However, I have found that  
6 instead it increases my workload and contributes to  
7 the backlog of SNAP cases. For example, Angi was  
8 designed so that any supervisor from any SNAP center  
9 from across the city can approve a case. I have  
10 found that this is ineffective, because I don't know  
11 who was signing off my cases. And if I should  
12 experience an error on the case, the supervisor or  
13 the system assigns the case to a completely different  
14 worker, who must then perform much of the work I have  
15 already completed. This delays timely benefit  
16 delivery for our clients who need like-saving food  
17 assistance.

18 A coworker stated that before Angi was  
19 implemented, she was producing more cases on a date.  
20 Now due to the system's inefficiencies and errors,  
21 she can only complete seven cases per day. As a SNAP  
22 worker, I want a better system that will allow us to  
23 complete and track our work to ensure timely  
24 delivery. Thank you.

2 Good afternoon Chair Ayala and members of the  
3 committee. I am thankful for the opportunity to  
4 testify today. I am Lucy Perez, an Eligibility  
5 Specialist II, and a member of AFSCME Local 1549,  
6 District Council 37 in New York, and I have worked  
7 for SNAP for 11 years.

8 I also would like to focus on the Angi system.  
9 as a barrier to timely benefits delivery. This  
10 system has a lot of faults, a lot of flaws, and if we  
11 flagged an error while I am entering a client's  
12 information or processing eligibility for a person,  
13 the case has to be suspended until IT can fix the  
14 problem. This could take anywhere from three weeks  
15 to two months. In the meantime, I have to move on to  
16 the next case, and everything with the original case  
17 falls through the cracks.

18 Last year because of this system inconsistency,  
19 management continued to use the old case management  
20 system in parallel in order for us to catch up with  
21 the backlog. The prior system we used to complete  
22 gave us more flexibility, and we were able to do more  
23 work with less errors. The current system, Angi,  
24 creates a huge backlog. And the stress of reducing  
25 this backlog contributes to retention problems. As a

2 result, we need many more eligibility specialists.  
3 But the pay is not high enough to attract and retain  
4 the cost-- because the cost of living in New York  
5 City is so expensive.

6 In the end, the Angi system hurts the clients,  
7 and prevents us from being able to do our work in a  
8 timely manner. Management said that the Angi system  
9 will help the frontline workers be more efficient.  
10 And as a result, it will benefit the client. But it  
11 has done exactly the opposite. We do have a staffing  
12 issue, but 50% of the backlog is the Angi issue, is  
13 the system that we're using that is not working.

14 Thank you.

15 MS. CHANDLER: Good afternoon Chair Ayala and  
16 members of the committee. My name is Helen Chandler.  
17 I'm an Eligibility Specialist II. And I just want to  
18 thank you for, you know, giving us the opportunity to  
19 just hear our voice on the work that we do on a day-  
20 to-day basis. We do hear the cries of the clients.  
21 And I, me personally, I put myself in the client's  
22 shoes. We hear the frustration, the long hold time,  
23 the closing of cases, the asking of documents that's  
24 already in the system. But like my colleague said,  
25 we do have a system that's failing. Angi came into

2 play, and it dropped our productivity down  
3 tremendously.

4 Like, me and my colleague right here, we worked  
5 together, you know, for many years, and I we worked  
6 around the same time 11 years.

7 So, we went from doing like anywhere from 30-plus  
8 cases, or maybe less, to now maybe five to eight  
9 cases, maybe 10, on a day-to-day basis, because with  
10 Angi, there's, like, glitches and then you can't get  
11 past certain screens. You know, it's just very  
12 frustrating on our behalf, and on behalf of the  
13 client.

14 And then like with Angi, when you get to a  
15 certain screen it won't allow you to go past that  
16 screen until you address an issue. Sometimes we  
17 don't even know what the issue is. And then, you  
18 know, we'll ask our supervisors, but like I said with  
19 the, um, Angi system, it is just not working.

20 And we've been with Angi, I think, about like  
21 2019? Yeah. And when we was on Classic Pies, we can  
22 produce the work.

23 And then like during the interview process, like,  
24 we were informed that we have to ask, like, questions  
25 that I feel that shouldn't even be part of the

2 interview, like asking the client's, "Have you been  
3 convicted? Or sold or transferred SNAP benefits?" I  
4 mean, be realistic, the client-- I mean, they've been  
5 on hold for like about 4-5 hours. Like, why do we  
6 have to ask these unnecessary questions that can  
7 delay the time, you know, with the interview process.

8 And then the clients, you don't want to make them  
9 feel like they're criminals? You know, they're here  
10 just to get some help. And then some of them, like,  
11 don't have a place to lay their head. Some don't  
12 know where their next meal is coming from. So why do  
13 we have to spend time asking like a whole slew of  
14 questions? You know, and it's very frustrating, not  
15 only with us-- Because like I said, we hear the cries  
16 of the clients-- But also why do we need to ask these  
17 certain questions that don't even, um, you know,  
18 pertaining to the eligibility?

19 So we do have a system that's just not working.  
20 And I mean, I just feel like, if they could just cut  
21 the questions down in the interview process, and then  
22 also, if they could just maybe go back to Classic  
23 POS, then you will definitely see an increase in  
24 cases getting, you know, processed.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But go back to what?

2 MS. CHANDLER: Like Classic POS, that was the--  
3 that was the system before Angi. So maybe if they  
4 could go back to that, and you know, give it a try,  
5 then they will see, like, the increase of cases being  
6 processed.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So Angi has been used since  
8 2019?

9 MS. CHANDLER: Yeah, like around 2019. And it  
10 really slowed down, you know, the processing.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That-- Was that before or  
12 after the beginning of the pandemic?

13 MS. CHANDLER: That was about 2019. That was,  
14 like, roughly before the pandemic.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Right. Right before the  
16 pandemic they launched the new system.

17 MS. CHANDLER: Mm-hmm. Yes. And then actually,  
18 during the pandemic, they switched us back to Classic  
19 POS. So you know, you've seen an increase of the  
20 cases flowing, but then we had to go back to Angi.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Back to Angi. And so, when--  
22 Who do you report to if you're uploading, you know,  
23 cases and you're working on it, and then now all of a  
24 sudden (there's some sort of hinderance, the system  
25 fails, you're not able to go to the next page) who--



2 MS. CHANDLER: They want us to go chain of  
3 command with our immediate supervisor first, and then  
4 our immediate supervisor, I guess, has to contact  
5 management, and then that's how they move.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And how long does this  
7 process take before-- from the time that you're  
8 making the-- the initial complaint to the time that  
9 whatever the problem that occurred is resolved?

10 MS. CHANDLER: Sometimes it could take days.  
11 Sometimes it could take weeks. Because they don't  
12 have the answer to come back to us with, so we're  
13 like, literally stuck in limbo. You know? And like  
14 I said, we hear the cries of the clients.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So does that mean that a  
16 complete halt happens? Like when that happens, and  
17 you're waiting, you're not able to process any  
18 applications?

19 MS. CHANDLER: We have to move on to the next,  
20 basically, until--

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, so the--

22 MS. CHANDLER: And then-- and another thing is,  
23 you know, we have to create tickets, which IT say  
24 that is bombarding their queue with the amount of  
25 tickets that we have, but that's what we're informed

2 to do. We have to create tickets if there's a system  
3 issue. So yeah.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And what and what is your  
5 current caseload?

6 MS. CHANDLER: Well, we don't have a caseload.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You don't have caseload?

8 MS. CHANDLER: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So it's as many as you can  
10 get done that day?

11 MS. CHANDLER: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Typically, you said before  
13 Angi...?

14 MS. CHANDLER: Yeah. Before Angi, I can do like  
15 anywhere-- maybe 27 or 30 cases, sometimes over 30.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Wow.

17 MS. CHANDLER: Now with Angi, it, yeah, dropped  
18 dramatically.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Wow.

20 MS. CHANDLER: Yeah. Sometimes on a day-to-day  
21 basis, you-- you'll be lucky if you get, like, 10  
22 cases in with Angi.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. That's interesting,  
24 because it didn't come up as part of the Admin's

2 testimony. And, you know, you would assume that  
3 that's-- it's not all just staffing, right?

4 MS. CHANDLER: It's not.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm assuming staffing has  
6 something to do with it, but it--

7 MS. CHANDLER: The main problem as Angi. Yeah.  
8 That's like the biggest problem. If you ask any  
9 worker that's on-- on hand, they will tell you the  
10 main problem is the Angi system.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So now you're working-- if  
12 you're working on Ms. Smith's case, and you have a  
13 hiccup there, right? And now you go, and you report  
14 it to your supervisor, and you-- you leave it in her  
15 hands-- his or her hands to fix. So, you come back  
16 and now you move on to the next client. That client  
17 that you working on during the time of the of the  
18 incident, do you record the name of that individual,  
19 or does that case get recorded and flagged so that  
20 you are able to come back, or does it then-- when the  
21 system, whatever issue is corrected, does that person  
22 then go to somebody else?

23 MS. CHANDLER: Okay. So what I do personally,  
24 because I'm-- I like to take my notes and I'll be  
25 very detailed. I have, like, a list of, you know,

2 clients that I personally give a collateral call to.  
3 Because my thing is, instead of the client sitting  
4 there waiting, you know, to see if their case is  
5 being processed. Me personally, I take the time out,  
6 and I will call those clients back, you know, just to  
7 give them the status of their case, let them know,  
8 like a ticket was put in. I'll even sometimes email  
9 my supervisor and see if any updates on that  
10 particular case. And, you know, I try to keep the  
11 clients abreast of what's going on with their case.

12 Yeah, because like I said, it's frustrating, when  
13 they are sitting their waiting, and they're not  
14 knowing what's going on with their case, if their  
15 case is going to be closed, because I put myself in  
16 the client's shoes.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

18 MS. CHANDLER: And, you know, rather than keep  
19 going on to the next case, you just leave that, you  
20 know, case, just sitting there, I don't wait to the  
21 supervisor gets back to me. I usually, you know, try  
22 to follow up with them. So I can keep my clients  
23 posted.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And there's no minimum  
3 requirements of the number of applications that you  
4 get to complete, is there?

5 MS. CHANDLER: No, no.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No?

7 MS. CHANDLER: You can ask my manager--

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You need to pull the mic.

9 MS. PEREZ: I would also like to mention that I  
10 have to commend my colleague here, because she says  
11 she keeps track and gets calls back. We are not  
12 responsible to do that. And we don't get the time to  
13 do that either. Because it's always "get to the next  
14 case." So, I commend you for finding the time to do  
15 that. Because I don't find the time to do that.

16 Also, there is no case load, because every case  
17 is different. You know, one case may have one or two  
18 people. There are cases we do with 10 members, 15  
19 members. If they're a citizen, you know, it's less  
20 information we have to put in. If they're  
21 immigrants, there's a whole lot of information that  
22 we have to put in and go through a lot more, you  
23 know, questions and windows and stuff like that.

24 So it's-- everything is different, you could  
25 spend, you know, 30 minutes on a case, or almost two

2 hours on a case, depending on what's involved in that  
3 case. So, it's complicated.

4 MS. GRANT: And I would just like to add: So  
5 Angi was implemented to track the workers, because  
6 when they do their monthly reports, they can  
7 determine how long you were on the case. And  
8 sometimes they will come and ask you, "Why were you  
9 on the case so long?" And just as my colleague just  
10 stated, each case is different. It has a household  
11 of five, a household of 10. And then the  
12 demographics of that case differs. There is more  
13 information when they're non-citizens. And-- And  
14 then the Angi system, it, like, deletes things when  
15 you have to put it in. So, you have to double-- it's  
16 like double work because you have to keep putting--  
17 the information doesn't stick. So, you have to keep  
18 putting information in before you could even, you  
19 know, process the case.

20 MS. PEREZ: Yeah. You think you've completed a  
21 case you get to the end, and then you can't run a  
22 budget, because it's missing information, and you go  
23 back and put it, and you think is stuck. Now you go  
24 back and it is still missing. And it's simple  
25 things. Sometimes it's just the veterans' code, or

2 the address, issues with the address. The income has  
3 a lot of issues. Sometimes it doesn't stay or it  
4 duplicates it.

5 So, you have to, you know, be very mindful when  
6 you get to the end up to make sure that everything is  
7 correct. Because you can, you know, deny a person  
8 their benefits because the system is duplicating  
9 their income. Or you can make someone eligible  
10 that's not eligible because the system is not picking  
11 up the income. And that's why Angi has a lot of  
12 issues. Because besides the fact that every case is  
13 different, we are-- the system is creating-- we are  
14 spending more time in these cases--

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Troubleshooting.

16 MS. PEREZ: --because we have to keep on going  
17 back. And there are situations in which we can fix  
18 it, because fixing the income could take us, you  
19 know, 15-20 minutes more depending on how many times  
20 we have to go back. But when you encounter an issue  
21 that it doesn't allow you to move forward (and that's  
22 every day), you have to put in a ticket. And then  
23 that's it for that case, you know. That case? I  
24 don't know what happens to it.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

2 MS. GRANT: And we as the workers, we created the  
3 word workarounds. We found ways in which we can get  
4 the errors fixed, and we try to--

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Some.

6 MS. GRANT: Some not all. But we try. But that  
7 takes hours. It takes a long time to come up with  
8 these workarounds just to try and get one case, you  
9 know, processed efficiently.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Well, I appreciate that at  
11 least you took the initiative to try to figure it  
12 out. You know?

13 MS. PEREZ: There's some glitches that we have  
14 figured it out. But we didn't figure it out right  
15 away, you know? It took time and communicating with  
16 each other, you know? Like, "Oh, I found out how to  
17 do this." "Oh, and yeah, and you could do this this  
18 way."

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. No, no. Do-- Two  
20 questions that I have for you. On the call log  
21 complaints, right? The-- The people that are calling  
22 and saying I've been waiting for four hours. Is  
23 there a callback option? Because sometimes now, when  
24 I call places, they're like, "If you want to wait,



2 you can stay here and wait. But if you want to call  
3 back, we'll call you back." Is that an option?

4 MS. PEREZ: Yeah. There is a call back-- back  
5 option. There is. But what-- what I have found out  
6 though, is that we get a-- because the calls come in  
7 automatically to us. And so it's a courtesy call  
8 back. But if the person doesn't answer that call  
9 back, I don't know if the system will do another call  
10 back, because that happens a lot, too. They're not--  
11 Then when they get a courtesy call back, and we get--  
12 I leave them a message, a voice message. You know, I  
13 tell them, you know, please give us a call back when  
14 you get a chance.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. But now they're  
16 calling the same number again. And it's like--  
17 [makes a circular motion with hand].

18 MS. GRANT: The wait.

19 MS. PEREZ: Yeah, yeah. So we don't know if-- I  
20 don't-- I don't know if the system would do another  
21 call back.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. And in terms of the  
23 centers, because each center operates differently,  
24 right? Do some centers get more applications than  
25 others. Like, or are they equitably distributed?

2 Because I, you know, I'm assuming people are sent to  
3 the closest site to wherever their place of residence  
4 is, hopefully.

5 MS. GRANT: So-- Oh, sorry.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But I just want to-- No. I  
7 just want to make-- I don't-- I'm just trying to get  
8 some clarity, like, you know, is there a higher  
9 demand at some sites than others?

10 MS. GRANT: So during the pandemic, the centers  
11 were closed, right? And they routed a lot of people  
12 to the Atlantic Avenue Clermont location, because  
13 that was the one that was open. Anybody from any  
14 centers can come there to submit their documents, and  
15 see what's going on with their case. I currently  
16 work in the customer service department in my  
17 location. Everyone comes there. And I was directed  
18 to tell the clients to go to your local centers,  
19 because the centers are-- they're-- they're allocated  
20 by the person's zip code. So based on their zip  
21 code, we'll say, "Okay, you're at center so and so."

22 So that's what's been happening at my center, but  
23 everybody comes in, and we just try to service them,  
24 you know, the best way we can.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But if it is done that way--  
3 And the reason that I ask is because I get a lot of  
4 complaints from my colleagues in the Bronx  
5 specifically, right?, about delays, applications that  
6 are not being processed. And so, you know, we have  
7 job sites throughout the entire city, but if there is  
8 a geographical area where there are a higher number  
9 of, you know, people that are dependent on the-- on  
10 those benefits, I want to-- I'm trying to decipher  
11 whether or not those centers are all adequately  
12 staffed? Like, do we send more folks that-a-way  
13 because we have a higher demand at Clermont? Or is  
14 that-- You know, are the staffing ratios consistent  
15 between sites? Like how-- What does that-- What does  
16 that look like to you as a person that works there?

17 MS. PEREZ: Okay. They mentioned re-stay,  
18 redeployment, right? So, what they have done is that  
19 the centers for example, in the Bronx (they started  
20 with the Bronx), they sent everybody to what they  
21 have a call center, a [inaudible] that houses-- it  
22 can house 450 people. So, they only left about three  
23 people at those centers in the Bronx to do the SIC  
24 work that she does. And then every call comes in  
25 through that call center. So really at those

2 centers, there's-- there's no one that can, you know,  
3 interview or do anything else. It is just to give  
4 out information.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Hmm. During the pandemic,  
6 were you guys working remotely?

7 MS. GRANT: Yes.

8 MS. PEREZ: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And you were using the old  
10 system?

11 MS. GRANT: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Because the rate of  
13 completion was significantly higher during the  
14 pandemic than it is now. Which is...

15 MS. CHANDLER: [inaudible]

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You know, I know that there  
17 were-- there was some benefits that made it easier,  
18 but the system also allows you to process  
19 applications--

20 MS. PEREZ: More efficiently.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. [coughs] Hold on one  
22 second. I'm sorry. Allergies guys. I'm sorry. I  
23 don't know if it is this room. I should probably  
24 never get this room again. I'll make a pitch to be

2 in the bigger, nicer room but-- but this is really  
3 really, really helpful.

4 And I want to thank you guys for not only doing  
5 what you do, and I think people mis-- misunderstand  
6 what it is that, you know, what role we play here and  
7 we're oversight, right? And we're ensuring that our  
8 public dollars are being used as they are intended to  
9 be utilized. And that the services that, you know,  
10 are rendered are, you know, being provided in the way  
11 that they were intended to.

12 And so we're-- Obviously there are some hiccups  
13 here. But I think your testimony here provided a lot  
14 of clarity for me. And I'm sure for some of the  
15 folks that are-- that are listening.

16 And so I thank you for your testimony and your  
17 time. I know it's-- it wasn't easy to be here for  
18 such a long time. But it's really important, because  
19 you speak for a cohort of folks that are going  
20 through the same thing. And a lot of them happen to  
21 be women of color, you know? And so thank you so  
22 much for speaking, you know, on their behalf.

23 Thank you.

24 COUNSEL: Now, we're going to call on the next  
25 panel, which is going to be an in-person panel, and

2 this panel will be followed by a panel virtual on  
3 Zoom.

4 So, the next panel will be comprised of Abby  
5 Biberman, Kathleen Kelleher, Chris Mann, and Topacio  
6 Nunez.

7 And then the panel after that will be comprised  
8 of Jenny Veloz, Eric Lee, and Rebecca Zangen.

9 You can begin whenever you're ready.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin, just make sure  
11 that your mic is on. See the red light?

12 MS. BIBERMAN: Deputy Speaker Ayala,  
13 councilmembers who are left, and staff. Thank you  
14 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is  
15 Abby Biberman, and I'm the Associate Director of the  
16 Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance  
17 Group. I did testify before this Council in December  
18 of 2022, about HRA's persistent delays in processing  
19 applications and recertifications, and about how our  
20 clients were left without benefits to feed and care  
21 for their families. In January of 2023, NYLAG, along  
22 with the Legal Aid Society sued the New York City  
23 Department of Social Services for failing to comply  
24 with the law by not processing these applications and  
25

2 issuing benefits, and failure to maintain functional  
3 systems for applicants and recipients.

4 As of August 31, you heard that over 32,000  
5 households were still experiencing delays. I have  
6 serious concerns about HRA's ability to come into  
7 full compliance with the terms of the preliminary  
8 injunction.

9 HRA has repeatedly testified about having an  
10 unprecedented number of applications recovering from  
11 the global pandemic and persistent staffing issues.  
12 But the increase is not an aberration. It has been  
13 over three years. And yet we still have not heard  
14 from the agency about a meaningful and effective plan  
15 to address these delays and comply with its legal  
16 mandates to process applications on time.

17 New Yorkers in need are still waiting without  
18 benefits to which they are entitled without money to  
19 buy groceries, and these delays are causing eviction.

20 Because of HRA's delays, we have more households  
21 facing emergency increased economic instability and  
22 actually a higher number of applications for HRA to  
23 process when these households do inevitably reapply  
24 for benefits.

2 I want to highlight some of the delays Our office  
3 has seen. They're experiencing delays at each stage  
4 of the process.

5 Indexing of documents: HRA is failing to index  
6 documents submitted online and other methods, and our  
7 clients are either repeatedly asked to resubmit, or  
8 improperly denied benefits for failure to submit, or  
9 accepted for benefits at a lower level than they  
10 should be based on their income and expenses.

11 [BELL RINGS]

12 I just want to finish up with:

13 On-demand interviews: They did implement a new  
14 system which we are pleased with. But we are hearing  
15 reports that clients are waiting hours to get through  
16 and often not getting through at all, requesting a  
17 call back, never receiving a call back, and not able  
18 to complete their required interview.

19 And also in my written testimony, I'll talk about  
20 CityFHEPS delays.

21 But we also have one concern which is the return  
22 of mandatory employment appointments. This is going  
23 to increase the workload, and it is already  
24 overwhelmed. So, we're concerned about how HRA is



2 going to manage this increase in workload with the  
3 return of employment appointments.

4 NYLAG also supports the passage of all the bills  
5 introduced at this hearing. And thank you for the  
6 opportunity to testify.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin.

8 MS. KELLEHER: Oh, thanks. Good afternoon, I  
9 think it is now? Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker, and  
10 thanks for the opportunity to testify today. My name  
11 is Kathleen Kelleher. I'm a Staff Attorney at the  
12 Legal Aid Society in the Civil Law Reform Unit. And  
13 along with my colleague next to me here, Abby  
14 Biberman from NYLAG, we have sued the New York City  
15 Human Resources Administration for failing to follow  
16 the legal deadlines required by law to process cash  
17 assistance and SNAP benefits.

18 And the numbers that they announced to you after  
19 you asked them today in the hearing, for what the  
20 delay numbers were, were numbers that they had to  
21 produce to us yesterday in the lawsuit. And I have a  
22 feeling that they wouldn't have even produced those  
23 if they hadn't been required to by our court order.

24 I looked at my testimony, at the preliminary  
25 hearing in December, and I was so upset, because I

2 just felt like I could just send you a video. And  
3 you could just listen to what I said. Because it's--  
4 The only thing that's different is that things are  
5 worse.

6 But I did watch my testimony and HRA must not  
7 have because they came here today with no statistics  
8 on how the rate of processing, no numbers on  
9 staffing, they kept saying that there's no such thing  
10 as a caseload. But why couldn't they give you  
11 information on the number of hours it takes-- the  
12 average hours it takes to process and application or  
13 recertification? They have data that they keep as an  
14 algorithm to understand what they need to process  
15 cases, and what it will take to eliminate the  
16 backlog. I don't know why they wouldn't talk about  
17 it today.

18 And, so what we wanted to say is that-- we want  
19 to focus on-- we did talk about this last time, but  
20 we want to focus on the things that we think that the  
21 City Council should do to-- to get to get things  
22 turned around. Because it's clear, since HRA has not  
23 done these things voluntarily, and they also haven't  
24 even come with information, we have some  
25 recommendations.

2 The first is transparency: That they should be  
3 required to post and publish the delay numbers every  
4 month for cash assistance, SNAP, as well as all the  
5 rent arrears grants that you mentioned in your  
6 questions.

7 HRA should be required to process the timeliness  
8 rates and how far behind they are in those every  
9 month. And they should be required-- When they fall  
10 below 95% timeliness, they should be required to also  
11 post a corrective action plan with how they're going  
12 to get back to timeliness within 90 days. And they  
13 should also have to publish corrective action plans.

14 They should have to publish staffing numbers,  
15 which, as when Councilmember Restler was asking a lot  
16 of questions about that, they weren't able to answer  
17 a question about net staffing.

18 And so there are lots of questions that they  
19 need-- There's lots of information they should  
20 publish about staffing.

21 In addition, they should publish salary data.  
22 Just all the information you need to be able to  
23 figure out whether staffing is a big way to solve the  
24 problem, which we think it is.

2           Then the next thing they should do is-- There  
3 was some discussion in today's testimony about  
4 waivers. I'm sorry, I'm going over, but I just need  
5 a few minutes. Okay, thanks. They talked about  
6 waivers. We think that HRA should be required to  
7 publish a waiver database so that everybody has an  
8 idea-- has a complete understanding of what waivers  
9 HRA is operating under, and what they've applied for.  
10 That kind of information was actually required by the  
11 federal government during COVID for SNAP benefits, so  
12 there's a model for it.

13           Then the other two things are related to client  
14 access. One is about people being able to get  
15 through on the phones. And I wanted to clarify one  
16 thing.

17           I'm sorry-- Should I just stop, because I'm so  
18 over?

19           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, no, no. Keep on going.  
20 This is great.

21           MS. KELLEHER: I wanted to clarify one thing  
22 about the phones. Today you were hearing some  
23 discussion about whether there was a call back  
24 feature on the phones. I want to clarify that there  
25 are actually two different phone problems and two

2 different phone systems that we are talking about  
3 with client delay here today.

4 There's a main number that people call which is  
5 referred to as "Info Line" on HRA's website.  
6 Sometimes it's also called "One Number." That's-- I  
7 think it's 718-557-1399. Did I get that right?  
8 Let's see if I remember that by heart. That's the  
9 main number.

10 But there's also a different number that people  
11 are given to call for mandatory interviews for  
12 applications or recertifications. The interview  
13 number that they're given has a callback option.  
14 That's the number-- that's the only number that to my  
15 understanding that has a callback option. So the  
16 only time you have an opportunity to be called back  
17 by HRA is the one time that you have to call them to  
18 have an interview. And even then, there's-- there  
19 are problems with that.

20 But I want you to understand that when people  
21 were telling-- saying that they were on hold for five  
22 hours or six hours or a day: That's true, and  
23 they're not getting a call-back option.

24 So we need that fixed. HRA needs to have more  
25 options. You also should know that 311 also does not

2 assist people. So when people call 311, to make a  
3 complaint about HRA. They are given the number for  
4 Info Line, the number they're calling to complain  
5 about.

6 So it's like HRA is lacking the complaint box.  
7 You can file a complaint, it's just we're not going  
8 to let you actually put it in the box.

9 So, we need a solution to that. They need  
10 another number. They need-- 311 needs to be able--  
11 needs to take these complaints, give clients  
12 confirmation numbers. There needs to be another  
13 alternative to the One Number system.

14 And then the last thing is: You heard, I think a  
15 lot of-- some discussion today about people having  
16 trouble using the Access HRA system, and, you know,  
17 to apply online and upload documents and stuff. We  
18 think that HRA (and this is something that the  
19 Council could also act)-- that there should be a  
20 standard developed, that the system needs to be  
21 measured as one that's accessible to clients.  
22 Because the average client-- I haven't looked at the  
23 data recently, but they have data on the-- on the  
24 reading level of clients. And my understanding is, I  
25 think, the average reading level is eighth grade.

2 And if that's true, all the materials should be aimed  
3 at somebody with an eighth grade reading level. It's  
4 just common sense. So the same thing needs to happen  
5 with access HRA, because that's what they expect  
6 people to use.

7 So I think they're not going to do it. And all  
8 the things we just mentioned, unfortunately, we've  
9 mentioned before, and HRA has-- has not offered the  
10 information up to-- to the Council.

11 So it seems to me that it's time to legislate.  
12 And they're not giving you a choice, really. And  
13 it's just terrible. And I'm glad that they announced  
14 the-- the data because we are scandalized at the at  
15 the numbers. So I'm sorry for going so far over.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And we will follow up with  
17 you for-- oh, you can hand Aminta the lists, and we  
18 will definitely follow up on that.

19 MS. KELLEHER: I agree.

20 MR. MANN: All right. Good afternoon, Chair  
21 Ayala, and Committee Counsel. Thanks for the  
22 opportunity to testify today. My name is Chris Mann.  
23 I'm the Assistant Vice President of Policy and  
24 Advocacy at Win, the nation's largest provider of  
25 shelter and services to families with children

2 experiencing homelessness. We operate 14 shelters  
3 and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the  
4 five boroughs. Currently, more than 6,500 people  
5 call Win home every night, including 3,600 children.

6 For many families that live in Win shelters and  
7 supportive housing, the services provided by DSS are  
8 essential for regaining stability. But too often our  
9 families report significant delays in benefits  
10 processing, which perpetuate instability and lead to  
11 delays in shelter exit.

12 While the city contends with the worst  
13 homelessness crisis in history, we should be  
14 investing more resources than ever in our social  
15 services infrastructure. Unfortunately, the Adams  
16 Administration has proposed to do exactly the  
17 opposite.

18 If enacted, the proposed 15% cuts would cause  
19 profound harm to all New Yorkers and  
20 disproportionately so for communities of color.

21 We can't cut our way out of this crisis. Cuts  
22 already enacted by the mayor have resulted in massive  
23 disruptions in critical services. For instance, as  
24 noted earlier today, cash assistance timeliness rates  
25 are down 66%, SNAP timeliness rates are down 52%.



2 Inadequate staffing continues to be a core driver,  
3 and further cuts to DSS budgets will exacerbate this  
4 already desperate situation.

5       Additionally, the many antiquated and fragmented  
6 systems used by DSS also represent significant  
7 opportunities for improvement. To truly address the  
8 homelessness crisis, the city must focus on filling  
9 vacant staff lines rather than cutting them, and make  
10 every effort to modernize and streamline the systems  
11 and infrastructure used for benefit processing.

12       We applaud Councilmember Hudson for Intro 910,  
13 which would establish a universal benefits  
14 application for NYC.

15       Similarly to what New Yorkers experienced when  
16 applying for SNAP and cash assistance, accessing  
17 shelter is an onerous process at best. We applaud  
18 and support Intros 651 and 902, introduced by you,  
19 Deputy Speaker, which would ensure families no longer  
20 have to bring their kids to PATH, and create PATH  
21 navigators to help families navigate the complex  
22 bureaucracy.

23       In order for the city to thrive, we have to  
24 invest in the people that live here. We must invest  
25 in and modernize our social services infrastructure,

2 and investment that we know will pay dividends in the  
3 long run. Thank you.

4 MS. NUNEZ: Good afternoon. I want to thank the  
5 Committee on General Welfare and chair Ayala for  
6 holding this important hearing on delays in public  
7 benefit processing at HRA. My name is Topacio Nunez  
8 and I am a Senior Paralegal in the Civil Justice  
9 Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services.

10 BDS is a public defender's office in Brooklyn.  
11 We provide criminal defense family defense,  
12 immigration and civil legal services for  
13 approximately 22,000 people a year. Our Civil  
14 Justice Practice here at BDS aims to reduce the civil  
15 collateral consequences for the people we serve,  
16 working with clients and their families to prevent  
17 loss of housing, benefits or property due to legal  
18 cases or investigations.

19 As a case-handling paralegal, I support clients  
20 when their public benefits are terminated or  
21 applications are denied. I also accompany clients to  
22 HRA offices and provide representation for clients  
23 challenging HRA decisions in administrative hearings  
24 and state appeals.

2 The majority of people BDS serves are eligible  
3 for some sort of public assistance program. As a  
4 result, we routinely hear about problems obtaining  
5 and maintaining assistance.

6 While the Mayor's management report includes some  
7 shocking data about application delays, the numbers  
8 don't capture the complete scale of the impact for  
9 the people that we serve. Often families in our  
10 family defense practice are directed or even mandated  
11 by the administration for children's services to  
12 apply for and start receiving benefits as a condition  
13 of the return of their children. The delays at HRA  
14 not only prevent unification, but further destabilize  
15 vulnerable families.

16 And I would like to highlight a story of one of  
17 my clients. Miss M is a parent who is represented by  
18 our Family Defense Practice. When I started working  
19 with her, she was having issues with her HRA case,  
20 and she was at the point of needing to reapply. We  
21 assisted her in the re-application process that  
22 started in February of 2023. Before then, she had  
23 attempted on multiple moments to apply, but never  
24 received anything in Spanish, even though it was  
25

2 noted on her application that she needed documents in  
3 Spanish.

4 Two of Miss M's children at the time had been  
5 removed by ACS, and thus improperly removed from her  
6 housing voucher. Because of this mistake, her  
7 voucher was not covering her rent, which placed Miss  
8 M and her newborn baby at risk of eviction.

9 Losing her housing or going into shelter would  
10 only create additional barriers to having her  
11 children returned. After the application was  
12 submitted, we completed all necessary steps,  
13 including the interview which I helped myself, and it  
14 took approximately two months for her application to  
15 be approved. While Miss M waited for her HRA case to  
16 be processed she was unable to take her children for  
17 home visits or bring them anything during the time  
18 the visits took place elsewhere, because she had no  
19 cash assistance available or SNAP, or food stamps.

20 She was also experiencing additional stress and  
21 fear to her ACS case. She was terrified that ACS  
22 would remove her baby that was with her at the time,  
23 because of not having available food, sufficient food  
24 in the fridge. Swift access to benefits is critical  
25 for low-income New Yorkers and helps provide critical

2 stability. Benefit access may help the people we  
3 serve favorably resolve their criminal cases and  
4 reunite with their children after ACS involvement.  
5 It would also help maintain jobs and allow children  
6 to remain in school. Unnecessary delays only  
7 contribute to community and family instability.

8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Just a question  
10 regarding-- Well, I think I have two questions for  
11 Chris, regarding DHS's side. So they-- The Admins--  
12 The Administration testified that children are no  
13 longer required to be there, that they can do that  
14 virtually. Is that your experience? Because, I  
15 mean, I've been there. I don't know if it's just a  
16 matter of poor information sharing. Um, but there  
17 are a large number of-- of children, small children  
18 present at PATH every day.

19 MR. MANN: Yeah, I mean, we met with the  
20 Administration recently, and they told us the same  
21 thing. And what we said was, "You know, that's news  
22 to us. Like, we're really happy to hear that." But  
23 that should be announced. And people should know  
24 that that's the case. So, you know, on our, you  
25 know, at our agency, we're starting to let our you

2 know, people know. But at that point, it's already  
3 too late, right?, because they're already in shelter.  
4 So, you know, I think it's something that really  
5 needs to be communicated more broadly.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And on the-- Have you heard  
7 any of the issues regarding the-- the Angi system?

8 MS. BIBERMAN: No, I have not personally, and I  
9 found that testimony to be very illuminating. I've  
10 been in negotiations with HRA for almost a year on  
11 our case, and I've spoken to them for, you know,  
12 years before that about efficiency, and what-- you  
13 know, how to improve their systems. And I was  
14 disappointed that they weren't in the room to hear it  
15 from their own staff, because that seems to be a  
16 pretty-- It lines up pretty well with when the  
17 numbers started going down. And I think there's a  
18 staffing issue, but I don't think that that's the  
19 only problem. So I would like to know more.

20 MS. KELLEHER: And it could-- There could be--  
21 Actually it made me want to ask about the other side  
22 of the caseload. So, the numbers that they cited,  
23 you know, for the delays? The DC 37 panelists who  
24 testified, I think all of them work in the SNAP  
25 system. I think that's the-- if I got it-- if I got

2 that right. And Angi I think is only in the SNAP  
3 part of the agency. You know that there's sort of  
4 two systems: One for SNAP only, and one for people  
5 who also have applied for cash assistance, or just  
6 cash assistance. And while they were testifying, I  
7 was looking it up. And I could only find policies  
8 related to Angi for SNAP. So the reason I'm raising  
9 that is because I thought to myself, "Well, the  
10 delays on the SNAP-only side they're only-- only  
11 1,574 that, you know, delays there. Applications and  
12 recerts, but they are 30,772 on the CA SNAP side. So  
13 I want to know, similarly, what-- what kind of  
14 problems are there on the CA SNAP side? Like, it  
15 immediately made me want to find out what's up with  
16 that?

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, Yeah, same. [Laughs]  
18 The same. Yeah. I think you know, the fact that the  
19 numbers started to trend downward, you know, as soon  
20 as they reimplemented it is very telling. But thank  
21 you guys so much for your testimony here today.

22 ALL: Thank you.

23 COUNSEL: We're now going to call on the next  
24 panel, which is going to be a virtual panel. The

2 next panel will be Jenny Veloz, Eric Lee, and Rebecca  
3 Zangan. Over now to Jenny Veloz.

4 MS. VELOZ: Thank you. Oh, excuse me. I  
5 apologize. I am battling a cold. So I may sound a  
6 little weird. But thank you for holding this  
7 hearing. My name is Jenny Veloz. I'm a Policy and  
8 Advocacy Associate at the Citizens Committee for  
9 Children of New York. And since 1944, CCC has served  
10 as an independent multi-issue child advocacy  
11 organization. Our priority is improving outcomes for  
12 children and families through civic engagement,  
13 research, and advocacy.

14 So once again, we would like to thank you, Deputy  
15 Speaker Ayala, and the members of the Committee for  
16 holding this very important oversight hearing on such  
17 a critical matter.

18 As has been mentioned throughout this hearing,  
19 SNAP continues to be an important antipoverty  
20 resource for families. With inflation making food  
21 more expensive, low income households are again  
22 struggling with the high costs of not only food, but  
23 housing, childcare, transportation, and utilities.

24 And I also want to highlight as has been  
25 mentioned previously, that the timeliness receipt of



2 SNAP benefits has exponentially decreased during the  
3 during the last fiscal year from 60.1% to 39.7%,  
4 respectively. And that's not even addressing how it  
5 has dropped from 90% in 2019.

6 New York City must invest in the resources that  
7 are vital to the health and well-being of families  
8 and children, starting with ensuring that HRA has the  
9 staffing and the resources necessary to process SNAP  
10 benefits in a timely manner. We also urge the city  
11 administration to reject the proposed austerity  
12 measures of the 10% budget cut that would  
13 detrimentally impact the health of New Yorkers.

14 And now I'm going to pivot over to how this is  
15 affecting housing and children and families.

16 The current housing and shelter crisis started  
17 long before the influx of migrant families, as 9800  
18 families with children were already languishing in  
19 our shelter system, spending 520 days in shelter on  
20 average. CCC and peer advocates across the city are  
21 deeply concerned with--

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 MS. VELOZ: --the mayor's call for budget cuts in  
24 the coming months. Instead, we urge the city to  
25 prioritize action steps that can keep families

2 housed, expedite access to permanent housing for  
3 those already in shelter, and to protect staffing and  
4 fill vacancies at DHS, HRA, and HPD.

5 The following recommendations are not only cost  
6 effective, but will improve outcomes for unhoused  
7 families, creating space within our existing shelter  
8 system for newly arrived migrants and positively  
9 impacting our local economy. And these  
10 recommendations are: Implementing CityFHEPS  
11 expansion; improving public benefits, access, and  
12 retention; prioritizing access to home-based  
13 services; and promoting well-being in shelters by  
14 baselining funding for community coordinators, and  
15 supporting Deputy Speaker Ayala's, Intro 092,  
16 requiring DHS to provide process navigating services  
17 to every family with children at an intake Center.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

19 COUNSEL: Thank you, Jenny, for your testimony.  
20 Over now to Eric Lee for testimony.

21 LEE: Good afternoon. My name is Eric Lee. I'm  
22 Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless Services  
23 United. Thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala and members  
24 of the General Welfare Committee for allowing me to  
25 testify today. HSU's members have not seen

2 significant improvements to delays at HRA since the  
3 December hearing. And we're concerned by HRA's  
4 testimony today which stated that they don't have an  
5 idea of how many staff are needed to eliminate the  
6 backlog and delays.

7       These delays mean people are going hungry waiting  
8 for SNAP benefits, people are at risk of eviction or  
9 losing their housing because they can't receive a  
10 one-shot deal or rental assistance quickly enough,  
11 and people in shelter are stuck there for months  
12 longer than necessary.

13       HSU urges OMB to exempt DSS, DHS HRA from the  
14 proposed 15% Plan to Eliminate the Gap, or PEG, and  
15 staff that are responsible for processing benefits  
16 and rental assistance applications, interviews, and  
17 documentation should be exempt from city hiring  
18 freezes.

19       As shelter staff continue to reach record highs  
20 every day, this is the exact worst time to be  
21 reducing safety net services.

22       HRA should backfill agencies and expand headcount  
23 until their agency has sufficient capacity to  
24 eliminate the backlog and attain a 30-day processing  
25 timeline not only for cash assistance and SNAP

2 benefits, but also for one-shot deals, CityFHEPS and  
3 StateFHEPS vouchers.

4       Given the historic increase in cash assistance  
5 and SNAP applications, HRA should be planning to  
6 expand capacity beyond their pre-pandemic headcounts  
7 to be able to reflect the growing need in the city.  
8 The agency should stop continuing to rely on stopgap  
9 measures like voluntary overtime and redeploying  
10 staff within the agency to address backlogs and meet  
11 the current need, as it's burning out staff at HRA,  
12 and creates new delays within the units that are  
13 being pulled from in order to redeploy, as was  
14 mentioned by the HRA staffers today.

15       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16       MR. LEE: Do you mind if I finish up?

17       CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sure.

18       MR. LEE: Thank you. In addition to staffing up  
19 to meet the current demand for benefits and rental  
20 assistance, HRA must also ramp up capacity in advance  
21 of implementing the CityFHEPS Go package, which the  
22 Council passed and will take effect this winter.  
23 This includes staffing up both at FI8 to process cash  
24 assistance applications and interviews, and

2 documentation indexing, as well as RAP for processing  
3 CityFHEPS applications, and LOSU for issuing checks.

4 Finally, HSU supports Intro 651 to codify that  
5 children are not required to be present at PATH, and  
6 Intro 902 to establish PATH navigators to help  
7 families navigate this highly complicated and  
8 confusing process.

9 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

10 COUNSEL: Thank you, Eric, for your testimony.

11 Over now to Rebecca Zangen.

12 MS. ZANGEN: Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

13 COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

14 MS. ZANGEN: Okay, great. Good afternoon Deputy  
15 Speaker Ayala, Committee Council. My name is Rebecca  
16 Zangen, and I'm the Director of Policy and Planning  
17 at the Supportive Housing Network of New York. We're  
18 a statewide membership organization representing over  
19 200 nonprofit developers and operators of supportive  
20 housing. I appreciate the opportunity to testify and  
21 I'm going to speak specifically to One Shot Deal cash  
22 assistance applications for tenants with rent  
23 arrears.

24 Although supportive housing is rent subsidized,  
25 tenants must still pay 30% of their monthly income on

2 rent, which is significant if that income is just a  
3 monthly Social Security check. And supportive  
4 housing tenants are not exempt from the rising costs  
5 of food, medication, transportation, and childcare,  
6 leaving tenants to make difficult choices which often  
7 lead to arrears.

8 A survey of our members from July found that 54%  
9 of tenants were behind on rent. Supportive housing  
10 developments are underwritten in accordance with  
11 city, state, and federal regulations with the  
12 assumption that tenants will pay a portion of the  
13 rent. This is how the budgets are created and  
14 buildings are operated and maintained. When rent is  
15 not collected, building maintenance suffers.

16 The same survey found that out of 29 respondents,  
17 there was a total of more than \$24.6 million of  
18 arrears. Currently, the only way to recoup arrears  
19 is through the One Shot Deal process, which often  
20 comes after case management and all other options  
21 with the tenants have been exhausted.

22 As has been described in this hearing by many  
23 other speakers, the process to apply for cash  
24 assistance (and a One Shot Deal is part of that) is  
25 very onerous and requires tremendous effort from

2 supportive housing tenants, who are also coping with  
3 other challenging life circumstances.

4 The current delays in HRA processing translates  
5 to millions of dollars lost by nonprofit supportive  
6 housing providers and undue stress and anxiety for  
7 tenants whose arrears put them in violation of their  
8 lease agreement.

9 Today, we're urging the city to create a system  
10 to expedite the processing and approval of One Shot  
11 Deal applications for supportive and affordable  
12 housing tenants, and allow providers to bundle  
13 request HRA to create efficiencies.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 Additionally, we urge the city to exempt DSS and  
16 HRA and all other city agencies that interface with  
17 households in need of care from pegs. Thank you so  
18 much for your time.

19 COUNSEL: Thank you, Rebecca, for your testimony.  
20 And thank you to this entire panel for your  
21 testimony. We are now going to move to an in-person  
22 panel comprised of Jenna Coudin and Towaki Komatsu.  
23 And I apologize Jenna if I mispronounced your name.  
24 I apologize if I mispronounced your name.

2 MS. COUDIN: Okay, good afternoon. My name is  
3 Jenna Coudin. I'm an attorney with the Government  
4 Benefits Unit at Manhattan Legal Services. We serve  
5 clients throughout Manhattan, who seek us out in  
6 housing court as well as at our clinics, one of which  
7 you let us hold at your office, Councilmember Ayala.

8 I'm here today to shed light on the actual day-  
9 to-day disastrous consequences of HRA's extreme  
10 delays in processing, approving, and issuing public  
11 benefit. We've been talking about it all morning.  
12 We are seeing systemic delays of more than the  
13 required timeframe of 30 days processing for SNAP,  
14 public assistance, One Shot Deals, PHEPS, and  
15 CityFHEPS applications.

16 While some applicants receive decision well past  
17 the required timeline, while others never receive a  
18 response on their application. These harmful delays  
19 are widespread across New York City.

20 As I've seen in my client's work, issuance delays  
21 of SNAP cash assistance or rental subsidies have  
22 real-life consequences. It is the single mother who  
23 won't be able to feed her 10-year-old daughter  
24 tonight. It is the 18-year-old homeless high school  
25 student who will skip breakfast and lunch tomorrow to



2 have enough cash to afford dinner. It is this 55-  
3 year-old woman, a former accountant, who landed in  
4 housing court after becoming paralyzed following a  
5 stroke, unable to cook or afford groceries while her  
6 SNAP application is pending. These are the stories  
7 that we hear every day. They are disheartening and  
8 infuriating.

9 New York City's been mandated by law to protect  
10 low-income New Yorkers. New York City has to ensure  
11 that we support the people whose life already are  
12 struggles and battles every day. We can all agree  
13 that \$281 a month in SNAP is far from sufficient to  
14 afford a month worth of groceries. But these \$281  
15 can make the difference between life and death. And  
16 HRA's continuous delays are not only unacceptable,  
17 but it's also deadly, and it's critical to act now.

18 Every week in New York City, new tenants are  
19 being sued by the landlord because of missing delayed  
20 shelter payments, or improper discontinuance of  
21 public assistance, FHEPS, or CityFHEPS case. Why is  
22 it that the programs that were created to help  
23 vulnerable people access fordable housings are the  
24 ones that ended up pushing the same marginalized  
25 tenants into eviction proceedings?

2 HRA indicates that they are taking aggressive  
3 action to fill critical vacancies, invest in  
4 technology, and implement process improvement to  
5 improve timeliness. Well, this is great to hear.  
6 But what is the concrete structural plan, and what is  
7 the timeline. But what date will New Yorkers be able  
8 to get their benefit processed within 30 days. This  
9 rule was supposed to be effective as of October 1,  
10 2022. What substantial steps have been put in place  
11 to comply with the federal court order to eliminate  
12 the backlog?

13 These are the adjustments that I wish to present:

14 Number one, the Adams administration should  
15 approve the necessary budget to, at minimum, fill all  
16 the positions that are currently vacant at HRA. The  
17 US economy will keep getting worse until it gets  
18 better and HRA must hire more staff to get rid of  
19 this year's long backup.

20 Number two, HRA should commit to creating and  
21 publishing a corrective action plan to resolve the  
22 systemic delays in processing public benefit  
23 application within the requisite timeline.

24 Number three, HRA should share monthly monitoring  
25 reports with community partners until they can

2 demonstrate that the agency is complying with its  
3 protocols, corrective action plan, and applicable  
4 state and federal law.

5 Finally, HRA should create a direct access line  
6 phone number four advocates like us and community  
7 partners to help address and facilitate correction of  
8 case errors.

9 Thank you.

10 COUNSEL: Thank you, Jenna, for your testimony.  
11 Over to Towaki.

12 MR. KOMATSU: Hi, I'm Towaki Komatsu. I've  
13 talked to you many times. I've been lied to many  
14 times. In this room today, you said your oversight,  
15 I guess for HRA. Another lie. Somebody who was at  
16 this table for HRA said that-- let me look at my  
17 notes. She made a remark saying something to the  
18 effect of "We have a shared goal of keeping people in  
19 their homes." No they don't. They committed fraud  
20 against me. I told-- I've testified to you  
21 previously about the fact that HRA personnel, as well  
22 as personnel for urban pathways illegally changed my  
23 lease. So how is that keeping me in my home?

24 In terms of New York State Real Property Law 853.  
25 She's an attorney. That's about illegal evictions

2 from someone's residence after they sign a lease.  
3 I've been in housing court. Guess what: In the  
4 Bronx, the judge wouldn't let me present my  
5 counterclaims or defenses. So, guess what: I have  
6 to go to appeals.

7 Also, with regards to fair hearings, this hearing  
8 today is about public assistance benefits. So  
9 meaning if HRA denies an application, you go to OTDA  
10 to appeal that. Guess what: OTDA isn't working  
11 properly, meaning HRA has a legal duty to provide  
12 discovery prior to those fair hearings for those  
13 hearings. It doesn't do that. It hasn't done it  
14 with me. It hasn't done it with other people.

15 People testified to you earlier today who are  
16 attorneys. They walked out of this room. They  
17 basically talked to you about the fact that HRA won't  
18 provide discovery material, even for federal court  
19 litigation.

20 So bottom line is they're not the only ones with  
21 litigation against HRA. They're not the only ones  
22 with litigation against the city. I have litigation,  
23 and I'm moving for sanctions this week.

24 Also, with regards to today's testimony by me for  
25 this hearing, you have a reporter over there. She

2 was in the room earlier. I tried to prepare my  
3 testimony I was in the room. The security person  
4 over there told me I couldn't charge my laptop to,  
5 you know, prepare my testimony better.

6 So why is it that someone in this room can charge  
7 their laptop over there? But if I'm sitting at this  
8 table testifying to you, I can't simply plug in my  
9 laptop?

10 Thanks.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you for  
12 your testimony.

13 COUNSEL: Thank you both for your testimony. At  
14 this point, we have heard from everyone who has  
15 signed up to testify. If we inadvertently missed  
16 anyone who would like to testify whether in person or  
17 via Zoom, if in person, please visit the sergeant's  
18 table and complete a witness slip now. If we  
19 inadvertently missed anyone on Zoom who would like to  
20 testify virtually, please use the raise hand function  
21 in Zoom and I'll call on you in the order of hands  
22 raised.

23 Seeing no one else I would like to note that  
24 written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by  
25 committee staff.

2 Oh, we do have one more person who is signing up  
3 to testify.

4 Alex Malescio from Urban Upbound.

5 You may begin.

6 Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Allah. My name is  
7 Alex Malescio, and I'm here today to express Urban  
8 Upbound's support of Intro 910 as well as to share  
9 the experiences of Urban Upbound's staff, who on a  
10 daily basis, submit public benefits applications for  
11 New Yorkers in need.

12 At Urban Bpbound our mission is to provide lower  
13 income New Yorkers and public housing residents with  
14 the tools to overcome the barriers they face to  
15 professional, financial, and personal development,  
16 with the ultimate goal of helping them break cycles  
17 of poverty. These barriers can take on many forms,  
18 such as the lack of access to affordable childcare,  
19 or debt and low credit scores brought on by predatory  
20 lending institutions.

21 Today, I'm here to highlight barriers created by  
22 the lengthy and onerous process of applying for  
23 public benefits. At Urban Upbound, we regularly work  
24 with New Yorkers who are facing food insecurity by  
25 screening them for SNAP eligibility, and assisting

1 them with applications and recertifications. For our  
2 clients who are in crisis mode, the thought of  
3 navigating the application can be overwhelming, and  
4 past negative experiences with government  
5 institutions can leave a lasting and discouraging  
6 effects. For these New Yorkers public benefits serve  
7 as a lifeline. Moreover, for many of our clients,  
8 public benefits have a stabilizing effect that allows  
9 them to work with our counselors on other pressing  
10 matters, such as employment assistance, affordable  
11 housing access, and financial planning.  
12

13 It is for these reasons that public benefits  
14 screening application and recertification processes  
15 should be as quick, painless, and efficient as  
16 possible.

17 Access NYC is a useful tool because of its  
18 ability to consolidate the screening process for  
19 several public benefits. Application processes  
20 however, are still fragmented by agency. Urban  
21 Upbound is encouraged that the sponsors of Intro 910  
22 and the Committee on General Welfare are discussing  
23 the feasibility of the consolidated or universal  
24 benefits application process.  
25

2 I will close with an example that illustrates the  
3 positive effects that a universal benefits  
4 application could have.

5 At Urban Upbound, our clients, many of whom are  
6 hesitant to apply for SNAP benefits to begin with,  
7 often become more encouraged when they learn that by  
8 using the same documentation, they can also apply for  
9 a Fair Fares MetroCard, and they can do so using the  
10 same online portal through which they applied for  
11 SNAP. Unsurprisingly, SNAP and Fair Fares, both of  
12 which live on Access HRA are two of the most popular  
13 benefits amongst our clients.

14 Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

15 COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. And now,  
16 seeing no one else registered or signed up to  
17 testify. I'd like to note that written testimony,  
18 which will reviewed in full by committee staff may be  
19 submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the  
20 close of this hearing by e-mailing it to  
21 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

22 Deputy Speaker Ayala, we have concluded public  
23 testimony for this hearing.

24 Thank you and with that This hearing is adjourned

25 [GAVEL]



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 09/30/2023