

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY  
WITH THE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS

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September 15, 2020  
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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin,  
Chairperson of Committee on  
General Welfare  
  
Mathieu Eugene,  
Chairperson of Committee on Civil  
and Human Rights

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
  
Vanessa L. Gibson  
Barry S. Grodenchik  
Robert F. Holden  
Brad S. Lander  
Antonio Reynoso  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Ritchie J. Torres  
Mark Treyger

A P P E A R A N C E S

Shawntel Williams

Karim Walker

Josefa Silva  
Win's Policy Director

Charisma White

Ashley Belcher  
Homeless Can't Stay Home Campaign

Bruce Jordan  
Chief Homelessness Prevention Officer for DSS

Erin Drinkwater  
Deputy Commissioner of Intergovernmental and  
Legislative Affairs for the Commission on Human  
Rights for DSS

Dana Sussman  
Deputy Commissioner of Policy and  
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Zoey Chenitz  
Senior Policy Counsel for DSS

Christine Quinn  
President and CEO of WIN

Sarah Wilson  
Safety Net Project

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Devone Nash  
North Star Residence Shelter

Joseph Soto

Salik Karim  
Advocacy Coordinator at John Jay College  
Institute for Justice and Opportunity

Alison Wilkey  
Director of Public Policies at John Jay College  
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Winnie Varghese  
Priest at Trinity Church on Wall Street

Stanley Richards  
Executive Vice President at the Fortune Society

Erobos  
Fortune Society

Velvet Ross

Michelle Carreras  
Domestic abuse survivor

Sofia Janz

Winston Tokuhisa

Annie Carforo  
Neighbors Together

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Nicole McVinua  
Director of Policy at Urban Pathways

Shiniquea Bryan

Lavoune Witherspoon  
Neighbors Together

Reverend Sharon White-Harrigan  
Executive Director of the Women's Community  
Justice Association, also known as WCJA

Kendra Clark  
Vice President of Policy and Strategy with Exodus  
Transitional Community

Shawn Boyd

Victor Herrera

Eric Lee  
Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless  
Services United

Joseph Loonam

Alisa Kyle  
Testifying in place of Nicole Branca  
Director of the Housing Link at New Destiny  
Housing Corporation

Nicole Branca  
Director of the Housing Link at New Destiny  
Housing Corporation

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Giselle Routhier  
Policy Director at Coalition for the Homeless

Basha Gerhards  
REBNY

Suzanne Adler  
Licensed Real Estate Agent with Triplemint

Minister Dr. Victoria A Phillips (Ms. V)  
Community Health and Justice Organizer at the  
Mental Health Project Urban Justice Center

Irene Linares  
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Justin La Mort  
Supervising Attorney at Mobilization for Justice

Jacob Malafsky  
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Alexandra Dougherty  
Senior Staff Attorney in Policy Counsel of the  
Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender  
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Reverend Wendy Calderon Payne  
Executive Director of Bronx Connect

Alfonzo Riley  
Employed by the Legal Aid Society as a Paralegal  
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Robert Desir  
Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Society Civil  
Law Reform Unit

Antonio Garcia  
Director of Preserving Housing

Wendy O'Shields  
Homeless Rights and Housing Advocate in New York  
City

Amy Blumsack  
Neighbors Together, testifying on behalf of  
Shanere Denton[SP?]

Chrystal Neavus[SP?]

Debra Berkman  
Coordinating Attorney in the Public Benefits Unit  
and in the Shelter Advocacy Initiative of the New  
York Legal Assistance Group or NYLAG

Yamina Sara Chekroun  
Civil Defense Attorney at New York County  
Defenders Services

Abraham Gross

Theo Chino  
Co-founder of the website Around my Block

Suhali Mendez  
Senior Advocate in the Disability Justice program  
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Aracelous Figorora[SP?]

Advocate for parents with children with special  
needs

Katie Shaffer

Director of Advocacy and Organizing at Center for  
Community Alternatives

1  
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Good morning  
3 everyone and welcome to today's remote New York City  
4 hearing on the Committees of General Welfare joint  
5 with Civil and Human Rights.

6 At this time, would all panelists please turn on  
7 their video. Once again, all panelists please turn  
8 on your videos.

9 To minimize disruption, we ask everyone to please  
10 place electronic devices on silent or vibrate. If  
11 you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at  
12 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Once again, that is  
13 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Thank you for your  
14 cooperation. Chair's, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning everybody. I  
16 got to do this quietly because my son is napping.  
17 Good morning everybody and welcome to this hearing on  
18 the City Council Committee on General Welfare and  
19 Committee and Civil and Human Rights. Today the  
20 Committee's will be hearing a series of bills  
21 concerning the city's rental assistance program and  
22 source of income discrimination. I want to thank my  
23 colleague Chair Mathieu Eugene for holding this  
24 hearing with me today.

3 The Committee's will hear Intro.'s 146 and 2047  
4 and a Preconsidered bill sponsored by me, Council  
5 Member Stephen Levin, as well as Introduction 1020  
6 sponsored by Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel.  
7 Introduction 1339 sponsored by Council Member Diana  
8 Ayala. Intro. 2018 sponsored by Council Member Helen  
9 Rosenthal, and a Preconsidered bill sponsored by  
10 Council Member Keith Powers.

11 Rental assistance vouchers are the primary tools  
12 that we have in New York City to ensure that people  
13 are able to move out of shelter and into housing.  
14 Doctors can also assist New Yorkers at risk of losing  
15 their housing to avoid eviction and entry into  
16 shelter. However, we know that the success of this  
17 program depends on the ability of clients to actually  
18 use them. And we know that the current voucher  
19 amounts are woefully inadequate to secure housing.  
20 There is currently no neighborhood in the city where  
21 the median rental price for a studio is at or below  
22 the current City FHEPS rate for an individual.

23 Intro. 146 would raise the voucher levels to the  
24 fair market rent as set by the HUD standard, so that  
25 individuals and families are able to quickly exit  
shelter and into housing or avoid entering the

3 shelter system all together. It is not uncommon for  
4 voucher recipients to spend years trying to secure an  
5 apartment. The inadequacy of the voucher amounts is  
6 not the only barrier people face in trying to utilize  
7 them. While denying somebody in an apartment based  
8 on a method of paying their rent, voucher recipients  
9 face an additional hurdle, a source of income  
10 discrimination in applying for apartments.

11 According to Vocal New York and TakeRoot  
12 Justice's recently released paper, voucher holders  
13 were three times less likely to get a response to an  
14 inquiry from an agent about a perspective apartment  
15 and applicants paying from employment. Voucher  
16 holders were also less likely to be invited to  
17 viewings and more likely to be told that apartments  
18 were no longer available than applicants not paying  
19 with a subsidy. In some instances, were outright  
20 told that vouchers were not accepted.

21 Intro. 1339 sponsored by Council Member Ayala  
22 would provide written notice to those potentially  
23 eligible for city rental assistance programs and  
24 inform them of their rights and resources available  
25 related to the source of income discrimination.

3 Domestic violence is among the most frequently  
4 cited reasons for entry into shelter. And placement  
5 into a specialized DV shelter is subject to  
6 eligibility and availability in the system. Intro.  
7 2018 sponsored by Helen Rosenthal, would require  
8 domestic violence services to be available in all  
9 shelters. Reports of upticks in domestic violence  
10 cases during the COVID-19 pandemic are especially  
11 concerning and city shelters should be prepared with  
12 services for all survivors in shelter moving forward.

13 The Preconsidered bill that I am sponsoring would  
14 allow online access to rental assistance program  
15 status, so that clients can know where their case  
16 stands, rather than navigate in bureaucracy of  
17 calling HRA.

18 Intro. 2047 would help end housing discrimination  
19 for justice involved individuals by making it illegal  
20 to deny someone in an apartment on the basis of an  
21 arrest record or conviction. \$4 million incarcerated  
22 people are among the most vulnerable people to become  
23 homeless and housing is often just one of many  
24 significant challenges that they face upon reentry.

25 The COVID crisis has underscored the importance  
of safe and secure housing. With the Centers of

3 Disease Control issuing guidance for a nationwide  
4 eviction moratorium it has never been more apparent  
5 that housing is healthcare and housing is a human  
6 right.

7 With the overwhelming majority of the shelter  
8 population in Black and Latinx people ensuring that  
9 the voucher levels are at sufficient amounts in order  
10 for people to swiftly use them emphasizes that  
11 housing justice is racial justice.

12 I believe that the legislation included in  
13 today's hearing will make great strides to promote  
14 equity in housing by removing some of the barriers,  
15 just some, not all. Keeping people from securing or  
16 maintaining their apartments.

17 I want to thank the advocates and members of the  
18 public and those with lived experience for joining us  
19 remotely today. Thank you to representatives from  
20 the Administration for joining us and I look forward  
21 to hearing from you on these critical issues.

22 At this time, I would like to acknowledge my  
23 colleagues who are here today. We are joined by  
24 Council Members Perkins, Grodenchik, Barron, Holden,  
25 Lander, Salamanca, and Powers. Ayala is not joining  
us at this time but I hope to hear from her later.

3 I'd also like to thank my staff Jonathan Boucher my  
4 Chief of Staff, Elizabeth Adams my Legislative  
5 Director, Deidra Cheatham my Director of Constituent  
6 Services. And I want to thank Committee Staff Aminta  
7 Kilawan Senior Counsel, Crystal Pond Senior Policy  
8 Analyst, Natalie Omary Policy Analyst and Frank Sarno  
9 Finance Analyst.

10 And with that, I will turn it over to my  
11 colleague Dr. Mathieu Eugene for his opening remarks.

12 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much Chair  
13 Levin, thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Council  
14 Member Mathieu Eugene and I am the Chair of the  
15 Committee on Civil and Human Rights. Thank you for  
16 joining our joint virtual hearing today.

17 I would like to thank my Co-Chair Stephen Levin  
18 for convening this very important hearing today. I  
19 would like also to acknowledge my colleagues on the  
20 Committee Council Member Perkins and also Lander,  
21 Barron, I don't if Mr. Dromm is here, he will  
22 probably join us later on.

23 Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, housing and security  
24 was always a significant issue plaguing New York  
25 City. As of January 2019, 83,277 individuals were  
experiencing homelessness in New York City. This

1  
2 number includes those experiencing street  
3 homelessness, as well as the thousands that can't  
4 live in shelters toward the city. There are  
5 formidable numbers.

6 With a global pandemic we are currently at a  
7 critical juncture that could exasperate this already  
8 critical housing crisis. At moratoriums on eviction  
9 begin to expire. It is apparent that the city,  
10 state, and federal officials are quickly to address  
11 what is certain to come a homelessness crisis of  
12 epic proportions.

13 The City Council will hear several bills today  
14 that attempt to address the various aspect of this  
15 homelessness problem in the city. While none of  
16 them, none of this nation will solve the issue  
17 completely. The bills will strengthen protections  
18 for housing application and improve access to support  
19 rental assistance programs.

20 As a city, it is of utmost importance that we  
21 strengthen the city human rights law to the greatest  
22 expense possible when it comes to discrimination and  
23 housing. While the city's law currently contains  
24 some of the strongest and most comprehensive  
25 protections, including forbidding discrimination and

1 housing based on a generous lease of protected  
2 classes, there is always more to be done.  
3

4 In today's hearing, we will hear from the  
5 Commission of Human Rights CCHR about the source of  
6 income discrimination unit and their overall effort  
7 to combat housing discrimination. The unit has been  
8 instrumental in combating discrimination against  
9 those who apply for housing using the rental  
10 assistance vouchers.

11 Between 2018 and 2019, the unit has investigated  
12 and resolved over 350 cases of discrimination.

13 However, we heard at this Committee's 2018 Budget  
14 hearing, discrimination runs rampant in this City.

15 This Committee wants to ensure that CCHR is doing  
16 all that it can particularly in the upcoming months  
17 to ensure that those who are legally entitled to  
18 housing are not unnecessary prevented from obtaining  
19 it.

20 In addition, given budget cuts, this Committee  
21 would want to hear from CCHR. How it plans to  
22 address [INAUDIBLE 13:24] and when it will apply  
23 funding program as Fair Housing Initiative. A  
24 program that in New York State Division of Human  
25 Rights has been all in for a few years now.

3 In addition, we will also hear feedback on Intro.  
4 2047 sponsored by my Co-Chair Levin. This bill will  
5 ban the criminal history in housing by landlord,  
6 state brokers, and their companies or agents.

7 In 2015, New York City restricted to use of  
8 arrests in criminal history check for employment  
9 purposes. However, no such protections exists in the  
10 housing context.

11 In today's hearing, we present the first step  
12 toward addressing this very important issue. I look  
13 forward to hearing feedback on this bill and the many  
14 other bills our Committees are hearing today.

15 I would like to thank the Committee Staff and  
16 Counsel Staff in general while working hard behind  
17 the scenes to make this hearing possible. I would  
18 like now to turn it back to my Chair Levin.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much my Co-Chair  
20 Dr. Mathieu Eugene and thank you for your work on  
21 behalf of Human Rights here in New York City.

22 And now, I would like to turn it over to members  
23 of the Administration for their testimony. We are  
24 joined by Dana Sussman, Deputy Commissioner – sorry,  
25 and I am missing the entire [DROPPED AUDIO 15:22] but

1 Deputy Commissioner if you could read that into the  
2 record when you begin.

3  
4 Also joined by Deputy Commissioner Erin  
5 Drinkwater out of the Department of Social Services.  
6 And let's see, oh I'm sorry, we are doing a public  
7 panel first, excuse me, I'm sorry. Sorry about that.  
8 We are doing a public panel first and bear with me  
9 please. Oh, and I am going to call on Council Member  
10 Keith Powers to do a statement before calling on the  
11 panel on his legislation.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you. Thank you to  
13 both Chairs. My name is City Council Member Keith  
14 Powers and I am glad to be here joining my colleagues  
15 today in support of his brilliant important piece of  
16 legislation.

17 I will talk briefly about my bill but I want to  
18 just take a step back to say that this week, this  
19 past week, as many of us including the Chair Stephen  
20 Levin, have been out there advocating for clearer and  
21 better policies with regard to a number of the  
22 shelters and hotels that have been in the news  
23 recently. These bills become even you know, to me,  
24 are a really important part of the equation. We're  
25 talking about long term solutions for homelessness

1  
2 and as we all talk often about the need to find  
3 people housing and find people permanent housing to  
4 avoid these community battles over hotels and  
5 shelters, we now have an opportunity right here today  
6 to do and to do that and to take steps in the pursuit  
7 of that goal.

8       So, I hope many folks will, who whatever side  
9 you are on will be widely in support of these bills  
10 here today and I have to commend the Chair Stephen  
11 Levin because he has been talking about a number of  
12 these bills for quite a long time and I have actually  
13 witnessed him fighting with the Administration over  
14 things like vouchers and making sure that we are  
15 doing our part here in the city. But I am also  
16 really glad to join him in the Introduction of a Fair  
17 Chance Housing Act a few weeks ago, which will offer  
18 people a better opportunity to get housing here in  
19 New York City.

20       As the Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee,  
21 we talked about reentry and we talked about being  
22 prepared for getting people permanent housing, which  
23 is about stability and this is a real opportunity to  
24 do it and so, this bill is I think a tremendous step  
25 forward to actively help people find housing and to

3 remove the box, sort of to ban the box here in New  
4 York City when it comes to peoples criminal history  
5 when finding housing.

6 I'm also really proud to introduce a bill that's  
7 about source of income discrimination here in New  
8 York City, something I have talked about for quite a  
9 long time. This goes back to when I was working in  
10 the assembly some years ago in the Bloomberg  
11 Administration and we fought over expanding source of  
12 income discrimination protections. I think they even  
13 had the bill vetoed, but right now in New York City  
14 there is prohibitions against discrimination based on  
15 law for source of income only apply to buildings with  
16 six units or more. That leaves many smaller  
17 buildings out, where New Yorkers with vouchers who  
18 may already struggle to find housing, could continue  
19 to face discrimination.

20 So, the bill that I have introduced here today  
21 Preconsidered bill, would expand protections against  
22 source of income discrimination to any housing with  
23 more than two units in New York City with an  
24 exception for owner occupied units and buildings. It  
25 also brings New York City closer to line with the  
laws of the state passed recently around source of

3 income discrimination, so that we can ensure that New  
4 York City can enforce our laws here, right here in  
5 the city and we can empower our own agencies that are  
6 doing a very good job enforcing source of income  
7 discrimination to be able to do their job.

8 So, I look forward to hearing everybody's  
9 comments on that and of course, ready to take notes  
10 on those and to address any challenges that might  
11 reside within those but I think these are really  
12 important bills that are going to actually help New  
13 Yorkers at a time when we desperately need it.

14 I really want to thank everybody here who has  
15 been working on these issues far before I came to the  
16 City Council and have been in pursuit of more just  
17 policies. And just policies and also are standing up  
18 for our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

19 And I will just end on this note, which is that  
20 beyond this at some point, we're going to continue to  
21 need to talk about resourcing those agencies which  
22 are in -- had the responsibility for enforcing these  
23 laws because I do believe and I've said this for a  
24 while, I think we need some more resources at those  
25 agencies where it is possible at a very challenging  
time in the city around the fiscal crisis. But those

3 agencies do really important work to make sure that  
4 folks can get housing.

5 So, with that being said, I'll leave it at that.  
6 I really want to thank the Chair for his endless work  
7 and also hosting this hearing to make sure that New  
8 Yorkers can get housing and can be made sure that  
9 they are not discriminated against and have  
10 appropriate vouchers.

11 So, thank you Chair and I look forward to hearing  
12 everybody's testimony.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council Member  
14 Powers. With that, I am going to turn it over to  
15 Counsel to the Committee Aminta Kilawan for the first  
16 panel.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Levin. I am  
18 Aminta Kilawan Counsel to the General Welfare  
19 Committee of the New York City Counsel. I will be  
20 moderating today's hearing and I will be calling  
21 panelists to testify.

22 Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that  
23 you will be on mute until I call on you to testify.  
24 At that point, you will be unmuted by the host. I  
25 will be calling on panelists, please listen for your  
name to be called. After you are called on, you will

1  
2 be unmuted. I will be periodically announcing who  
3 the next panelists are going to be.

4 So, the first panelist that we are going to be  
5 hearing from today are Charisma White, Shawntel  
6 Williams, Karim Walker and Josefa Silva.

7 Again, I will call on you when it is your turn to  
8 speak. During the hearing, if Council Members would  
9 like to ask a question, please use the Zoom raise  
10 hand function and I will call on you in the order in  
11 which you have raised your hand.

12 I want to note that we will be limiting Council  
13 Member questions to five minutes, that includes both  
14 questions and answers. Please also note that ease of  
15 this virtual hearing, we won't be allowing a second  
16 round of questioning. And again, all public  
17 testimony is going to be limited to three minutes.  
18 After I call your name, please wait a brief moment  
19 for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may  
20 begin before you start your testimony.

21 I am going to now call on our first witness for  
22 today, who will be Charisma White.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, it seems as if Charisma  
25 may be having some technical difficult, so we will

3 move on to Shawntel Williams and we will get back to  
4 Charisma.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 SHAWNTELL WILLIAMS: Hello, good morning. My  
7 name is Shawntel Williams. This is my second time  
8 having a CityFHEPS voucher, receiving the first due  
9 to losing my job. Late payments for HRA got my  
10 family evicted from my apartment of five years,  
11 forcing us into homelessness. I received my second  
12 CityFHEPS voucher from DHS. Constantly getting  
13 denied for apartments both times because I don't make  
14 40 times the rent. I cannot work due to medical  
15 reasons, so why should my occupation matter if I have  
16 a voucher that can cover the rent. It shouldn't, but  
17 me not knowing my rights got me discriminated against  
18 like many others. Which is why we need to approve  
19 Intro. bill 1339.

20 Landlords deny me because "by law we cannot rent  
21 a one bedroom to get a four family household with a  
22 1580 CityFHEPS voucher. If landlords know this, then  
23 the people that create the vouchers, why don't they?  
24 It's simple, DHS and HRA does not care and is set up  
25 for failure. If they have a lack of care for their

3 rat and roach invested shelters, they won't care to  
4 increase our CityFHEPS vouchers to help us out.

5 Do you realize the more people you help out of  
6 shelters; you can decrease homeless people being on  
7 the streets? Here is median asking right for a  
8 studio in the past two years. Queens \$1895, Brooklyn  
9 \$1945, Bronx \$1814, Manhattan \$3888. How is \$1580,  
10 one bedroom CityFHEPS voucher going to cover that?  
11 Because the system is not built on common sense which  
12 is why Intro. bill 146 would help cover real listing  
13 asking rent.

14 Please don't delay helping lives and what could  
15 be you or did you not think that this could happen to  
16 you. Guess what? This is happening to my 4-year-old  
17 autistic son. This is happening to my 2-year-old  
18 daughter and my 12-week baby in my womb. After being  
19 ripped from their homes for just 20 minutes with no  
20 shoes for my baby's feet in 30 degree weather, don't  
21 you think they deserve fairness? Don't you?

22 Thank you for your time.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Shawntel.  
24 And now we move on to Karim Walker.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 KARIM WALKER: Good morning ladies and gentleman.  
4 My name is Karim Walker. If we could start with the  
5 in one word, it would be expensive. The city, as we  
6 can see, New York City has a very, very big problem  
7 in terms of housing and in affordability in housing.  
8 That's why Intro. 146 we could raise the value of the  
9 vouchers to fair market value is so key to  
10 maintaining housing stability in the city.

11 If we can afford approximately - if we could  
12 afford about \$3500 a month for a shelter bed for  
13 someone to stay in a shelter, I'm sure the city can  
14 afford to pay a fraction of that, \$2,000 just to make  
15 sure someone has a roof over their head and from that  
16 and move on with their lives and what they need to do  
17 to make themselves a viable productive member of  
18 society.

19 As we all know, housing is healthcare. Housing  
20 is much more than just a roof over your head. It's a  
21 source of pride, it's a source of stability, it's a  
22 source of respect and if you can afford to do that,  
23 I'm sure a lot of people will feel a lot better about  
24 themselves.

25 Thank you for your time.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Karim. And now we  
4 will move on to Josefa Silva.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 JOSEFA SILVA: Good morning. My name is Josefa  
7 Silva, I am from Win and I will be reading testimony  
8 from two individuals this morning.

9 My name is Tashia Wells and I thank the City  
10 Council for allowing me to submit testimony. My  
11 three children and I live at the family residents in  
12 East New York, which has been our home since November  
13 of 2018. Since January of 2019, I have a CityFHEPS  
14 voucher and I have looked everywhere to find a  
15 landlord who would take the voucher to allow us to  
16 rent an apartment and leave shelter.

17 It's been nearly two years using the voucher. I  
18 don't know how many times I have to renew it, it's  
19 about to expire again. The search is taking so long  
20 because my family and I are looking for a two bedroom  
21 apartment. At \$1580 a month, you cannot find  
22 anything.

23 At Win, I regularly speak with the housing  
24 coordinator and I've searched everywhere for an  
25 apartment. I call landlords and I reach out to them  
via text. It's very rare that you find anything for

1  
2 \$1600 and most two bedroom apartments are \$1800 to  
3 \$2000 per month.

4 I've gone to a number of viewings. It's very  
5 difficult and very competitive. Often there are  
6 multiple families looking at the same apartment.  
7 It's very hard. I have even looked for one bedroom  
8 apartments. I am willing to do what we have to to  
9 move out of shelter and will make it work.

10 My family and I are appreciative of the City  
11 Council's dedication to helping homeless families.  
12 We came to New York City after surviving two category  
13 5 hurricanes in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Our family,  
14 like so many, lost everything in those storms and  
15 have had to start over.

16 Finding a permanent home would be even more  
17 important for my family because it would allow me to  
18 get the medical care that I need in order to go back  
19 to work. I am on dialysis and need treatment three  
20 days per week but I cannot get a transplant until my  
21 doctors feel that I will be able to get three months  
22 of around the clock care. I need a home, so that I  
23 can get the care I need. I have applied for  
24 supportive housing but it is a very long waitlist.

3 Finding a home and getting a transplant would be  
4 a new start. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, I worked  
5 with a program coordinator on HIV prevention reaching  
6 out to girls about health and safety. I would  
7 someday like to return to working in public health.

8 Having a voucher that pays more would make those  
9 dreams possible and provide a more stable home for my  
10 three children. I ask you today to please pass  
11 Intro. 146, so that I can find an apartment for my  
12 family.

13 May I ask for time to start for a second  
14 testimony?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes Josefa, you can do that.

16 JOSEFA SILVA: Thank you. My name is Kory  
17 Darby[SP?] and I thank the City Council for allowing  
18 me to submit testimony.

19 I'm calling on the City Council to pass Intro.  
20 146. It will ensure that CityFHEPS rent amount is  
21 always competitive and can allow families to move out  
22 of shelter.

23 I work as a housing coordinator at Win. Next  
24 month, I will celebrate 24 years working at the Win  
25 Bay Family Shelter in Sheepshead Bay. Our shelter is

1  
2 home to 96 families and I regularly work with about  
3 35 families at a time to try to find new apartments.

4 As a housing coordinator, I help families apply  
5 for vouchers, search apartment listings on Craig's  
6 list and Zillow, attend showings, negotiate with  
7 landlords, and navigate the major aspects to housing  
8 search.

9 Finding an apartment with a voucher is already a  
10 long and difficult process. As part of my job, I  
11 regularly drive around Brooklyn neighborhoods and  
12 when I see for rent signs, I take down the contact  
13 information and call the brokers to see if they can  
14 help us find apartments for our clients. It is very  
15 difficult to find apartments that are listed for the  
16 rents that fit amounts of homeless families.

17 But finding an apartment is even more difficult  
18 with the CityFHEPS voucher because the maximum rent  
19 available is so low. It is incredibly challenging to  
20 find a studio or one bedroom apartment for \$1323 a  
21 month. It's even more difficult to try to help a  
22 family of three or a family of four to find an  
23 apartment for \$1580 a month.

24 If any of the landlords I meet who are looking  
25 for renters for a studio or one bedroom can get \$1800

3 or \$1900 a month. Expecting them to take the low  
4 market rates to house formerly homeless families is  
5 not realistic. So, it's extremely rare that our  
6 clients are able to find an apartment within the 90  
7 days of eligibility for using the CityFHEPS voucher.  
8 Many of our clients reapply for the voucher multiple  
9 times.

10 This leads to a frustrating cycle for our  
11 families. Many feel that as soon as they get the  
12 voucher, they will be able to move out of shelter  
13 quickly but the long search often means they get  
14 depressed in their situation. Many do not realize  
15 how hard it is to search for an apartment with  
16 CityFHEPS and they get frustrated just at the moment  
17 when they are so close to finding stable homes.

18 On many more occasions, our families get close to  
19 finding a home only to have apartments fall through.  
20 Largely because the amount of the rental voucher  
21 isn't enough to keep a landlord committed. It hurts  
22 me as a housing coordinator to see families get close  
23 and then have their hopes dashed. They are often  
24 looking at me for the answers. I get frustrated for  
25 them and I get frustrated for my colleagues at Win,  
who are also looking for answers.

3 The CityFHEPS voucher program has a number of  
4 advantages, including allowing families to receive  
5 help until their oldest child is 21. But at its  
6 current rent levels, it is not a useful tool for  
7 helping families.

8 Please pass Intro. 146 to help homeless families  
9 exit shelter more quickly. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Josefa and I  
11 apologize for having mispronounced your name.

12 JOSEFA SILVA: Oh, that's okay.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And now, we are going to  
14 again call on Charisma White.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 CHARISMA WHITE: Hello, my name is Charisma  
17 White. I am an HPD Section 8 voucher holder for over  
18 ten years now. I experienced a very harsh and  
19 alarming ordeal when looking for a home with a very  
20 serious medical problem. I was homeless for three  
21 years in New York City while holding a pretty  
22 reliable good voucher. Management and landlords and  
23 realtors would tell me, they are not accepting  
24 vouchers or your income is not high enough or your  
25 credit is not good enough. Increasing the voucher  
amount would make a difference in providing community

3 and homes for people that are formerly homeless.

4 Please increase the voucher amount on the CityFHEPS  
5 vouchers Intro. 146. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Charisma  
7 and again, I apologize for mispronouncing your name  
8 as well. I'm doing the best that I can.

9 I would now like to call on the attendee who has  
10 dialed in to our hearing today. If you can please  
11 identify yourself for the record.

12 ASHLEY BELCHER: My name is Ashley Belcher.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Ashley, you may  
14 begin your testimony.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 ASHLEY BELCHER: Good morning members of the City  
17 Council. My name is Ashley Belcher and I am with the  
18 Homeless Can't Stay Home Campaign. I am 27-years-old  
19 and I've been homeless for about 11 years. I feel  
20 that Intro. 146 is a huge deal for the future success  
21 of street homeless and sheltered people of New York.  
22 Push for 146 so we are out of the mix.

23 I believe and know from past experience Intro.  
24 146 could potentially give homeless people more  
25 confidence and protection by providing them with  
housing. Housing allows people to have their own

3 space and cleanliness. Ultimately, I say this  
4 because I want you to understand that housing will  
5 give us a life of our own.

6 I know I can speak for most of us when I say the  
7 current voucher value is much less than what's  
8 affordable or substantial living means in New York.  
9 It's virtually impossible to find housing with the  
10 voucher at its current rate.

11 By helping us with this increase, I can guarantee  
12 there will be more people off the street and it will  
13 allow myself and others to feel like a normal  
14 resident and participant in our community. It will  
15 give us an opportunity and confidence to become a  
16 working member of society.

17 In conclusion, by raising the CityFHEPS vouchers  
18 to fair market rate, we will have an actual chance in  
19 getting permanent housing. Currently, at this rate  
20 and amount, there is not much hope for finding a  
21 home. Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much Ashley  
23 and this concludes our first panel for this morning.  
24 I'd now like to turn it over to Chair Levin.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Aminta.  
Thank you to this panel and as you can see I have my

3 one-year-old here. So, I apologize in advance if you  
4 hear some you know crying or if I have to run screen  
5 for a minute.

6 I just want to thank this panel for you know,  
7 your perseverance and for sharing your story with us  
8 in very real terms, so that we can understand that  
9 it's not just a bunch of numbers and it's not just  
10 you know - we're not talking about abstract policy  
11 here. This is real. This has been real for a long  
12 time and so I just want to thank all of you so much  
13 for your testimony and Josefa, I remember gosh, a  
14 couple of years now, I went to meet with the housing  
15 coordination staff at Win to talk about it and I  
16 said, I know what we need, we need more housing  
17 coordinators. That will fix the problem, more  
18 housing coordinators and I went to talk about that  
19 with Win staff and they said, we don't actually need  
20 more housing coordinators, we need an increase in the  
21 voucher. Because you could triple the number of  
22 housing coordinators but if the voucher limits are  
23 not raised to fair market rent, people will still  
24 face the same problem.

25 So, I just want to thank all of you for keeping  
the progress going on this. I want to acknowledge

3 Antonio Reynoso who has joined us as well. Council  
4 Member Reynoso from Brooklyn and there are two  
5 Council Members or just one Council Member that has a  
6 question for this panel. I believe Council Member  
7 Barron.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, good, thank you so  
9 much. I want to thank you Chairs for having this  
10 very important hearing and thank the panel for  
11 sharing their personal experiences and I'd like to be  
12 added to those bills of which I am not already a  
13 member listed as a cosponsor and the issue that we're  
14 facing in terms of homelessness is so critical. We  
15 know that everyone is intitled to decent affordable  
16 housing and the temporary shelters are not the  
17 solution and we are seeing now, just last week, what  
18 are the consequences of people being in temporary  
19 shelters and being in locations where people have  
20 basically a nimby attitude, not in my backyard.

21 So, we know that on the upper west side, the  
22 residence there hired a high powered attorney and  
23 subsequently the men that were housed the Lucerne  
24 were evicted and that's having a trickle affect and  
25 the family residence in my community, I don't know if  
it's the same one where testimony was entered into

1 the record but there is a family residence here in  
2 East New York where the residence have been told they  
3 have to vacate. We are going to be holding a press  
4 conference in about an hour, saying no, this system  
5 needs to be corrected. We need to make all the  
6 provisions we can to get people into permanent  
7 housing. We don't want to have a juggling and a  
8 domino effect and a ripple effect because of  
9 community opposition and then displacing another  
10 location of people. We know that family shelters are  
11 also very, very important and it provides a sense of  
12 stability in the community and for those who are  
13 there particularly now during this pandemic and with  
14 the issues that we have regarding opening of schools.

15  
16 So, I support the legislation. I ask to be added  
17 to that and I want to offer words of encouragement to  
18 all of those who are caught up in this shelter system  
19 and just say that don't be discouraged, keep moving  
20 forward. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member  
22 Barron. Seeing no other questions from Council  
23 Members for this panel, I will now call on Members of  
24 the Administration to testify.

3 I'm going to now read off the names of the  
4 individuals who are going to be testifying. For DSS  
5 we have Bruce Jordan Chief Homelessness Prevention  
6 Officer. Erin Drinkwater Deputy Commissioner of  
7 Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs for the  
8 Commission on Human Rights. We have Dana Sussman  
9 Deputy Commissioner of Policy and Intergovernmental  
10 Affairs and Zoey Chenitz Senior Policy Counsel.

11 At this time, I am going to deliver the oath to  
12 the Administration. Do you affirm to tell the truth,  
13 the whole truth and nothing but the truth before this  
14 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
15 questions?

16 PANEL: Yes.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you all, you may begin  
18 your testimony when ready.

19 BRUCE JORDAN: Good morning Chairs Levin and  
20 Eugene and Members of the General Welfare and Civil  
21 Human Rights Committee's. Thank you for the  
22 opportunity to testify today on the topic of rental  
23 assistance and source of income discrimination  
24 programs.

25 My name is Bruce Jordan and I am the Chief  
Homelessness Prevention Officer at the Human

3 Resources Administration HRA and I am joined by Erin  
4 Drinkwater Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental  
5 and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social  
6 Services DSS.

7 The Homelessness Prevention Administration's  
8 mission is to keep New Yorkers stably housed and  
9 ensure they are connected to resources like rental  
10 assistance and legal services. Within the  
11 Homelessness Prevention Administration of the Housing  
12 and Homeless Services Initiative Division, the Rental  
13 Assistance Program, the Legal Services Initiatives  
14 unit, and the Early Intervention Outreach Team, all  
15 of which are vital partners in assisting New Yorkers  
16 in need and contributing to the first part of the  
17 Mayor's Turning the Tide plan to prevent homelessness  
18 where ever possible.

19 A system built upon, excuse me, a system built  
20 over time against the back drop of affordable housing  
21 scarcity structural inequality and severally rent  
22 burdened New Yorkers. The reforms and initiatives we  
23 are implementing are taking hold despite prior  
24 decades of underinvestment in affordable housing and  
25 rental assistance.

3 DSS serves 3 million clients each year. Poverty  
4 and homelessness are often attributed to individual  
5 decision making and individual circumstances, rather  
6 than underlying structural inequality. However,  
7 structural inequality is a reality for the families  
8 and individuals who serve every day. We are making  
9 progress. Our Census for 2017, 2018, and 2019 has  
10 remained flat year over year for the first time in  
11 more than a decade at approximately 60,000.

12 Today, the New York City Department of Homeless  
13 Services Census is fewer than 55,000 but we still  
14 have much work to do to address the problems that  
15 built up over many years.

16 As I begin my testimony, it is important to  
17 briefly provide some historical context. From 1994  
18 to 2014, the shelter population in New York City  
19 increased 115 percent and between 2011 and 2014,  
20 following the abrupt ended Advantage Rental  
21 Assistance program, the DHS shelter Census increased  
22 by 38 percent.

23 During this same time, New York City faced  
24 increasing economic inequality as a result of  
25 stagnant wages, a lack of affordable housing, and an  
increased cost of living. Rents increased by more

1  
2 than 18 percent while wages increased by less than 5  
3 percent and 150,000 rent regulated apartments were  
4 lost. Combined these and other trends meant that by  
5 2015 the city only had half the housing it needed for  
6 about 3 million low-income New Yorkers. And while  
7 the city's rental vacancy rate of 5 percent poses a  
8 problem for people across all incomes, renters who  
9 are only able to afford an apartment costing \$800 or  
10 less must search in the market with a vacancy rate of  
11 a mere 1.15 percent in 2017, down from 1.8 percent in  
12 2014.

13 Today, roughly three out of every ten New York  
14 City renters are severely rent burdened, spending  
15 more than 50 percent of their income on rent. Many  
16 of these individuals and families facing rent burden  
17 are also those who cycle in and out of poverty,  
18 living just one personal crisis away from  
19 homelessness. COVID-19 has only exacerbated this  
20 crisis.

21 Preventing homelessness whenever we can, a  
22 prevention first model has been key to addressing the  
23 homeless crisis that has built up over four decades  
24 by stopping homelessness in the first place. Our  
25 prevention model includes three key initiatives. An

3 expansion of the network of neighborhood based,  
4 homebased offices in all five boroughs and universal  
5 access to counsel through the Civil Office of Justice  
6 and Rental Assistance.

7 Homebase is a community based prevention program  
8 and serves as the first point of entry for those at  
9 risk of becoming homeless. Under this  
10 Administration, we expanded a number of homebased  
11 locations from 14 in 2014 to 26 in 2020. This  
12 expansion increases access so that people can reserve  
13 close to home. At these locations, our contracted  
14 providers work with families and individuals to  
15 determine the prevention and diversion tools for  
16 which they are eligible including on site processing  
17 and triaging of public assistance and rental  
18 assistance, landlords and family mediation,  
19 educational advancement, employment opportunities,  
20 and financial literacy services.

21 The numbers of households served by Homebase in  
22 FY20 was 28,700. Almost tripling the 11,900  
23 households served in Fiscal '14. Through Homebase,  
24 we also increased access to payment of emergency rent  
25 and utility arrears to assist New Yorkers at risk of

1  
2 eviction remain in their homes and to cover the  
3 increasing cost of rent.

4 To date, this Administration has provided  
5 emergency rent arrears to approximately 50,000  
6 households each fiscal year since FY15 and over a  
7 quarter of a million grants to households since 2014.  
8 The average payment per case between July 2019 to  
9 April 2020 was \$4,231. We also made the payment  
10 process more efficient and quicker by replacing the  
11 old system of generated checks at each individual HRA  
12 job center with a centralized rent arrears processing  
13 unit.

14 Moreover, we have implemented an electronic  
15 benefits payment system for Housing Authority rent  
16 arrears payments and we are developing a similar  
17 payment system for private landlords. Using Access  
18 HRA class can confirm that the rent was paid to their  
19 landlords and reform we work to codify in state law.

20 Under this Administration, we exponentially  
21 expanded free legal services for New Yorkers facing  
22 eviction and landlord harassment. Funding for legal  
23 services for tenants increase more than 24 since  
24 2014. Roughly 6 million to more than 128 million  
25 currently, growing to 166 million in the baseline

1 budget when the right to counsel program is  
2 implemented fully. With this investment, residential  
3 evictions by marshals declined by 41 percent since  
4 2013.  
5

6 In 2019 alone, evictions decreased by 15 percent.  
7 The largest single year decreased since the launch of  
8 the city's universal access to counsel program. In  
9 FY19, OCJ funded legal organizations, provided legal  
10 assistance to over 41,000 households across New York  
11 City facing housing challenges. Comprising over  
12 105,000 tenants and their household members. This  
13 reflected a 24 percent increase in households served  
14 compared to the prior year and a 74 percent increase  
15 compared to FY17.

16 Before the formal launch of Universal Access, as  
17 of December 2019, nearly 400,000 New Yorkers received  
18 free legal representation, advice, or assistance in  
19 eviction and other housing related matters since 2014  
20 through Tenant Legal Service Programs administered by  
21 the Human Resource Administrations Office of Civil  
22 Justice in the Homelessness Prevention unit.

23 Rental assistance, streamlined programs, policy,  
24 process changes, HRA's rental assistance programs  
25 help individuals and families move out of shelter or

3 avoid homelessness by providing monthly rental  
4 supplements which bridge the gap between rents and  
5 income.

6 After the city and state cut the Advantage Rental  
7 Assistance program in 2011, homelessness grew by an  
8 additional 38 percent. Upon taking office in 2014,  
9 this Administration jumped in aggressively to fill  
10 the gap and rebuild rental assistance and rehousing  
11 programs from scratch in order to provide families  
12 and individuals with the vital support needed to  
13 secure housing or remain housed today.

14 HRA's rental assistance programs are a critical  
15 component of a multipronged social service strategy  
16 that responds to unmet affordable housing supply  
17 needs. In 2018, HRA streamlined city funded rental  
18 assistance programs for households in or at risk of  
19 going into shelter. Collapsing seven unique programs  
20 into one, making it easier for landlords inclined  
21 alike.

22 The CityFHEPS program designed is consistent with  
23 the settlement with the state [INAUDIBLE 00:49:43]  
24 with respect to State FHEPS. We recognize, excuse me  
25 one second please, technical difficulties. We  
recognize rental assistance is a critical tool to

1  
2 move families and individuals out of shelter and to  
3 prevent entry into shelter. CityFHEPS is entirely  
4 funded through City Tax Levy. To be eligible for  
5 CityFHEPS, households must have a gross income at or  
6 below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and  
7 meet one of the following five criteria's.

8       The household includes someone who served in the  
9 U.S. Armed Forces and is at risk of homelessness or  
10 the household has an unexpired link CityFHEPS or SEPS  
11 letter at the time of CityFHEPS eligibility is  
12 requested. Not available after 2-28-2019 or the  
13 household gets link six or pathway home benefits and  
14 would be eligible for CityFHEPS if they were in a DHS  
15 or HRA shelter or the household was referred by  
16 CityFHEPS qualifying program and DSS determined that  
17 CityFHEPS was needed to avoid shelter entry or the  
18 household was facing eviction import or was evicted  
19 in the past and includes someone who has previously  
20 lived in a DHS shelter or includes someone who has an  
21 active Adult Protective Services, APS case and is  
22 designated community guardianship program or lives in  
23 a rent controlled apartment and will use CityFHEPS to  
24 stay in that apartment.

3 One of the goals of streamlining multiple rental  
4 assistance programs was to increase our ability to  
5 combat discrimination faced by a prospective renters  
6 using subsidized vouchers in the housing market.  
7 Referred to as source of income discrimination. The  
8 streamlining of rental assistance programs has  
9 resulted in more landlords and brokers opening doors  
10 for our neighbors in need while also enabling HRA to  
11 better track and attack SOI discrimination.

12 Fair Housing Litigation Unit FHLU, the process of  
13 securing a rental assistant voucher is an important  
14 first step towards achieving permanent housing for  
15 our clients. Searching for an apartment in New York  
16 City can be arduous for many people. However, it is  
17 particularly difficult when some landlords are  
18 actively discriminating against you based on your  
19 source of income.

20 In New York City, it is illegal for landlords or  
21 real estate brokers to refuse to rent to current or  
22 perspective tenants who use any form of public  
23 assistance to pay their rent, including Section 8,  
24 Supplemental Security Income SSI, HIV AIDS Services  
25 Administration HASA, Family Homelessness and Eviction  
Prevention Supplement FHEPS, CityFHEPS, among others.

3 It is also unlawful for landlords and housing  
4 agents to publish any type of advertisements refusing  
5 to accept these programs, including online or print.

6 In May of 2017, the Department of Social Services  
7 DSS, Source of Income discrimination unit SOI, was  
8 established to combat illegal practices that prevent  
9 New Yorkers from securing housing opportunities.

10 Today, the unit has been expanded and renamed the  
11 Fair Housing Litigation Unit. This units primary  
12 focus remains combating source of income  
13 discrimination but it has been renamed in recognition  
14 of the fact that SOI discrimination is often  
15 intertwined with other forms of discrimination. The  
16 unit works to prevent and prosecute instances of  
17 housing discrimination based on loss of source of  
18 income via multiprong approach that includes  
19 education and outreach.

20 Pre-complaint intervention, investigations, and  
21 filing and prosecuting complaints on behalf of the  
22 city alleging a pattern or practice of source of  
23 income discrimination.

24 When other forms of discrimination are identified  
25 in an SOI case, the unit will take steps to address  
those issues as well. On behalf of renters utilizing

3 rental assistance, their Fair Housing Litigation Unit  
4 takes decisive legal action against landlords.  
5 Including in New York State Supreme Court or  
6 discrimination based on sources of income by  
7 intervening whenever and wherever those seeking  
8 housing may encounter in the housing process. From  
9 inquiry and application through lease signing.

10 The units creation sends a powerful message to  
11 city landlords that refuse to rent to New Yorkers  
12 receiving public assistance to pay their rent. We  
13 are here to work with all landlords but will not  
14 stand for discrimination. We have lawyers working to  
15 address this illegal, discriminatory, behavior and we  
16 are prepared to intervene or prosecute to ensure all  
17 New Yorkers can access the housing opportunities that  
18 are rightfully theirs as they get back on their feet.

19 Coupled with our rental assistance programs, DSS  
20 source of income discrimination unit has proven to be  
21 an unformattable tool in fighting housing  
22 discrimination fueling homelessness in our city.

23 FHLU prevents and prosecutes instances of housing  
24 discrimination using a multiprong approach.  
25 Education and outreach, the unit provides training on  
fair housing across the five boroughs for legal

3 service provides, not-for-profit, community based  
4 organizations, tenant advocacy groups, and DSS, HRA,  
5 and DHS staff.

6 The unit will also address adequate inquiries  
7 relating to fair hearing concerns. Pre-complaint  
8 intervention, the unit reviews complaints and as  
9 appropriate conducts intervention through negotiating  
10 with brokers and landlords and leasing for any city  
11 resident seeking tenancy. Robust Fair Housing and  
12 Testing Investigations, the unit manages an extensive  
13 citywide testing operation that will use secret  
14 shoppers to identify all types of housing  
15 discrimination. Filing and prosecuting complaints on  
16 behalf of the city alleging pattern or practice  
17 discrimination, through a designation from the New  
18 York City Law Department, the unit is authorized to  
19 file cases alleging pattern or practice  
20 discrimination on behalf of the city.

21 Since this establishment, FHLU, DSS, SOI unit  
22 filed several cases against landlords in New York  
23 State Supreme Court for discrimination based on  
24 source of income. In June 2018, the unit filed its  
25 first two cases against New York City landlords in  
New York State Supreme Court for discrimination based

3 on source of income. In the first case, City of New  
4 York versus St. Marks Hamilton LCC and Oxford Reality  
5 Group LLC, property management company Oxford Reality  
6 told multiple callers seeking housing that vouchers  
7 were not accepted and to see new states rental  
8 apartment complex in Staten Island.

9 In the second case, City of New York versus  
10 Everton Campbell Atlas Reality Associates INC. DSS  
11 initiated an investigation that found advertisements  
12 containing discriminatory language for units located  
13 in the Bronx being published on multiple real estate  
14 websites including apartmentfinder.com, hotpads.com,  
15 and apartments.com. The discriminatory language  
16 included phrases such as, not accepting any vouchers,  
17 no vouchers are being accepted for this apartment and  
18 this apartment is not accepting any vouchers.

19 In July of 2019, the DSS SOI unit filed its third  
20 case in the New York Supreme Court for discrimination  
21 based on source of income. In this case, the City of  
22 New York versus Samson Management LLC, 700 Victory  
23 Boulevard, New House Reality Inc and Lelu[SP?] and  
24 Lili Lu, an investigation found that only Lili Lu,  
25 the exclusive broker for the apartments, a 200 plus  
unit building on Staten Island owned by 700 Victory

3 Boulevard LLC and managed by Samson Management LLC  
4 was systematically denying housing opportunities to  
5 perspective tenants with vouchers by failing to  
6 follow up with them regarding available apartments,  
7 while following up with non-voucher holders regarding  
8 the same apartments.

9 Samson Management LLC owns or manages over 5,000  
10 residential units across New York City. It has been  
11 the subject of multiple federal investigation and  
12 class action lawsuits regarding discrimination for  
13 decades.

14 This case was initiated by the Fair Hearing  
15 Litigation Unit, developed fully through in-house  
16 capabilities, and then referred to the Fair Housing  
17 Justice Center FHJC for additional field testing  
18 required to initiate litigation. The Fair Housing  
19 Litigation Unit takes action on matters received via  
20 intake referral as well as unit initiated  
21 investigations. Pursuing litigation where a pattern  
22 and practice of SOI discrimination is uncovered.  
23 Litigation is a necessary tool that the unit brings  
24 to the table, but it is considered a tool of last  
25 resort.

3 As the units top priority is helping DSS clients  
4 utilizing rental assistance to secure housing, we do  
5 this through an immediate rapid response intervention  
6 in individual cases of SOI discrimination leveraging  
7 all housing placement assistance and social service  
8 tools that the Department of Social Services brings  
9 to help New Yorkers in need get back on their feet.

10 The units first and fastest goal is turning a no  
11 into a yes, so the New Yorkers in search of housing  
12 could be connected to that housing swiftly in order  
13 to stabilize their lives and maintain stability.

14 At DSS HRA, we understand an intentional policies  
15 and practices perpetuate segregation and inequity  
16 across the country and in our city and it will take  
17 concerted effort from all levels of government  
18 working with our partners in the private and non-  
19 private sectors to undue that legacy.

20 Break interjectory and headed in the right  
21 direction beginning to reverse the trend. While the  
22 devastating impacts of economic inequality have  
23 passed in action from prior administrations led to  
24 the homeless crisis we face today, the initiatives of  
25 the Department of Social Services HRA and DHS are  
beginning to reverse the trend.

3 After nearly four decades of an ever increasing  
4 homeless population in New York City, we have broken  
5 the trajectory of growth in the homeless Census and  
6 the new programs, reforms, and investments we are  
7 implementing are headed in the right direction.

8 Currently, the DHS Census is 54,490 in comparison  
9 to 59,561 a year ago. With the number of children  
10 and adults in DHS shelters or families with children  
11 at its lowest point of 10,404 families with 32,194  
12 individuals in these families since December of 2012,  
13 34,497.

14 Over the past months, we have been closely  
15 monitoring the Census and what we've seen in a steady  
16 decline in family homelessness and the steady  
17 increase in the single adult homelessness as COVID-19  
18 has magnified the realities of housing instability  
19 for single adults in New York City.

20 In a five month period from November 2019 to  
21 April of 2020, the numbers of New Yorkers who have  
22 moved out of shelter to permanent housing will remain  
23 in their homes as a result of our rental assistance  
24 programs and supports increased by 9 percent from  
25 139,328 to 147,700 and through June of 2020, we have

3 assisted more than 150,000 individuals move out of  
4 their shelter or avoid entry into shelter.

5 While we know there is still much work to be  
6 done, the data shows that our strategies to address  
7 the crisis that has built up over 40 years are  
8 beginning to take hold. For example, prevention  
9 first, we are keeping more New Yorkers in their homes  
10 by expanding access to legal services through our  
11 first in the nation right to counsel program for  
12 eviction cases. With evictions by Marshal pre-COVID  
13 dropping by 41 percent since 2013. While evictions  
14 are up all across the country. Rehousing helped more  
15 than 150,000 New Yorkers move out of shelters or  
16 avoid homelessness all together through our rental  
17 assistance and rehousing programs.

18 Even in amidst of the COVID pandemic, HRA has  
19 continued to focus on permanent housing placements  
20 which are the best long term option for our clients.  
21 We have rolled out a virtual walk through permanent  
22 housing inspection process to continue move outs. We  
23 are also creating new housing opportunities for  
24 households experiencing homelessness through master  
25 leasing and collaboration with the Department of  
Housing Preservation and Development.

3 Now, we will move onto legislation. Intro. 146,  
4 this bill will require that any individuals or  
5 families receiving rental assistance vouchers  
6 established by the Department of Social Services  
7 would continue to receive assistance as long as the  
8 household continues to meet any other eligibility  
9 requirements. The bill would also require that the  
10 maximum rent towards which rental assistance vouchers  
11 may be applied annually increases at the same rate as  
12 the fair market rents set by the United States  
13 Department of Housing Preservation and Development.  
14 The requirements set by the bill would be subject to  
15 appropriation.

16 As we have testified to, our rental assistance  
17 programs are one of many tools used to address  
18 homelessness and housing instability. Every year  
19 thousands of households exit shelter with a voucher  
20 or receive vouchers in the community. Tens of  
21 thousands of households are currently using vouchers.  
22 Raising the FMR will increase the cost of these  
23 vouchers but not generate savings and that cost grows  
24 over time. As the previously placed population  
25 renews leases at the higher rent.

3 Additionally, raising the cost above the value of  
4 state rental assistance could inadvertently lead to  
5 property owners unlawfully playing favorites by  
6 picking the higher value city vouchers over state  
7 vouchers. We are concerned about fiscal implications  
8 given the current budgets realities facing the city.  
9 Consistency across programs help prevent source of  
10 income discrimination and ensure equal opportunity  
11 for voucher holders trying to get back on their feet.

12 Intro. 2018, this bill will require – excuse me  
13 one second. This bill will require the Department of  
14 Homeless Services DHS to provide services to domestic  
15 violence survivors in all DHS shelters. Services  
16 will be coordinated by a social worker. We look  
17 forward to working with the sponsor to address the  
18 goals of this legislation and we anticipate that  
19 there will be discussions at a staff level concerning  
20 any legal issues that may be implicated by this bill.

21 DHS works very closely with HRA's domestic  
22 violence programs, as well as the Mayor's Office to  
23 end domestic and gender based violence. Our chief  
24 priority is to ensure clients are able to access  
25 services in confidential locations and to ensure  
strong pathways for referrals, including those to the

3 New York City Family Justice Centers FJC's and to  
4 diverse network of community based providers.

5 Intro. 1020, this bill will require that the  
6 Department of Homeless Services and the Human  
7 Resource Administration track and report certain data  
8 regarding rental assistance programs, including  
9 outcomes of Family Homelessness and Eviction  
10 Prevention Supplement FHEPS and any future rental  
11 assistance program created for New York City  
12 residents.

13 We are interested in working with the sponsor to  
14 address the goal and intent of the legislation. The  
15 agency already submits reports to the City Council at  
16 each fiscal plan as agreed upon in a monitors report  
17 concerning rental assistance.

18 Intro. 1339, this bill will require the New York  
19 City Department of Social Services DSS to arrange for  
20 the provision of a written notice to applicants who  
21 are found potentially eligible for rental assistance  
22 programs administered by DSS. The notice will  
23 provide information about protections under the New  
24 York City Human Rights Law related to discrimination  
25 on the basis of a person's lawful source of income.

3 We support the goal of this legislation and want  
4 to work with the sponsor to align with our current  
5 work. DSS currently has information about  
6 protections under the New York City Human Rights Law  
7 related to discrimination on the basis of a person's  
8 lawful source of income and that's a lot of info. It  
9 is included on the CityFHEPS shopping letter.

10 Preconsidered T2020-6576, this bill will require  
11 the Department of Social Services DSS to provide more  
12 information about its rental assistance program,  
13 CityFHEPS online specifically DSS would be required  
14 to make the status of an application or renewal  
15 request available to applicants online.

16 DSS looks forward to working with the sponsor on  
17 this legislation. Currently DSS provides a great  
18 deal of information to clients through Access HRA.  
19 We currently have an RFP in the field to continue to  
20 improve this to. Given procurement rules, we are  
21 limited on what we can discuss today.

22 Thank you again for this opportunity to testify  
23 and I welcome your questions.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Mr. Jordan.  
25 I just want to note for members of the public that  
there is no need to use the raise hand function.

3 Again, there is no need to raise your hand as we will  
4 be calling on you throughout the hearing. Please  
5 listen for your name. The raise hand function is  
6 specifically for Council Members who wish to ask  
7 questions.

8 And now, we will move to Deputy Commissioner Erin  
9 Drinkwater.

10 ERIN DRINKWATER: I don't have additional  
11 testimony for the agency. We can move to CCHR now.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Deputy  
13 Commissioner. So, we will move on to Dana Sussman  
14 Deputy Commissioner Policy and Intergovernmental  
15 Affairs at the Commission on Human Rights.

16 DANA SUSSMAN: Thank you. Good morning Chair  
17 Levin, Chair Eugene, and Members of the Committee's  
18 on General Welfare and Civil and Human Rights. Thank  
19 you for convening today's hearing and for your  
20 commitment to improving access to affordable, fair  
21 housing in our city.

22 I am Dana Sussman Deputy Commissioner for Policy  
23 and Intergovernmental Affairs at the New York City  
24 Commission on Human Rights. Today, I am joined by my  
25 colleague Senior Policy Counsel Zoey Chenitz. We  
will be testifying today in support of the

3 Preconsidered unnumbered bill that would expand  
4 source of income protections under the City Human  
5 Rights Law and also in support of Intro. 2047, which  
6 would prohibit housing discrimination based on arrest  
7 or a criminal record.

8 My testimony will focus primarily on the proposed  
9 expansion of source of income protections and the  
10 Commissions work in this area. As you likely know,  
11 the Commission is the local Civil Rights Enforcement  
12 Agency that enforces the New York City Human Rights  
13 Law, one of the broadest and most protective anti-  
14 discrimination and anti-harassment laws in the  
15 country now totaling 27 protected categories across  
16 nearly all aspects of city living housing,  
17 employment, and public accommodations. In addition  
18 to discriminatory harassment and biased based  
19 profiling by Law Enforcement.

20 By statute, the Commission has two main  
21 functions. First, the Commissions Law Enforcement  
22 Bureau enforces the City Human Rights Law by  
23 investigating complaints of discrimination from the  
24 public initiating its own investigations on behalf of  
25 the city and utilizing its in-house testing program  
to help identify entities breaking the law.

3 Second, the Community Relations Bureau which is  
4 comprised of community service centers in each of the  
5 city's five boroughs. The Commission provides free  
6 workshops in individuals rights and employers,  
7 businesses and housing providers obligations under  
8 the City Human Rights Law and creates programming and  
9 outreach on Human Rights and Civil Rights issues.

10 In the last five and a half years, since  
11 Commissioner and Chair Carmelyn Malalis began her  
12 tenure. The Commission has implemented 31 amendments  
13 to the City Human Rights Law, including the nations  
14 broadest band the box criminal history discrimination  
15 protections and employment. The nation's first  
16 salary history ban and expansions of protections and  
17 new requirements related to sexual harassment and  
18 lactation accommodations, among many others.

19 The Commissions work has not paused because of  
20 the COVID-19 pandemic. To the contrary, our work has  
21 continued, expanded, pivoted to address current  
22 challenges including racial disparities and access to  
23 healthcare, housing, and essential needs. The needs  
24 of frontline workers who have disabilities or who are  
25 pregnant and need accommodations to continue to do

1  
2 their job safely and the rise in anti-Asian bias and  
3 discrimination.

4 As we just announced yesterday, the Commission  
5 has assessed a record \$7.5 million in damages and  
6 penalties for violations of the City Human Rights Law  
7 in Fiscal Year 2020. This represents a 550 percent  
8 increase in damages and penalties since Commissioner  
9 Malalis took over the agency in 2015. These figures  
10 exceed damages and penalties in the last fiscal year  
11 by 18 percent and represent nearly double the damages  
12 in penalties compared to Fiscal Year 2018.

13 Further, the Commission works to resolve cases  
14 not just for monetary relief in the form of damages  
15 and penalties but has applied creative approaches  
16 informed by restorative justice offering to repair  
17 the harm experienced by individuals in communities  
18 impacted by the discrimination.

19 For example, this year the Commission has  
20 negotiated Resolutions that require respondents to  
21 invest in paid internship, apprenticeship, or  
22 employment pipeline opportunities for  
23 underrepresented groups and to create new high level  
24 positions to oversee such efforts and to engage with  
25 community based organizations to recruit workers or

3 perspective tenants. And the Commission has  
4 maintained the cooperative approach to businesses and  
5 public accommodations it established five years ago.

6 In many instances involving first time violators  
7 of the City Human Rights Law, where there is no  
8 complainant harmed by the violation. The Commission  
9 has sought to educate businesses about their legal  
10 obligations and work with them in creating  
11 nondiscriminatory policies and practices rather than  
12 levying fines. Many small business owners and  
13 landlords themselves experience different forms of  
14 discrimination in other areas of their lives. In our  
15 approach in certain situations to educate rather than  
16 penalize has greater impact in furthering the  
17 understanding in adoption of human rights in this  
18 city.

19 While assessing a record level of damages and  
20 penalties, the Commission also closed a new high of  
21 1,066 cases and reduced the average case processing  
22 time by 100 days, an incredibly challenging feat,  
23 especially under current circumstances and within a  
24 telework environment.

25 The Commissions Law Enforcement Bureau this past  
fiscal year filed 525 new cases and completed 403

1 successful emergency interventions. The Commission  
2 settled 267 cases and completed 43 mediations, both  
3 representing increases from the prior fiscal year.  
4 These increases are a testament to the dedication of  
5 the Commission staff who remain steadfast in their  
6 efforts to vindicate New Yorkers human rights. So  
7 many of our own staff have lost parents,  
8 grandparents, and other family members in the last  
9 few months and/or were forced to contend with  
10 pandemic related challenges for themselves and their  
11 families.  
12

13 The agency also received an increase number of  
14 reports of discrimination in Fiscal Year 2020 from  
15 9,804 in Fiscal Year 2019 to 10,015 in Fiscal Year  
16 '20. Consistent with past years, the protected  
17 categories of disability, gender and race were the  
18 top three most reported areas of discrimination.

19 I'm now going to highlight the Commissions work,  
20 long standing work on combating source of income  
21 discrimination.

22 Combating discrimination based on lawful source  
23 of income has been a major priority for Commissioner  
24 Malalis since the very beginning of her tenure. In  
25 her first year, the Commission quadrupled the number

1 of investigations into lawful source of income,  
2 filing 90 cases. A 300 percent increase from the  
3 prior year's 22 cases. In 2016, the Commission  
4 issued its highest civil penalty in a source of  
5 income discrimination case in commission history.  
6 Fining Best Apartments Incorporated, a management  
7 company with control over more than 1,000 units  
8 throughout the city \$100,000 for refusing to show a  
9 perspective tenant an apartment after he revealed he  
10 had a Section 8 voucher.  
11

12 In January 2017, the Commission announced five  
13 commission initiated cases filed against large  
14 landlords and brokers that collectively controlled  
15 approximately 20,000 units for repeatedly  
16 discriminating against perspective tenants based on  
17 their use of housing vouchers. A violation of the  
18 City Human Rights Law.

19 The complaints, which the Commission filed on  
20 behalf of the city followed proactive commission led  
21 investigations developed from tips from perspective  
22 tenants as well as the Commissions testing program.

23 The landlords and brokerage firms charged with  
24 discriminatory practices include Park Chester, River  
25 Park, Goldfarb, Martini and ABECO management.

3 Then, in 2018, the Commission announced a launch  
4 of a groundbreaking dedicated source of income unit  
5 to provide rapid response advocacy and interventions  
6 for people experiencing discrimination while seeking  
7 housing using vouchers. The unit undertakes  
8 emergency interventions to stop discrimination in its  
9 tracks. Our staff contacts the landlords or brokers  
10 who are in danger of violating the City Human Rights  
11 Law directly. To educate them and advocate for the  
12 rights of tenants. In the last two fiscal years, the  
13 unit has completed over 400 emergency interventions  
14 on behalf of New Yorkers with housing vouchers, which  
15 includes getting them into housing they had been  
16 denied. Along with filing nearly 150 cases and  
17 conducting testing and commission initiated  
18 investigations.

19 Since 2014, the Commission has assessed over \$1.2  
20 million in damages and penalties in source of income  
21 cases. Of which over 450,000 were assessed in Fiscal  
22 Year 2020 alone. The Commissions Law Enforcement  
23 Bureau has taken an expansive approach to address  
24 landlords use of other requirements like minimum  
25 income requirements and credit checks to exclude  
voucher holders.

3 In 2018, the Commission published materials that  
4 explicitly prohibit the use of credit checks when a  
5 voucher covers 100 percent of the rent.

6 In addition, the Commissions materials also state  
7 that where the tenants rental portion is calculated  
8 based on the tenants income, it is a violation of the  
9 City Human Rights Law to impose any additional income  
10 requirements on applicants for housing.

11 The Commissions materials, which include three  
12 separate documents, with specific frequently asked  
13 questions targeted to landlords, brokers and agents  
14 and voucher holders are available in multiple  
15 languages on our website.

16 Earlier this year, based on a case the Commission  
17 initially brought and New York State Appeals Court  
18 held vouchers for security deposits are, as the  
19 Commission had asserted, a lawful source of income  
20 and landlords must therefore accept them.

21 The Commission brought the case in 2017 against  
22 the Lefrak organization on behalf of a woman who was  
23 denied an apartment because she was seeking to use a  
24 security voucher to pay the security deposit. The  
25 Commission's case built on a prior decision in order  
issued by Commissioner Malalis, finding that the

1 denial of a perspective tenant security voucher was  
2 source of income discrimination. The upheld court  
3 decision ensures that security vouchers can continue  
4 to be administered by HRA and individuals who use  
5 them are protected under the City Human Rights Law.  
6

7 In the last Fiscal Year, the Commission has  
8 pioneered a new requirement in source of income  
9 discrimination resolutions, mandating that landlords  
10 found to have violated the City Human Rights Law  
11 source of income protections reserve or set aside a  
12 specific number of units in their housing stock for  
13 voucher holders. This novel strategy applies the  
14 Commissions commitment to restorative justice to  
15 source of income discrimination cases.

16 Not only does it repair the harm to the impacted  
17 complainant by ensuring they obtain housing along  
18 with damages but it also creates a structural  
19 response to the broader crisis of access to housing  
20 for voucher holders and reduces the likelihood of  
21 future tenants facing the same kind of  
22 discrimination. This new approach was just profiled  
23 in an article in the Gothamist last week and I  
24 encourage the Council Members to check out that  
25

1 article if you haven't already and hear some of the  
2 stories of the complainants that were helped.  
3

4 I highlight now several case resolutions. This  
5 is just a small sample of the many that the  
6 Commission has worked on, the Commission staff has  
7 worked on over the past years. In June 2020, a  
8 complainant, a Section 8 recipient, filed a complaint  
9 alleging that her landlord refused to allow here to  
10 begin using her Section 8 voucher after she became  
11 eligible for the voucher during her tenancy. The  
12 Commission's Law Enforcement Bureau investigation  
13 revealed that respondents intentionally failed to  
14 process the legally required paperwork for her  
15 voucher.

16 After the Law Enforcement Bureau issued a  
17 probable cause finding, the parties entered into a  
18 conciliation agreement in which the respondents  
19 agreed to pay complainant \$15,000 in emotional  
20 distress damages, waive over \$14,000 in rent arrears  
21 and other fees, train employees with job duties  
22 related to reviewing or evaluating rental  
23 applications and revise their tenant screening  
24 policies and display the Commissions Fair Housing  
25

1 poster at any and all of their buildings in their  
2 portfolio.  
3

4 And another settlement from February 2020, a  
5 perspective tenant who had received rental assistance  
6 through Section 8 filed a complaint alleging that a  
7 broker would not allow her to apply for an apartment  
8 because of a rental voucher. At the time, the  
9 complainant was a homeless mother.

10 Respondents cooperated fully with the  
11 Commission's investigation. Complainant and  
12 respondents entered into a conciliation agreement  
13 requiring respondents to pay \$25,000 in emotional  
14 distress damages and lost housing opportunities  
15 damages to complainant and \$15,000 in civil  
16 penalties. Respondents also updated their policies  
17 and source of income discrimination and agreed to  
18 attend an anti-discrimination training.

19 In October 2019, the Commission settled a case  
20 involved in source of income discrimination by  
21 Michael Partridge Reality Cooperation. In which a  
22 frontline staffer told a perspective tenant that  
23 vouchers were not accepted. The Commission  
24 negotiated \$5,000 in emotional distress damages to  
25 the victim and ordered anti-discrimination training

1  
2 for the respondents and creation of the anti-  
3 discrimination policy.

4 And finally, in August of 2019, the Commission  
5 ordered a landlord with 15 buildings to pay \$20,000  
6 in emotional distress damages and \$4,000 in civil  
7 penalties for refusing to accept a perspective  
8 tenants Section 8 voucher. The tenant had lost her  
9 voucher as a result of discrimination and had to seek  
10 alternative housing options. In addition to her  
11 voucher restoration, the landlord agreed to train all  
12 employees with job duties related to reviewing and  
13 accepting perspective tenants and to post to the  
14 Commission's Fair Housing poster in all of their  
15 buildings in New York City.

16 My testimony now includes a chart that shows the  
17 numbers of inquiries, complaints, commission  
18 initiated investigations and successful pre-complete  
19 interventions from calendar years 2015, 2016, 2017,  
20 and Fiscal Years 2018, 2019, and 2020.

21 I won't go over all of these numbers but if  
22 people are interested, this testimony will be posted  
23 on the Commission's website later today and we can  
24 share those.

3 The Commission's Community Relations Bureau has  
4 also engaged in deep community outreach and  
5 engagement to educate New Yorkers on their rights to  
6 be free from discrimination based on lawful source of  
7 income. During Fair Housing month each year, the  
8 Commission hostesses symposium and over the past  
9 several years, source of income discrimination has  
10 been a key focus. We built relationships with  
11 community based organizations doing critical work on  
12 the ground who make direct connections to our team  
13 and help us spread the word about our work.  
14 Including Neighbors Together, Housing Court Answers,  
15 Community Action for Save Apartments, Legal Hand,  
16 Nazareth House, Part of the Solution, Asian Americans  
17 for Equality, St. Nicks Alliance Community  
18 Development Corporation, Northwest Bronx Community  
19 and Clergy Coalition, North Brooklyn Housing Task  
20 Force, and Met Council.

21 In Fiscal Year 2020, the Commission conducted  
22 over 40 Fair Housing Workshops, held seven onsite in  
23 community mobile housing rates clinics, and  
24 participated in over 50 additional fair housing  
25 related events. The Commission supports the proposal  
to reduce the current six unit minimum for

3 jurisdiction on source of income cases to three  
4 units. Which will help ensure access for New Yorkers  
5 with vouchers to a broader range of affordable  
6 housing staff.

7 As you may be aware, last year, New York State  
8 passed source of income protections statewide that  
9 are broader than current protections under the City  
10 Human Rights Law and we support more closely aligning  
11 the two statutes.

12 I will turn it over to my colleague Zoey Chenitz  
13 to discuss Intro. 2047. Thank you for the  
14 opportunity today and I just want to express  
15 gratitude as well to the first panel. That brought  
16 to life so much of the work that we are all trying to  
17 address and it is not easy to speak about one's  
18 personal experience and I am deeply grateful that I  
19 had the opportunity to hear their stories today.

20 The Commission believes that access for all New  
21 Yorkers to affordable housing free from  
22 discrimination is key to the city's wellbeing and we  
23 look forward to working with the Council further on  
24 these bills. Thank you.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Zoey Chenitz, you may begin.

3 ZOEY CHENITZ: Thank you. Good morning Chair's  
4 Levin and Eugene and Members of the General Welfare  
5 Committee and the Committee on Civil and Human  
6 Rights. Thank you for convening today's hearing. I  
7 am Zoey Chenitz Senior Policy Counsel at the New York  
8 City Commission on Human Rights and I am pleased to  
9 represent the Commission today in support of Intro.  
10 2047, which would amend the New York City Human  
11 Rights Law to prohibit most housing providers from  
12 inquiring about and discriminating against applicants  
13 based on their arrest for conviction history.

14 Intro. 2047 aligns with the Commissions  
15 longstanding commitment to racial justice and greater  
16 social equity. As we have been reminded by recent  
17 events including the public health crisis caused by  
18 the pandemic and widespread social activism seeking  
19 to end systemic racism, two frequently disparities  
20 play out a long lines of race. Whether we are  
21 talking about issues of poverty, access to  
22 healthcare, health outcomes, food security or  
23 involvement in the criminal legal system.

24 Policies like Intro. 2047 have been enacted in  
25 city's across the country. They are growing in  
popularity because city's recognize that given the

1 long history of racial discrimination in the criminal  
2 legal system, arrests or conviction histories ought  
3 not to bar people from accessing stable housing for  
4 themselves and their families.  
5

6 Policies like this one represent a step toward  
7 ensuring that whether they are recently returning to  
8 their communities from custody or if their records  
9 are older, New Yorkers with arrests and conviction  
10 histories and their families are given the best  
11 possible opportunity to thrive. Our conversations  
12 with residents and advocates and communities across  
13 the city, consistently reaffirm the desire for such  
14 support.

15 Our support for this legislation also stems from  
16 the Commissions long track record of enforcing  
17 protections in the employment context for New Yorkers  
18 with a history of criminal system involvement. The  
19 first such protections were added in 1977 when the  
20 Commission was given joint enforcement authority with  
21 the New York State Division of Human Rights over  
22 Correction Law Article 23A.

23 Over the years, additional protections were added  
24 to the New York City Human Rights Law. Most notably  
25 with the passage of the Fair Chance Act in 2015 which

1 prohibits most employers, labor organizations and  
2 employment agencies from inquiring about or  
3 considering a job applicants criminal history until  
4 after a conditional offered employment in times of  
5 need. And guarantees a job applicants receive proper  
6 notice and an opportunity to be heard before they may  
7 be rejected from a job based on an individualized  
8 assessment of their criminal history.  
9

10 Since 2015, the Commission has filed 486  
11 complaints alleging employment discrimination based  
12 on criminal history. And as of last week, has 145  
13 open matters related to employment discrimination  
14 based on criminal history. The Commission has  
15 conducted a total of 1,261 tests related to Fair  
16 Chance Act, excuse me, related to the Fair Chance Act  
17 from Fiscal Year 2016 through to the present and  
18 filed a total of 100 commission initiated complaints  
19 resulting from investigative testing.

20 In Fiscal Year 2020, the Commission assessed  
21 approximately \$800,000 in damages and civil penalties  
22 arising from claims of employment discrimination  
23 based on criminal history. The Commissions Law  
24 Enforcement Bureau has also been successful in  
25 obtaining far reaching policy reforms that address

3 employment discrimination based on criminal history  
4 in systemic ways with a focus on restorative justice  
5 remedies.

6 For example, as the Commission testified in  
7 January, the Law Enforcement Bureau has settled cases  
8 in which respondents have among other things, agreed  
9 to partner with reentry organizations to  
10 intentionally include people with criminal histories  
11 in the job applicant pool to incorporate New York  
12 City's Ban the Box policies and their job  
13 applications for offices nationwide and to  
14 voluntarily disregard certain categories of  
15 convictions that are not otherwise subject to such  
16 restrictions when accessing job applicants.

17 Including all convictions more than seven years old,  
18 marijuana convictions over two years old, convictions  
19 where the person participated in a diversion program,  
20 and juvenile convictions.

21 The Commission is also grateful for its close  
22 partnerships with many advocates and community groups  
23 that work with us to educate New Yorkers about their  
24 rights under the Fair Chance Act including the Legal  
25 Aid Society, Legal Services NYC, The Legal Action  
Center, Local New York, The Community Services

3 Society, the Fortune Society, and the Osborne  
4 Association, among others.

5 Despite the absence of specific protections based  
6 on criminal history, in 2018, the Commission  
7 succeeded in resolving a case on behalf of New  
8 Yorkers who have been denied housing based on their  
9 criminal histories, utilizing a desperate impact  
10 theory of discrimination.

11 The case was against PRC Management LLC, a  
12 housing management company that controls 100  
13 buildings with 5,000 units citywide and that had a  
14 policy of categorically denying housing to applicants  
15 with criminal histories. The Commission charged that  
16 this policy had a desperate based on race, color, and  
17 national origin since Black and Latinx New Yorkers  
18 are disproportionately impacted by arrest,  
19 conviction, and incarceration rates citywide and  
20 applicants were not afforded an individualized  
21 assessment.

22 The theory of this case was consistent with Fair  
23 Housing Act Enforcement guidelines issued in 2016 by  
24 the United States Department for Housing and Urban  
25 Development or HUD. Under the terms of the  
settlement, PRC management agreed to pay \$55,000 in

1 emotional distress damages to a victim who was  
2 impacted in the case and \$25,000 in civil penalties,  
3 to revise its application and screening policies,  
4 train staff on its new policies and the law and  
5 invite applicants with criminal histories who were  
6 previously denied housing to reapply.  
7

8 The Commission strongly supports Intro. 2047  
9 which would provide the first ever housing  
10 protections for New Yorkers specifically based on  
11 criminal system involvement. Because desperate  
12 impact claims such as those in the case against PRC  
13 Management can be harder to investigate and proved in  
14 claims of direct discrimination, this addition to the  
15 law would significantly strengthen protections in  
16 this area.

17 Intro. 2047 would effectively prohibit  
18 discrimination against perspective tenants who have  
19 criminal records by making it an unlawful  
20 discriminatory practice under the New York City Human  
21 Rights Law for a real estate broker, landlord, or  
22 their employee or agent to inquire about or take an  
23 adverse action based on a rental applicants arrest or  
24 conviction history. Adverse actions would include  
25 denial of a rental application, higher application

3 fees, failure to take action on an application or the  
4 imposition of additional requirements or less  
5 favorable lease turns.

6 The bill would also prohibit housing providers  
7 from directly or indirectly expressing a limitation  
8 based on a rental applicants arrest or conviction  
9 history. For example, by stating in ads and  
10 application materials that they will not approve  
11 tenants with criminal records.

12 The bill exempts from its coverage any action  
13 taken pursuant to a federal or state law or  
14 regulation that requires consideration of criminal  
15 history or housing purposes. It also would not apply  
16 to people renting out a room in their or their  
17 families home or to people seeking a roommate.  
18 Importantly, the bill does not restrict housing  
19 providers ability to pursue legal remedies if the  
20 tenants conduct violates their lease turns.

21 Intro. 2047's simple straight forward prohibition  
22 on inquiries and adverse actions based on criminal  
23 history provides clear guidance for housing providers  
24 including smaller and less sophisticated actors  
25 concerning their obligations under the law.

3 New York City often leads the nation in  
4 introducing and implementing new legal protections  
5 strengthening human rights. In this area, it is time  
6 to amend our lot to join the slate of other  
7 jurisdictions who have already passed these  
8 protections. These jurisdictions include Seattle,  
9 Berkeley, Oakland, the District of Columbia, Los  
10 Angeles, San Francisco, Detroit, and Oregon, among  
11 many others.

12 Intro. 2047 would place New York City among those  
13 jurisdictions including Seattle, Berkeley and Oakland  
14 with the strongest housing protections based on  
15 criminal history.

16 Expanding the New York City Human Rights Law to  
17 protect against housing discrimination based on  
18 criminal history would offer multiple potential  
19 benefits for the wellbeing of our city. Such  
20 protections help to limit disparities and access  
21 stable housing for protected classes of people who  
22 already face discrimination in housing and who are  
23 over represented in the criminal legal system.

24 This includes Black and Latinx people, LGBTQI  
25 people, people with mental health disabilities,  
victims of sexual violence and increasingly women and

3 mothers. By reducing the collateral consequences of  
4 criminal history in the housing context, this bill  
5 can help to alleviate problems of housing  
6 discrimination and segregation.

7 Intro. 2047 can also help to address rates of  
8 homelessness and housing instability within the city.  
9 According to the coalition for the homeless, in 2018,  
10 at least 20 percent of adults who entered New York  
11 City shelters did so directly from a jail or prison.  
12 And the research shows that jail and prison stays  
13 tend to increase the risk of homelessness.

14 As we know, a stable home is the foundation for a  
15 persons wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of their  
16 families and communities. A stable home enables  
17 people to find and maintain employment and promotes  
18 better health outcomes since people with a stable  
19 home are better able to receive health treatments and  
20 to care for children and other dependents.

21 Increasing access to housing also significantly  
22 reduced rates of child poverty and rates of  
23 recidivism. In short, we all stand to benefit when  
24 barriers are removed stable affordable housing for  
25 our fellow New Yorkers.

3 While this bill will not on its own solve all of  
4 the challenges facing people with criminal history,  
5 we believe it is an essential step toward helping our  
6 city move toward a brighter future.

7 For all of these reasons I've discussed, the  
8 Commission strongly supports Intro. 2047 and we look  
9 forward to working on it with you. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to the members of  
11 the Administration for your testimony. We are now  
12 going to move on to questions for the Administration.  
13 I want to remind Council Members that should you have  
14 questions, please use the Zoom raise hand function  
15 and I will call on you in the order in which you have  
16 raised your hands. We will now turn to our Co-Chairs  
17 Chair Levin and Chair Eugene for questions. Chair  
18 Levin, you may begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to pass it over to  
20 Chair Eugene for a moment because I've got some  
21 childcare issues at the moment but I will be  
22 listening and then I will come back to my questions  
23 after.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright Chair Levin, we will  
25 now pass it over to Chair Eugene for questions.

3 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much Chair  
4 Levin. Thank you very much and I want to take the  
5 opportunity also to thank all the participants, the  
6 members of the community who came to testify and to  
7 share with us their situation. The situation they  
8 are facing in the housing system and I want to thank  
9 also all the members of the panel, their testimonies  
10 also and one of the things I want to mention is Mr.  
11 Jordan was talking about the different programs in  
12 front of the Administration to address the  
13 homelessness and also the discriminations. But based  
14 on what he said, it seemed that everything that is  
15 correct is an okay and beautiful but Mr. Jordan, do  
16 you believe that the system is well structured enough  
17 and you have done everything possible to ensure that  
18 the people who have vouchers, who are in the housing  
19 system can have access to suitable housing and that  
20 can now fulfill their needs and also bring them some  
21 dignity as members of our society?

22 BRUCE JORDAN: So, thank you Chair Eugene for  
23 your question.

24 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: You are welcome.

25 BRUCE JORDAN: Given the tools that we have at  
hand, I think my testimony has demonstrated that we

3 have made tremendous strides in servicing our  
4 clients. As I indicated, I mean, we moved out  
5 150,000 individuals and/or prevented them from going  
6 into shelter. The Census are down to 54,000,  
7 evictions are down 41 percent. We work tirelessly  
8 with our providers, both shelter providers and also  
9 with our providers in the community such as Homebase  
10 and Legal Service providers to closely monitor any  
11 pending eviction actions or any barriers to moveouts  
12 and we proactively work together to address them on a  
13 case by case basis as best we possibly can.

14 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Hello? It seems there is a  
15 problem with - Hello?

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Mr. Jordan you are on mute.

17 BRUCE JORDAN: Can you hear me now?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

19 BRUCE JORDAN: I would just also add of course  
20 there is always more work to do as I did indicate in  
21 the testimony. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much. Of  
23 course, you know, I always mention what my father  
24 usually said. He usually taught also the children  
25 there is no perfection in life. Whatever you are  
doing, how great you could be, how intelligent you

3 can be but you will never reach perfection. There is  
4 always room for improvement and he used to say that  
5 every time before you go to sleep. Take a moment to  
6 think about what you have done during the day and  
7 what you will be doing tomorrow and see what you can  
8 do to improve what you have done.

9 And based on your experience, what do you believe  
10 that we as a city can do to make the housing system  
11 better? Based on your experience, based on  
12 everything that you have said, in order to ensure  
13 that the people who are benefiting from the housing  
14 system, who have vouchers. Because what we have been  
15 seeing throughout the city and also in the  
16 testimonies, it seems to indicate that we have to do  
17 a lot. Could you just elaborate? Give us some  
18 example. Something that you believe that we should  
19 do to better the system. Any new approach, any way  
20 to rethink the system that we have.

21 I don't say that we are doing you know, a lot but  
22 as I said, there is no perfection and you do agree  
23 that much more need to be done. Is there anything  
24 that you are thinking about or what you think that we  
25 can do to the circumstances right now, to what we  
have right now. What could we do to implement and to

3 better the system that we have in addition to  
4 increasing the vouchers and putting in legislation  
5 and stuff like that. Is there anything that you  
6 believe that we more we can do, we should do?

7 BRUCE JORDAN: Well, thank you once again Chair  
8 Eugene. I think one of the things that we need to  
9 continue to do together is to work with our partners  
10 in both the state and the federal government to  
11 increase the housing supply. As you said in addition  
12 to all the other things that we've been talking about  
13 and trying to do, but we're constantly at this  
14 Administration evaluating what we can do thus, that's  
15 why we streamlined right, in order to make the  
16 programs more easier to make it one and more sellable  
17 and more understandable by both staff, clients, and  
18 landlords and brokers.

19 So, we're constantly evaluating but we have to  
20 work within the means of what we have. But really, I  
21 mean, it's really a supply issue.

22 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much for your  
23 answer. You know, I always, when I'm thinking about  
24 the city, when I'm thinking about our society, I  
25 believe that all of us, we are all members of the  
community. We are all members of the society. We

1  
2 are all human beings. Whenever there is an issue, I  
3 believe regardless of our position, our social and  
4 economical status, we should all come together to  
5 resolve the issues facing our society in our cities.  
6 I may be wrong but that's what I believe on and you  
7 did mention that some of the time, you negotiate with  
8 the landlord, with the brokers because as I said, we  
9 are all in this together. All in this together, you  
10 know, I believe the best way to ease off any issues  
11 is to bring all the departments, everybody at the  
12 table.

13 You mentioned that you have had negotiations with  
14 the brokers. Could you elaborate on those  
15 negotiations? What happened? What did you discuss?  
16 What was the goal in the negotiation and what was the  
17 outcome? Did it reach the outcome, what you were  
18 trying to do by negotiating with the landlord or the  
19 brokers?

20 BRUCE JORDAN: So, thank you once again, Chair  
21 Eugene. I mean, it started with the beginning of the  
22 Administration when we reintroduced and recreated  
23 these subsidies. We had to go on a vigorous campaign  
24 with RSA and the different broker and landlord  
25 organizations and basically try to let them know that

1 this wouldn't be advantage all over again. That  
2 there were different programs. We tried to make them  
3 understand what the rules are. Over time, we tried  
4 to adjust based on the tools we had and add things we  
5 could. So, we added a landlord bonus, we added a  
6 unit whole, we also added basically additional  
7 security type mechanism that if a landlord was  
8 worried about maybe damaging the apartment or maybe  
9 not renting to someone because they felt the security  
10 voucher process didn't work for them or wasn't  
11 enough. They could not only get the security voucher  
12 returned to them but they can get up to \$3,000  
13 additionally towards damages. So, all of these  
14 things came about by this administration who was  
15 willing to sit down and listen to everyone involved  
16 within the means that they had but we could do just  
17 by the city itself going it alone. But once again,  
18 like I said, I don't think we can by ourselves  
19 address the supply demand.  
20

21 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much Mr.  
22 Jordan, thank you. Deputy Commissioner Sussman, I  
23 would like to ask you a few questions. I don't know  
24 if my colleague Council Member Levin is available or  
25

1  
2 can I still you know, enjoy the opportunity to ask a  
3 few questions.

4 So, let me ask some questions to Deputy  
5 Commissioner Sussman. You mentioned something that I  
6 like. You were talking about as I said previously  
7 that we are all in this together and we have to reach  
8 all the partners, regardless if it's good or bad.

9 But you know, everybody, everyone is a partner and  
10 you mentioned Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner  
11 Sussman, that you educate the business owners.

12 That's wonderful. You educate the people. We have  
13 to reenforce law but one of the things that is very  
14 important, education also is very important and I  
15 think that I had the opportunity to discuss that you  
16 know, in detail with the Commissioner herself.

17 Because some of the time people can give value to  
18 rules and regulation and principle because of lack of  
19 information and education. And I question in the  
20 effort that the Human Right Commission is doing and  
21 educating in the business on this and also, what I  
22 call the other partners. Can you elaborate on the  
23 type of training or education that you have had the  
24 opportunity to provide to the business owners in  
25 terms of housing and discrimination in housing and

1  
2 also in the type of discrimination in other issues  
3 effecting the people that we are serving in New York  
4 City.

5 DANA SUSSMAN: Sure, thank you for the question  
6 Chair Eugene. We take training outreach and  
7 education incredibly seriously. It has been a key  
8 part of our ability to ensure that as many New  
9 Yorkers as possible both know what their rights are  
10 but also know what their obligations are under the  
11 City Human Rights Law and as I mentioned, the law has  
12 changed dramatically over the past five or six years  
13 and so, to keep up with those changes and ensure that  
14 people have the tools to comply, we have invested  
15 greatly in building out workshops and trainings and  
16 building our capacity to provide trainings in  
17 multiple languages across the city.

18 Those often used to be held in person, they are  
19 all now virtual and you know, we will continue to  
20 explore the best way to deliver them. We also  
21 require training when we are resolving cases. So, in  
22 many circumstances where we have you know, an  
23 individual landlord or a broker who this is the first  
24 time that we learned that they are violating the City  
25 Human Rights Law or they are unaware of the

1 requirements under the City Human Rights Law. They  
2 might be a small business. They don't have you know,  
3 an in-house attorney to advise them. We would often  
4 in those situations require training by us, so we  
5 know exactly what content they are receiving. It is  
6 free and it is you know, something that we would  
7 offer monthly or quarterly, so that they take the  
8 training, they change their policies, they ensure  
9 that you know customers who are coming to them get  
10 information about their rights and we resolve those  
11 cases without a fine, with a penalty and we move on.

12  
13 Now, if we see those same respondents come back  
14 because we learn of other you know, additional  
15 violations, at that point we would consider monetary  
16 fines or penalties against that respondent in  
17 addition to other potential - but we find that  
18 education and providing sort of an education first  
19 approach, especially with smaller operators is  
20 really, really critical. But we also think that when  
21 there are large operators with you know, housing  
22 stock in the thousands that have resources and know  
23 or should know what the laws are, that we enforce the  
24 law aggressively to ensure that the message is being  
25 sent that violations of the City Human Rights Law

3 impacting large populations of New Yorkers,  
4 particularly vulnerable New Yorkers, those violations  
5 are taken seriously and that there will be  
6 repercussions.

7 So, we have a really broad and sort of varied  
8 approach depending on what the particular situation  
9 of that case and that potential respondent is.

10 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much. I see  
11 that my colleague, Council Member Holden is raising  
12 their hand. Operator, moderator, can you please give  
13 Council Member Holden the opportunity?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'd like to call on Council  
15 Member Holden for questions. Again, Council Members  
16 in general, please keep your questions to five  
17 minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer and  
18 let you know when your time is up. And for any other  
19 Council Members who have questions, please use the  
20 Zoom raise hand function.

21 Over to Council Member Holden.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you Chair's and  
24 thank you all for your testimony. It's an important  
25 hearing. I support the proposed legislation  
mentioned today; however, I do have some questions

3 and concerns regarding Intro. 2047. For Senior  
4 Policy Council, Zoey Chenitz, my concern is  
5 specifically for folks registered as sex offenders,  
6 arsonists, and people with recent violent felonies  
7 including drug dealers. Do you think that the bill  
8 might include either a timeframe for applicants who  
9 have a recent history of violence or have  
10 demonstrated that they have been rehabilitated at  
11 all?

12 ZOEY CHENITZ: Thank you for the question Council  
13 Member. If I can take a step back just to give a  
14 little bit of a frame, I think that might be useful.  
15 So, as I mentioned in my testimony, the Commission  
16 comes to this issue with quite a lot of experience in  
17 the employment sector. And in that context, our law  
18 takes an approach perhaps along the lines of what you  
19 may be contemplating. Rather than I though  
20 prohibition, there is a procedural set of  
21 requirements for covered entities. So, if someone is  
22 applying for a job, they are first assessed based on  
23 their qualification but then given a conditional  
24 offered employment and it is only after that their  
25 criminal history is reviewed and it's generally with  
a focus on a relationship between someone's criminal

1 history and the specific job at issue and then there  
2 is a three day hold period during which the person  
3 can come back with information that might be - you  
4 have the wrong criminal history record for me or here  
5 is evidence of medication.  
6

7 Our view is this is not a useful framework in the  
8 housing context. It's a poor fit. In part, that's  
9 because in the employment context an analysis that is  
10 specific to one job, say you are applying for a job  
11 as a driver, would be very different if you were  
12 applying for a job say in a manufacturing plant. The  
13 nature of your job would vary.

14 In the housing context, the considerations for  
15 someone's criminal history are largely going to be  
16 the same we anticipate with respect to any unit  
17 someone would be applying for. And so, that creates  
18 the risk of creating a group of people who may be  
19 unable to secure stable housing with all of the  
20 negative social outcomes that all of the speakers  
21 today have highlighted.

22 So, with that view in mind, we do believe that a  
23 flat prohibition offers important benefits, both to  
24 those who are seeking housing and also for the  
25 covered entities. It's straight forward and simple

3 to understand as Chair Eugene highlighted in his  
4 questions. There are smaller housing providers in  
5 the city who may be less sophisticated. This is a  
6 law that everyone can understand. It doesn't have  
7 any added expenses; it doesn't slow down the housing  
8 market in getting that assessment.

9 And I would also add, related to your specific  
10 question, that there is already a very extensive body  
11 of state laws that dictate where people on the  
12 registry can live and that provides for an incredible  
13 amount of supervision for them. It's leveraging  
14 nothing to undermine that but it would do the good  
15 deed of ensuring that everyone in our city who is  
16 returning has access to stable housing for themselves  
17 and for their families and we believe that is to the  
18 benefit of New Yorkers.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But you mentioned some  
20 other cities that already have this legislation. I'm  
21 a little concerned because I looked at some of those  
22 cities and they have a little bit more specific  
23 language than we do, then we are proposing here. You  
24 know, also Seattle's law, I believe, their laws are  
25 encountering lawsuits and have not had a positive  
result on addressing discrimination. Do you know

3 anything about – have you looked into Seattle’s  
4 problems now that they are facing with a similar kind  
5 of law?

6 ZOEY CHENITZ: I am vaguely familiar. I am  
7 somewhat familiar with the litigation that you  
8 referenced, so my understanding is that Seattle  
9 passed a packet of legislation together which  
10 including one legislative piece that’s simply not an  
11 issue here, which is a requirement that housing  
12 providers except the first application that was  
13 qualified, that they received in time.

14 So, that first time requirement is not at issue  
15 here and that was a significant portion of what the  
16 plaintiff’s and the litigation had challenged in  
17 Seattle. My understanding is that there has been  
18 quite a number of different appeals that have already  
19 now gone up and been decided and the most recent  
20 decision was decided in Seattle’s favor, which was to  
21 clarify what the standard of review would be for the  
22 Fair Chance Housing proposal and the Washington State  
23 Supreme Court held that its rational basis review.

24 So, I think our expectation – sorry.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: My time is up, so I just  
want to just mention that I think there are some

3 consequences for other tenants that I think we have  
4 to consider and I think there needs to be a language  
5 that the person should have demonstrated that they  
6 have been rehabilitated, that they are not let's say  
7 lighting fires. They are not doing arson; they are  
8 not doing certain things that can jeopardize the  
9 other tenants.

10 So, I think this needs to be looked at a little  
11 bit more specifically and we need to look at other  
12 city's that have this kind of legislation but they do  
13 have more specific language. Thank you. Thank you  
14 Chair's.

15 ZOEY CHENITZ: Do I have time to respond briefly  
16 to that?

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You can wrap up, sure.

18 ZOEY CHENITZ: Yeah, I just wanted to say we'd  
19 welcome the opportunity of course to discuss all of  
20 these approaches and questions with you. But I did  
21 want to clarify that this bill focuses on peoples  
22 past and protecting against discrimination based on  
23 speculation of how future - it doesn't in any way  
24 limit landlords ability to obtain you know, legal  
25 remedies or actual conduct or for violations of lease

3 terms. And I think that's a very important  
4 distinction to bear in mind. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Seeing no other  
6 Council Members with their hands raised, I'm going to  
7 turn it back over to Chair Levin for questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much Ms.  
9 Kilawan and I want to thank all of the - oh, Chair  
10 Eugene?

11 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you. Can you hear me?

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Yes, thank you very much.  
14 Can you give me the opportunity to ask a very quick  
15 question?

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Of course.

17 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much. Deputy  
18 Commissioner, just to take me back on what's on the  
19 comment of my colleague Holden. Intro. 2047  
20 currently does not allow consideration of any type of  
21 criminal background for housing related papers. And  
22 does CCHR agree with this approach, if not, what type  
23 of limitation should exist in this bill? Is there  
24 any language that should be changed?

25 I know that you say that you would be happy to  
continue the conversation but what is the position of

1  
2 CCHR on this approach and if CCHR doesn't agree,  
3 what's the type of limitation should exist in this  
4 bill?

5 Commissioner? Hello? Hello?

6 DANA SUSSMAN: Hi, sorry, it was not letting me  
7 unmute briefly. Can you hear me?

8 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Can you hear me? Did you  
9 hear my question?

10 DANA SUSSMAN: Yes, yes, I did, thank you. I can  
11 let my colleague Zoey Chenitz respond but I will say  
12 that the Commission supports the bill as it is  
13 proposed now. There are likely some changes that we  
14 can work through with the Committee and with City  
15 Council and with our you know, our Administration  
16 partners but the framework that's been proposed is  
17 the framework that the Commission supports at this  
18 point.

19 And Zoey, if you have anything to add, please  
20 feel free.

21 ZOEY CHENITZ: I don't have anything to add,  
22 that's what I would have said, thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Now, I want to turn it back  
24 to my colleague Chair Levin. Thank you Chair Levin.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Chair Eugene. So,  
4 thank you to the Administration officials and to my  
5 Co-Chair. Again, I apologize if there is some  
6 squawking here from the little one.

7 I would like to ask from HRA just about some of  
8 the voucher issues. My first question is how many  
9 CityFHEPS shopping letters are currently out in the  
10 market?

11 BRUCE JORDAN: So, thank you for your question.  
12 Okay, now, I'm unmuted. Go ahead Erin, you can  
13 start.

14 ERIN DRINKWATER: Can you hear me? Sorry about  
15 that technical difficulties. The question was how  
16 many shopping letters are in the field. We would  
17 have to get back to you on the exact number. I think  
18 what's important to note is that individuals might be  
19 eligible for more than one program but we can get  
20 back to you with that exact number. I don't know if  
21 Bruce has anything to add.

22 BRUCE JORDAN: No, nothing to add. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean, is that something  
24 that we keep track of? Is the number of shopping  
25 letters out there specifically for CityFHEPS because

1  
2 you know, that's what we're talking about here. Is  
3 that something that the city keeps track of?

4 ERIN DRINKWATER: Sorry, problem with the mute.  
5 So, what we are looking at is the fact that there are  
6 multiple solutions here and in regards to the number  
7 of shopping letters, we want to make sure that people  
8 are moving out and that could be through the multiple  
9 tools that we have available to us on the rental  
10 assistance side in the way of subsidized moveouts as  
11 well as unsubsidized moveouts.

12 And then, on the prevention side, we also want to  
13 be certain that for folks who are in community, that  
14 we are making sure that we are connecting clients to  
15 the most appropriate resource. That might be paying  
16 rent or utility arrears. It might be the connection  
17 to the Office of Civil Justice and our anti-eviction  
18 and anti-harassment work or it might be referrals to  
19 Homebase to gain access to any number of preventative  
20 tools of the 26 locations across the city.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's all understood. I  
22 just want to know, because the CityFHEPS at the  
23 moment, you can't get CityFHEPS as a preventative  
24 voucher. You can only get it if you are in shelter  
25 right?

3 ERIN DRINKWATER: No, the CityFHEPS voucher has  
4 the eligibility criteria posted online in which it  
5 can be used also as a prevention tool. It is  
6 primarily used as a moveout tool, the vast majority  
7 of uses of CityFHEPS is for moveouts from shelter  
8 into permanent housing. But there is a subset of the  
9 CityFHEPS voucher that is used to maintain permanent  
10 housing in limited circumstances for individuals who  
11 are in community.

12 Part of the issue with the shopping letter is the  
13 way in which that shopping letter is generated from  
14 either from HRA and DHS. But it is, CityFHEPS  
15 primarily a moveout tool. It complements the  
16 StateFHEPS program and can also be used as I  
17 mentioned, in limited circumstances for preserving a  
18 tenancy in the community.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I get all that. I  
20 actually just really want to know, I'm really  
21 genuinely interested here, does the city keep track  
22 of how many are out there at any given time?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: In order to void any of the  
24 technical difficulties that we've been experiencing  
25 with the muting and unmuting, if you can all remain  
unmuted during this question and answer period, that

3 will mitigate for the technical difficulties we've  
4 been experiencing. So, please remain unmuted at this  
5 time, all of the members of the Administration.

6 ERIN DRINKWATER: Part of the challenges with a  
7 concrete number is the ways that that shopping letter  
8 is generated. So, to have a confirmed number is a  
9 challenge because of the ways in which that number  
10 can be, that voucher can be issued.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, what's the average  
12 length of time that a client has a shopping letter?

13 ERIN DRINKWATER: So, shopping -

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Before they find an  
15 apartment.

16 ERIN DRINKWATER: Shopping letters can be renewed  
17 annually and the time from the issuance to move to  
18 apartment is reliant on a number of factors. I don't  
19 have an average number for your today. It includes  
20 anything from finding the correct size apartment,  
21 finding an apartment that meets the needs of the  
22 client as it relates to perhaps a bureau preference.  
23 Clients can reject an apartment just like you or I  
24 can, it might not meet their specific needs.

25 So, there is a number of factors that play in  
having a shopping letter and then moveout.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How do we — was is our  
3 methodology for assessing whether the CityFHEPS  
4 program is successful or not?

5 ERIN DRINKWATER: So, last year alone, the  
6 CityFHEPS program moved over 12,000 individuals and  
7 were able to utilize that program. That significant  
8 number as we have all of our rental assistance tools  
9 but the voucher itself isn't the only tool, right.  
10 We have the NYCHA set asides, we have legal services  
11 and we have the payment of rent and utility arrears.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Understood, I'm really just —  
13 because we're just really talking about CityFHEPS  
14 here. I understand that it is a tool in the toolbox.  
15 So, let's kind of establish that that is tool in the  
16 toolbox. There are other tools in the toolbox. It's  
17 not the only thing but for a few years now, I've been  
18 trying to drill down on this particular program.  
19 Because this particular program really has an outside  
20 role in that toolbox and the evidence of that is when  
21 we look at the data from 2011 to 2014. When there  
22 was not a rental assistance program run by the city  
23 and that's when we saw a 30 percent increase or 40  
24 percent increase in the shelter Census.

3 So, let's just — because I just want to make sure  
4 that like, all of my questions are going to be about  
5 CityFHEPS.

6 ERIN DRINKWATER: Okay, so I'm happy to talk —

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What is the methodology that  
8 we use to determine whether it's meeting its  
9 objectives.

10 ERIN DRINKWATER: Right, so you mentioned I think  
11 an important factor here, which is the pretty  
12 significant increase we saw in homelessness when  
13 advantaged was not an existence.

14 We saw a 38 percent increase in the years that we  
15 did not have that tool available to us. CityFHEPS is  
16 something that we streamlined in 2018. Prior to  
17 that, it existed as seven unique programs. The  
18 streamlining that occurred in 2018 made that program  
19 easier to use for clients, easier to understand and  
20 accept for landlords. That work is important.

21 When you look at our Census, if you want to talk  
22 about how we are measuring it, our Census has been  
23 flat year over year from 2017, 2018, and 2019, which  
24 has not occurred for over a decade.

25 Furthermore, our families with children Census is  
at 2012 levels. So, this program —

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, right now it's at 2012  
4 levels but that's because of an eviction moratorium.  
5 In February it was not at 2012 levels. It is today,  
6 we've had an eviction moratorium in place now for six  
7 months.

8 I just, I get all the history, I don't really  
9 want to kind of go around in circles here. I'm just  
10 really trying to get at, you know, this is a  
11 governmental program. It's a linchpin to our  
12 homelessness efforts.

13 I just want to know what the, I mean other than  
14 kind of these broad issues of you know, whether our  
15 shelter Census is remaining constant or like, how are  
16 determining, how are measuring the success of this  
17 actual program? Is that program working? And the  
18 reason I ask is that we've been hearing from clients.  
19 I've been hearing from clients for years now, years,  
20 years. We had this exact hearing, an oversight  
21 hearing on maybe the prior iteration of the vouchers,  
22 I don't know, it was like a couple of years now. We  
23 had a hearing already about this.

24 We know anecdotally the challenges here. I just  
25 want to know what rigor the agency uses to assess  
whether it's working or not because how are we to

1 know, how many iterations have we had? We've had  
2 Link, we had Link one through gazillion. No more  
3 Link, Link's out. Then it was CityFEPS and now it's  
4 CityFHEPS. And we've had so many iterations and how  
5 are we gauging whether these are successful or not?  
6 That's what I want to know. What metrics are we  
7 using, what are the metrics? That's what I'm trying  
8 to get at.

10 ERIN DRINKWATER: So, part of the metrics  
11 include, do landlords accept the program. We've  
12 worked very closely with landlords to have them  
13 understand the program, to provide incentives to  
14 them, including a landlord bonus. As my colleague  
15 Mr. Jordan mentioned, we talked about the unit whole  
16 bonus. Working with landlords is critical. We need  
17 to have that supply available to us to ensure that  
18 our clients can utilize the voucher and move into  
19 locations.

20 We also want to be mindful of the fact that while  
21 the program is - folks can be eligible for the  
22 program for five years and has the good cause  
23 extension for future years, we also want to be  
24 mindful to make this something that clients  
25 ultimately are able to pay their rent on their own.

3 So, we are balancing both the incentives that we  
4 have for the landlords to have them use and accept  
5 the program and then the future ability to pay with  
6 our clients.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, I'm sorry, I  
8 apologize, those are all kind of considerations,  
9 maybe qualitative considerations for the program but  
10 they are not metrics. What I am looking for are  
11 metrics, percentage of shopping letters that are out  
12 there that are accepted within you know, that  
13 resulted in an apartment in three months, six months,  
14 nine months, twelve months, eighteen months, twenty-  
15 four months.

16 You know, I'm looking for - I'm looking for data.  
17 I understand that it is an art as much as it is a  
18 science but for years now I have been asking for  
19 numbers and I still don't have them. And so, what  
20 I'd like to know are what are - what are the data  
21 here. I mean, frankly, I sent a letter I think to  
22 Commissioner Banks back in November of 2019 and I  
23 don't know if I ever received a response to that  
24 asking all of these questions.

25 I don't know what the data is, so I don't know.  
All I know is anecdotally people tell me they've had

1 vouchers for years, two, three years, four years and  
2 haven't been able to find an apartment and that seems  
3 logical to me because the vouchers are worth what  
4 they are worth and they are not the Fair Market Rent.  
5

6 So, I mean, I don't know if it is much more  
7 complicated than that but I have no data. I have no  
8 data from the Administration and I've asked for it a  
9 number of times. So, that's what I'm kind of getting  
10 at here is where is the data, I need the data.

11 ERIN DRINKWATER: Sure, I mean we provide  
12 regularized reporting to Council Finance with each  
13 budget plan on the rental assistance program and our  
14 moveout numbers.

15 As it relates to some of the metrics that you are  
16 talking about, I do think that it is more new ones.  
17 We have clients who have preference just as much as  
18 you or me in terms of what they want to do in terms  
19 of finding an apartment. And so, clients can reject  
20 apartments just as quickly as they can -

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many have rejected  
22 apartments?

23 ERIN DRINKWATER: I can speak to the number of  
24 clients that I've worked with in my office and there  
25

1  
2 are instances in which clients reject apartments and  
3 it can be for any number of reasons.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we keep track of that? Do  
5 you keep track of whether they are rejecting  
6 apartments. Like, is there a number of clients that  
7 have rejected apartments?

8 ERIN DRINKWATER: I would have to speak to my  
9 colleagues in terms of what numbers we have on that.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you understand my  
11 frustration? I've been asking now - I mean, honestly  
12 you and I have talked about this letter I sent back  
13 in November of last year. I never got a response, I  
14 mean COVID intervened there but I sent the letter in  
15 November asking all these questions and never really  
16 got a response.

17 ERIN DRINKWATER: We can certainly follow up on  
18 the letter. I think as you rightfully noticed, it  
19 possibly was caught up in the COVID response but I am  
20 happy to look at that letter.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: COVID started in March and I  
22 sent the letter in November. I mean, this has been  
23 ongoing. The reason that you may be sensing some  
24 frustration in my voice here is that we've been at  
25 this for years and frankly, I mean, the

3 Administration has been supportive of Home Stability  
4 Support HSS, that's the bill in Albany and this  
5 legislation does much the same as HSS, it's just that  
6 the city is going to have to pay for it instead of  
7 the state.

8 And so, if we're really - if the city's objection  
9 to this is really that we don't want to pay for it,  
10 we think the state should pay for it, then that's an  
11 argument that I will accept at face value.

12 ERIN DRINKWATER: And we've quoted that. I mean,  
13 we've pointed to the places where we've had the most  
14 success in driving down homelessness. We've talked  
15 about the work that was done collaboratively with the  
16 federal government as it related to focus on veterans  
17 homelessness. Having the additional resources from  
18 the federal and state government is critical and it's  
19 even more critical now when we're operating in a  
20 world in which we are facing a very significant  
21 budget declines. We're facing layoffs at the city  
22 that not only will impact staff but potentially  
23 programs because of the very real budget situation  
24 that we're currently facing.

25 I know we've talked and I've talked to your staff  
about supportive long-term borrowing. These are all

3 real situations that we need to face and I think  
4 having a program where now we would increase the  
5 city's obligation is problematic. There is also the  
6 very real problem of setting up a situation in which  
7 the state program would be less attractive to  
8 landlords and they would be able to hold out and you  
9 know, only accept a CityFHEPS voucher.

10 That is troubling and we don't want that. We  
11 want to make sure we have as many tools and I know  
12 you only want to talk about CityFHEPS today and  
13 that's fine, but there is not a single tool that  
14 works for everybody. And that's why we have the  
15 multifaceted approach. It's why for some people,  
16 it's going to be supportive housing. For others,  
17 it's going to be a roommate. We need to be able to  
18 match the variety of solutions that we have available  
19 to us for each client.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so then because I've  
21 been asking for data and numbers and they are not  
22 forthcoming, what would the Administration say to  
23 somebody or a family, an individual or a family who  
24 has had a CityFHEPS voucher for 36 months and can't  
25 find an apartment. What would the Administration say  
to that person?

3 ERIN DRINKWATER: That we stand ready to continue  
4 to work with them. That one of the resources that we  
5 have available through our housing specialists,  
6 through our team and DHS –

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They are not working. Three  
8 years with a voucher is not an acceptable outcome. I  
9 mean, it's not a successful outcome. That means that  
10 we've been paying whatever we pay a month. What it's  
11 \$3,000 a month for somebody to stay in shelter.

12 We've been paying all of those months. All those  
13 months longer. I mean one other way to look at this.  
14 We see how many fewer people are in shelter right now  
15 because of the eviction moratorium. How much are we  
16 saving by those families not in shelter and if we  
17 were to look at that and say, how much would it have  
18 costs us if there was no eviction moratorium to keep  
19 those families from being evicted. Mr. Nash is  
20 holding up a calculator, I can't see the numbers but  
21 he is probably giving me some good – how much would  
22 we have saved, if you just took the number of  
23 families. The difference between the number of  
24 families that would have been in shelter and we know  
25 that they are not in shelter because of the eviction  
moratorium.

3 That's that difference between 69,000 or 59,000  
4 and 54,000 and so those number of families, if we  
5 were to have CityFHEPS, since it is available to  
6 people in communities to keep them in their  
7 apartments, how much is the difference between what  
8 we would have paid to keep them in their apartments  
9 versus what we would have paid to keep them in  
10 shelter and I guarantee you, it is more than \$1,000 a  
11 family a month, that difference.

12 The argument that it is not fiscally sound, even  
13 at this time to increase the city's obligation.  
14 We're obligated, we have a right to shelter. We're  
15 already obligated. We already paid for it. We just  
16 paid for it in terms of shelter, instead of paying  
17 for it to keep people in their apartments or get  
18 somebody in an apartment.

19 I mean, my frustration here is that we've been  
20 having this conversation for years now. Years, and  
21 we've held off and we held off in March to see if the  
22 state were going to act and I guess the argument  
23 could be made that we'll just off again until March  
24 2021 to see if the state wants to take this up again.  
25 Whether the governor has any interest in taking this  
up again. But at a certain point, I'm out of the

3 Counsel and Mayor de Blasio is out of the mayoralty  
4 and at the end of 2021, are we going to look back and  
5 say gee whiz, we really should have just you know,  
6 waited longer.

7 I mean, at a certain point, the opportunity will  
8 be past and this is - there are people that are in  
9 shelter for years because these vouchers don't work.  
10 We don't have Section 8 vouchers. There is no  
11 Section 8 vouchers available. I mean, there is like  
12 a handful of Section 8 vouchers. If you get a  
13 Section 8 voucher, it's like winning the lottery.

14 It's like winning the lottery and guess what,  
15 Section 8 vouchers work. Someone gets a Section 8  
16 voucher; they are staying in their apartments. They  
17 are finding new apartments. I mean, honestly, I  
18 don't quite understand why we just don't make a city  
19 funded Section 8 voucher that has all of the  
20 obligations of a Section 8 voucher to the point where  
21 a perspective landlord doesn't know the difference.  
22 It's just a Section 8 voucher.

23 You know, the landlord will say, what does it  
24 matter to the landlord whether it's federally funded  
25 or not or city funded. If it is the same voucher, a  
landlord will take it because we know a landlord will

1  
2 take Section 8 vouchers except for those that engage  
3 in source of income discrimination but we know by and  
4 large we present a CityFHEPS voucher and a Section 8  
5 voucher to a landlord, we know which one they will  
6 pick. We all know.

7 I mean, I don't know if you have a response to  
8 that but I mean really, without data from the  
9 Administration, all we have, all we have is the  
10 evidence in front of our faces and like, what we can  
11 see with our own eyes but the fact that we don't even  
12 know how many vouchers, I mean how many shopping  
13 letters are out there at any given time. We don't  
14 know what the average length of time that somebody is  
15 shopping for an apartment. All this anecdotal  
16 because we have no data from the Administration.

17 So, I don't know what to say other than, you  
18 know, we have to act and we have a super majority of  
19 sponsors on this legislation and I'm not waiting any  
20 longer. I mean, I don't know. I will turn it over  
21 to my colleagues if they have any other questions.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No other questions from  
23 Council Members. No Council Members have their hands  
24 raised. Chair Eugene would like to ask a question at  
25 this point.

3 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Yes, thank you so much.

4 Thank you. To the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner,  
5 we know that there have been a citywide voucher pause  
6 and I believe that CCHR has been affected by that  
7 also. Could you speak in detail, can you tell us how  
8 CCHR is going to be impacted? You know, especially  
9 the housing administration is frustrated. Is CCHR is  
10 going to be impacted by these citywide budget cuts.

11 DANA SUSSMAN: Thank you for the question Chair  
12 Eugene. Like, all city agencies were grappling with,  
13 you know, an unprecedented budgetary crisis. We are  
14 currently you know, working within the current  
15 constraints that we have. We continue to do the  
16 work. Our work has been impacted by both going to  
17 telework over a single weekend. We moved our entire  
18 workforce to telework and continue to do most of our  
19 work remotely. And we are challenged, as we have  
20 been challenged before with an incredibly broad  
21 mandate under the you know, one of the broadest anti-  
22 discrimination laws in the country to do this work  
23 effectively and to address systemic problems within  
24 our current resources.

25 And so, it's not a new challenge for us. It's  
been, we were an agency of about 55 staff when the

1  
2 Commissioner started in 2015. We are larger than  
3 that now. We are not at our largest but we have  
4 greatly appreciated the support of the Council and  
5 the Administration in growing our agency from when we  
6 started five and a half years ago. But we continue  
7 to move within the current constraints and get as  
8 creative as we can to remain as effective as  
9 possible.

10 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Yeah, during the public  
11 hearing that we have had, the Committee on Civil and  
12 Human Rights, we have been trying to ask the  
13 Commissioner of CCHR about the budget constraints.  
14 You know, the challenges that they are facing in  
15 terms of you know, enforcing the law and also  
16 providing the services to the people in need. And  
17 they never give us a clear, you know, response about  
18 the needs [DROPPED AUDIO 2:23:10].

19 We know the New York City invasion of human right  
20 is current in war in the Fair Housing Assistance  
21 program and we see funding from – why doesn't CCHR  
22 try to enroll also in this program?

23 DANA SUSSMAN: This is something that I know we  
24 have discussed before. It is my understanding based  
25 on conversations that I have had with our Deputy

1  
2 Commissioner for Law Enforcement, who has testified  
3 before this Committee before that the HUD  
4 administrative requirements and reporting  
5 requirements would require one early or entirely the  
6 staff time of one staff member and we do not have the  
7 staff to spare at this point.

8 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: I'm sorry, could you repeat  
9 that for me. Would require what?

10 DANA SUSSMAN: It is my understanding that to  
11 comply with all of the reporting requirements that  
12 this program administered through HUD requires, would  
13 eat up one staff members entire portfolio. And so,  
14 that would reduce our Law Enforcement staff or  
15 support staff by one effectively and so, the  
16 assessment was made by our Deputy Commissioner, that  
17 at this stage, we cannot afford to lose additional  
18 staff member time to comply with those administrative  
19 requirements.

20 We can reassess that at a later stage but because  
21 we are a file as of right agency. Essentially, if  
22 you state a claim of discrimination under the City  
23 Human Rights Law, we cannot turn you away. Our doors  
24 remain virtually open. We are trying to be as  
25 effective as we can with our current resources and

3 so, to commit that kind of level of staff time to the  
4 Administrative requirements for the HUD program, just  
5 does not make sense for us right now.

6 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Yeah, but I really don't  
7 understand that because usually more funding, more  
8 resources and we would be able to hire some  
9 additional you know, staff to fulfill this  
10 requirement, I believe. That would be beneficial  
11 also to the people that we are serving because a lack  
12 of resources you know, has been a challenge for many  
13 institutions. When you have enough resources, enough  
14 you know, opportunities so that means you can do much  
15 more. You can provide more services. So, don't you  
16 think that would be beneficial to New York City and  
17 to the people that we are serving to apply to this  
18 program and get more money, more resources to hire  
19 additional staff you know, complying with this  
20 requirement?

21 Can you hear me?

22 DANA SUSSMAN: Yes, I'm sorry, it doesn't allow  
23 me to unmute myself.

24 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Oh, okay.

25 DANA SUSSMAN: You know, we are working and  
crunching the numbers like every other city agency to

1  
2 expand our work to ensure that we are using our  
3 resources as effectively as we can. I think that  
4 there are questions as to how quickly you know, how  
5 quickly the resources from HUD would impact the  
6 agency. And again, our staff have dockets of you  
7 know, 30 to 70 cases each and if we are pulling staff  
8 members away to handle some of those administrative  
9 requirements, those cases would then not be assigned  
10 to an attorney or would be assigned to other  
11 attorney's.

12 So, again, I don't have more detail I can share  
13 right now. We are happy to get back to you on this  
14 but I've had this conversation with our Deputy  
15 Commissioner for Law Enforcement who her expertise  
16 is, she is formerly from the Department of Justice.  
17 Her expertise is in housing discrimination. She is  
18 very familiar with the HUD program. I can get back  
19 to you further on this later but again, just checking  
20 in with her this morning about this and her  
21 assessment was that this program did not make sense  
22 for us right now.

23 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Yeah, but it seemed to me  
24 that the issue is an issue of resources to hire more  
25 people because you can not afford to lose one staff

1  
2 member because more resources, if you have the  
3 funding or the resources, you would probably be in  
4 better position to hire more staff, I believe. But  
5 let me ask one thing, when did the CCHR last apply  
6 for this funding? Can you tell me when?

7 DANA SUSSMAN: If I could just clarify something,  
8 I think is important. The money - there is a lot  
9 strings attached to that HUD money and from what I  
10 understand, it will not be allowed to be applied to  
11 personnel. And because it varies you know, quarter  
12 to quarter, we could not guarantee that we could  
13 fulfill you know, that wouldn't be a guarantee  
14 particular sum and again, from what I understand, we  
15 couldn't actually apply it to personnel lines.

16 So, it wouldn't be that sort of you know, easy  
17 answer of if we did a. we would get b. We would not  
18 be able to add personnel based on that HUD money.

19 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Alright, thank you very  
20 much. Let me turn it back over to Chair Levin.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Chair Eugene.

22 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know, I'm going to ask a  
24 couple of more technical questions on the rental  
25 assistance vouchers. When using CityFHEPS vouchers,

1  
2 who is currently tasked with completing inspections  
3 of apartments prior to move in and has this changed  
4 recently?

5 ERIN DRINKWATER: I'm going to start and then  
6 turn it over to my colleague Mr. Jordan. So, we  
7 conduct the inspections. Those happen at the  
8 provider level. The apartment review, list, and  
9 guidance is posted online. So, landlords have an  
10 opportunity to review that. We have a whole section  
11 of information for landlords available about the  
12 program online and I can turn it over to Bruce to go  
13 through some additional information about that  
14 apartment checklist.

15 BRUCE JORDAN: Yeah, so thank you Councilman  
16 Levin. For apartments out of shelter, DHS, I mean,  
17 the shelter providers do those inspections for  
18 apartments in the community. The CBO's like Homebase  
19 do that and for any rooms, there is a special unit  
20 within DHS that does those, completes those, excuse  
21 me.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And what's the program again  
23 that moves people out of state?

24 ERIN DRINKWATER: Special One Time Assistance  
25 program SOTA.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: SOTA, who does the  
4 inspections for SOTA?

5 ERIN DRINKWATER: So, I don't want to misspeak on  
6 the record. That program did change earlier, I  
7 believe earlier this year, so I want to be mindful  
8 about my testimony on the record. I will get back to  
9 you. There are inspections though for those move  
10 outs.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, but you will tell me  
12 later who does them?

13 ERIN DRINKWATER: I'm going to get back to you.  
14 I don't want to misspeak on the record. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Can you provide us,  
16 for the past year, can you provide us the number of  
17 annual placements by population. So, families with  
18 children, adult families, single adults by gender, an  
19 average median, maximum and minimum length of stay in  
20 the shelter system until placement into permanent  
21 housing with a voucher?

22 ERIN DRINKWATER: I don't have that data readily  
23 available today.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: When can we expect that data?

25 ERIN DRINKWATER: As we normally do after  
hearings, if the Committee can follow up with the

3 data requests, we will move to answer those as  
4 quickly as possible.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. One way that we have  
6 heard around CityFHEPS is, landlords complain about  
7 payment issues. Does HRA take any actions to ensure  
8 that rental assistance payments are made on time?  
9 Made on or before the scheduled payment date and what  
10 is the process and has that process been amended in  
11 any way in recent years?

12 ERIN DRINKWATER: I'm going to refer to my  
13 colleague, Mr. Jordan.

14 BRUCE JORDAN: So, thank you Chair Levin.  
15 Provided that of course we have the correct  
16 information from the landlord. Provided also that  
17 the landlord is not conflating missed payments that a  
18 client might have had to pay or didn't pay from their  
19 share, we had had some problems in the past when we  
20 first started the program because payments were going  
21 through the states WMS system. But we are in the  
22 process now as we mentioned earlier, we have RFP out  
23 with different things but we have a process where we  
24 are doing a landlord management system that will be a  
25 better portal for landlords to actually put in their  
own information in real time. There will less

3 touches across DHS, HRA and DHS, which sometimes in  
4 the past could create a problem with different  
5 entities working with a client, all in their housing.  
6 There will be just one entity touching the golden  
7 record, so that payments will go to the correct place  
8 and we have various vehicles through both once again,  
9 our legal providers, our homebased providers. We do  
10 have hotlines where clients and landlords can call  
11 and let us know there is an issue and we'll address  
12 it asap.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How much does the CityFHEPS  
14 voucher pay compare to fair market rent right now?  
15 What's the percentage?

16 ERIN DRINKWATER: Sorry, I'm pulling up my  
17 worksheet. Bruce, if you have it ready and  
18 available, I just had closed the document, sorry.

19 BRUCE JORDAN: So, Chair Levin, an example would  
20 be three people would be \$1580, which could possibly  
21 get you a two bedroom apartment versus the Section 8  
22 NYCHA FMR levels for 2020 would be \$2669.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, the difference there  
24 being about \$900 a month?

25 BRUCE JORDAN: Somewhere around there, yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you have examples of other  
4 unit size or household composition?

5 BRUCE JORDAN: Excuse me, excuse me, let me just  
6 clarify. A two bedroom would be \$2107 FMR level but  
7 a household size would be \$1580. So, it's a little  
8 less, excuse me.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: \$500.

10 BRUCE JORDAN: About \$500 less.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: \$500 less. I guess don't you  
12 guys think that that would open up a lot more  
13 apartments to be available to people if we could get  
14 up to that FMR?

15 ERIN DRINKWATER: Council Member, as we stated  
16 previously, the concern has to do with additional  
17 resources. Getting additional funding, additional  
18 resources from the federal government, from the state  
19 government. You've mentioned that we've been  
20 supportive of the Home Stability Support program,  
21 that is in fact true.

22 And while that would do what you are seeking here  
23 for this program, it would do it across the board and  
24 we wouldn't lose the valuable resource that a  
25 StateFHEPS that individuals move out of shelter each  
year utilizing.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Why not do both? Why not do  
4 that this year and still fight for HSS on the state  
5 level? But in the meantime, saying we're not going  
6 to wait any longer?

7 ERIN DRINKWATER: I completely appreciate the  
8 sentiment. As I said earlier, the city is very much  
9 focused on the ability to have the authority to  
10 utilize long-term borrowing. Without getting  
11 additional resources from the state, we are currently  
12 facing not only layoffs but program cuts that are  
13 going to have further devastating impacts. We need  
14 to focus our attention on getting that authority and  
15 again, getting additional resources from the federal  
16 government, whether it be in state and local aid and  
17 or additional resources from the state.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay, I appreciate  
19 very much the testimony of every member of the  
20 Administration that is here and I look forward to  
21 working expeditiously on these pieces of legislation  
22 and moving forward.

23 ERIN DRINKWATER: Thank you. And just for a  
24 note, we do have staff who are staying to watch this.  
25 I need to jump to prepare for another hearing. Thank  
you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to the members of  
4 the Administration for your testimony and for  
5 answering Council Member questions. Once more, I  
6 want to remind everyone that we are going to be  
7 moving on now to additional public testimony. I will  
8 be calling individuals to testify in panels and also  
9 calling your name one by one as you are up to  
10 testify.

11 Again, for Council Members who are on our hearing  
12 right now, if you have questions for a particular  
13 panelist, use the raise hand function in Zoom and you  
14 will be called on after the entire panel has  
15 completed their testimony.

16 Again, public testimony will be limited to three  
17 minutes. Please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to  
18 announce that you may begin before you begin to  
19 deliver your testimony. And our next panel is going  
20 to be Christine Quinn, Vasha Gerhards[SP?], Sarah  
21 Wilson and Devone Nash. We will now begin with  
22 Christine Quinn.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you very much and I just  
25 want to start off by saying thank you to Chair Levin  
and thank you to Chair Dr. Eugene for having this

1 hearing. Well, let me say, go Steve go. You were  
2 asking all the right questions. They were dodging  
3 every answer and I think the real question to okay  
4 the state might be more than the city's then but we  
5 need to lead. New York has a history of doing more  
6 than the state, doing more than other people and then  
7 the others follow suit. Look at the Smoking bill as  
8 just one example.  
9

10 So, the question here is, do we want to humanly  
11 lead? The Council is saying yes, the Mayor is saying  
12 no. Let me just go to my testimony.

13 I'm Christine Quinn the President and CEO of WIN,  
14 the largest provider of shelter and services to  
15 families with children in New York City. I am here  
16 today to support all of the legislation on the  
17 agenda, but in particular, to urge the passage of the  
18 Intro. 146 which would peg the city's rental voucher  
19 values to the fair market rent.

20 The CityFHEPS voucher is intended to offer a  
21 clear straight forward exit plan out of shelter for  
22 eligible families but because the voucher amount is  
23 so low, that exit path is closed. Last year, all of  
24 all WIN families who had access to CityFHEPS vouchers  
25

1 only 28 percent left shelter using one, only 28  
2 percent.  
3

4 To put that in stark comparison, 32 percent of  
5 the families left for placements that were not stable  
6 that were high risk to return to shelter and these  
7 struggles have not abated no matter what you hear  
8 about dropping rents since COVID-19 struck.

9 The problem is that CityFHEPS pays far below  
10 market value even in the most affordable parts of the  
11 city. The CityFHEPS maximum rent allowed to three or  
12 four persons is \$1,580 per month. According to  
13 street easy data, there is no neighborhood, not one  
14 in the city, where the median asking rent for a two  
15 bedroom apartment is this low.

16 In order to make CityFHEPS an effective tool, its  
17 rents must reflect the actual cost of housing in New  
18 York City. CityFHEPS maximum rent amount should be  
19 tied to New York City's Fair Market Rents or FMR.  
20 The FMR is used to set rents for HUD subsidy programs  
21 including Section 8 which the Chair spoke of. In  
22 FY21, FMR for a two bedroom apartment in New York  
23 City is \$2,053 a month. This would increase the  
24 maximum rent allowed by \$473. Those are different  
25

1 numbers than the one we heard from the representative  
2 of the city.

3  
4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

5 CHRISTINE QUINN: He gave the NYCHA number, which  
6 is a little higher, FYI. This would increase the  
7 rent allowed by \$473 a month. This would  
8 significantly broaden access to many neighborhoods  
9 for voucher holders in the last five months instead  
10 of there being one neighborhood with affordable  
11 rents. I will submit the rest of the testimony for  
12 the record but I just want to say, when you give  
13 somebody a CityFHEPS voucher, you are giving them  
14 hope. You are sending them a message that they  
15 worked hard and they now have a vehicle to get out of  
16 shelter. But when you give them a CityFHEPS voucher  
17 that can't rent one apartment in one neighborhood,  
18 you are giving them false hope and that is just  
19 cruel.

20 And I'm so thrilled that Chair Levin and Chair  
21 Eugene and the sponsors of the bill, which I believe  
22 is up into the 40's are going to end that cruel  
23 practice of false hope and get vouchers into homeless  
24 families hands that can actually help move mothers  
25 and children out of shelter. The best way to prevent

3 a homeless child from growing up to be a homeless  
4 adult is to get them out of shelter.

5 Thank you all very much.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for our  
7 former Speaker Christine Quinn. We will now call on  
8 Sarah Wilson.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 SARAH WILSON: Hi, my name is Sarah Wilson, I am  
11 here with Safety Net Project and I'm hear to speak in  
12 favor of Intro. 146 regarding increasing the amount  
13 of the CityFHEPS voucher to be the fair market rate.

14 I'm happy to be here but I'm also upset to be  
15 speaking. The fact that I was here over three years  
16 ago, specifically June 27, 2017 as the Council Member  
17 mentioned to speak on this exact same issue that's  
18 over three years later and there have been  
19 unfortunately many deaths, many horrible things that  
20 have happened over that time period that could have  
21 been avoided, especially prior to COVID.

22 With that said, I'm sorry, the issues like what  
23 goes on in the upper west side, the problem is that  
24 you put 300 people into three separate addresses.  
25 It's not the problem, it's not the people that you  
are putting places, it's the policies that are

3 putting them there. It's over populated and its  
4 people with very minimal resources.

5 Anyway, this is all linked in and relevant  
6 because with your vouchers standing the way that they  
7 are not being at fair market value, not only have you  
8 created this but you are forcing them to live in it  
9 because they can't get out. The dollar amount as was  
10 stated before should be something similar to what  
11 goes on with Section 8 vouchers.

12 Bear with me, the fact that it would 30 percent  
13 or a third of the income. The fact that sorry, okay,  
14 going further. I'm also speaking on the fact that I  
15 did have a voucher in 2017 and then I was not - I had  
16 extreme difficulty trying to obtain it as well as use  
17 it.

18 When I was able to obtain it because the shelter  
19 did not help me, I spent 744 days in shelter on a  
20 voucher that took 72 hours. I was able to obtain it  
21 but no one wanted to accept it, so I started going  
22 and looking at apartments not telling them I had a  
23 voucher. Being showed it and then being declined  
24 because source of income discrimination. People  
25 said, we did not want a non-working tenant. We  
wanted things of that nature.

3 But in hindsight, I didn't put my efforts into  
4 pursuing that because I put it into housing.

5 I will close up with saying this because there is  
6 a lot going on today. When you are looking at  
7 someone and it hurts your eyes because you are  
8 supposed to help them, not remove them from the line  
9 of sight in your shuffling people around working on  
10 shelters when you need to be working on a housing  
11 vouchers. It's like monopoly money, it's not the  
12 right dollar value, they can't ever get out.

13 The only way to change a homeless persons  
14 situation is to house them.

15 Thank you for letting me speak.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Sarah and  
18 we will now have Devone Nash.

19 DEVONE NASH: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
20 Devone Nash, I'm currently at North Star residence  
21 shelter with my nephew. We started out when he was  
22 18 in the shelter and we're still here. It is now 33  
23 months later. I'm going to change my testimony  
24 today, only because there was some numbers that you  
25 guys were looking for.

3 Well, the government pays for me to be here and  
4 my nephew \$3,343. 41 every month. The FHEPS voucher  
5 is \$1,325. Now, you guys are going to give me money  
6 for rent, \$1,325 but you are giving these guys  
7 \$3,334.41 at 33 months. That comes out to be roughly  
8 \$110,035. 53. That's just on the housing and feeding  
9 us. The other services, which I got zero because  
10 I've been in this system for 33 months and I am still  
11 here.

12 So, this system that you guys spent \$93,535.53 on  
13 could have actually, the combined total with \$110,000  
14 plus \$93,000, you guys could have bought a house in  
15 33 months. You could have bought me a condo, a two  
16 or three bedroom condo for \$203,571. That makes  
17 absolutely no sense and in my building alone, its 15  
18 families on every floor times 11.

19 So, that's 165 families at \$3,334 per month with  
20 an additional because we have to go get our breakdown  
21 and they pay per month \$6,169.02 every month. Every  
22 month for us to stay in the shelter to of no end in  
23 sight. But let's say we do get an apartment, you say  
24 okay, we'll give you \$1,325 to live comfortably or to  
25 help you deal with that but you are paying these  
people all of this money. This is atrocity, this is

3 a waste of money. You could have gave me \$2,500 a  
4 month to live comfortably in a two bedroom apartment  
5 and saved \$4,062 every month, if you just gave me  
6 \$2,500 for an apartment, a decent apartment.

7 I can find an apartment for \$2,500, a two bedroom  
8 apartment for me and my nephew, who happens to have  
9 special needs. So, now you stick us in a place with  
10 no - I had to go out on my own and I found an agency  
11 called CASES that actually helped me. I've been  
12 asking since the day I walked in the system. I said  
13 my nephew has psychological problems. He needs help  
14 from day one, everywhere I went, every agency I went  
15 to I told that to. You know when I got help?  
16 January, when I decided to call up all of these other  
17 resources because I have a psychology major and I was  
18 able to and so, I was doing these actual services and  
19 so, I decided to reach out to these people. There is  
20 no communications with the city and state, none of  
21 the agencies. You guys sit up there and you talk and  
22 you smile and you say all of these nice things but  
23 it's just window dressing. It's fancy window  
24 dressing and it's very expensive dressing, window  
25 dressing to be exact with no services.

3 So, you have a window that's worth \$203,571.06  
4 and it's broken but you keep on pouring money into  
5 it. Can someone please explain that to me? Why are  
6 you willing to give them over \$6,100 a month, but you  
7 will not give me \$2,500 for rent?

8 That's the question I would like to ask and I'm  
9 here. I am here in the system, so this can be  
10 verified. So, you guys have to know what the city is  
11 paying out every month. So, you guys sit up there  
12 and act like you don't know and you are pulling these  
13 figures out. That woman was right, there is no end  
14 in sight in here and how many people that go out, how  
15 many people come back? That's what you need to know.  
16 That's what you should be asking because your system  
17 is not working.

18 They told me that I have to have, if I have a two  
19 year lease, I have to have the difference and so, the  
20 difference is \$725.00 a month. So, for one year, I  
21 got to have \$8,200 in the bank just to move in that  
22 apartment. If I want a two year lease, I got to have  
23 \$16,400. Where am I going to get that kind of money  
24 from? Where am I going to get that kind of money  
25 from to live under the FHEPS program that you guys  
created? Where am I going to get that from?

3 Somebody please answer, anybody, anybody can take it.

4 Anybody can verify my figures, because this is what I  
5 go down to get. This is my breakdown; this is  
6 breakdown right here. This is my breakdown.

7 So, this is what the city is paying every month.  
8 So, you have proof right here and the numbers don't  
9 lie. I'm a numbers person. The numbers don't lie.  
10 I'm just asking for \$2,500 out of \$6,000 and you can  
11 save. If you gave everybody enough money to get an  
12 apartment, you can wipe out this.

13 Sorry, but I'm actually through this. So, yes,  
14 it's a little bit personal.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can pay a mortgage with  
16 that \$2,500.

17 DEVONE NASH: Yeah, you most definitely can pay a  
18 mortgage. I know people who are paying less than  
19 \$2,500 a month on mortgage. I know people paying  
20 less than that. With 3 percent down, you could have  
21 gave me 3 percent, you could have bought me a house  
22 for this kind of money. I'm still here, I'm still  
23 here. That means this is going to go on, it's going  
24 to keep going on, till, what did you say 2021, that's  
25 when it is coming around again.

3 So, in 2021, I will be here 45 months and what  
4 will you guys have to say then. I'm a statistic,  
5 this is not working. It's not working what you are  
6 doing there, it's not working, it's not. It's not at  
7 all. And this is me, imagine all the other people  
8 who gave up. You should see the people around me;  
9 they walk around with their heads down. People do  
10 not give you eye contact. They are sad. People are  
11 very stressed out around this time, this was before  
12 COVID.

13 So, just imagine how they are going through right  
14 now with COVID going on. You know, you should see  
15 the food. They give these people \$125 a week to feed  
16 us rotten fruit, molded bread, spoiled milk. Give me  
17 \$125, I'll make it work, I'll make it work. I don't  
18 need it. Me and my nephew, we live off of \$10 every  
19 day. We eat \$5 we spend our meals down \$10 a day,  
20 \$300 a month, every month. Every month because I  
21 don't eat this. You are paying for nothing. Most of  
22 that stuff go in the garbage and they check off that  
23 we are eating it. We're not eating it. There is  
24 tons of it going in the garbage, tons of it.

25 So, you are not feeding us. All that is a lie  
what you are saying there. You can give me \$125 a

3 week, that's \$500 a month but you give me \$354 in  
4 food stamps but you know this is what it is going to  
5 cost for me to eat. Why are you doing this? Why?  
6 It's like you are making us suffer on purpose and  
7 then you're throwing money, where is this money going  
8 to? Who is it going to? It's supposed to be for us,  
9 right? But we're not receiving anything. The  
10 Counselors are overworked. My counselor has 4  
11 floors, 15 families on each floor, you do the math.  
12 How is she supposed to help when every two weeks she  
13 has got to put in paperwork. So, she is inundated  
14 with paperwork alone. Just to check and make sure  
15 that we are here every day.

16 So, where is the time for her to say, let me help  
17 you get an apartment. Let me help you with some  
18 things that you got going on. Where is the time? We  
19 don't even have a job developer here. How are you  
20 supposed to get a job without - get an apartment  
21 without a job? Something so vital. What is wrong  
22 with you people? What is wrong?

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Nash.

24 DEVONE NASH: It's not like you don't know that  
25 people need this stuff to survive. It's not like you

1 don't know it. So, you are purposely doing this and  
2 why?  
3

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Mr. Nash, you are right.

5 DEVONE NASH: You are purposely doing it.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You are right. We're not  
7 purposely doing it but you are right. You are right,  
8 you are right.

9 DEVONE NASH: Don't patronize me please, don't  
10 patronize me. Don't patronize me, I am living in  
11 this. I've been living in this shelter for my nephew  
12 for three years. Don't do that, don't do that, don't  
13 do that. At \$203,571.06, don't do that. That's more  
14 than some people make in a lifetime. Don't do that,  
15 don't do that.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

17 DEVONE NASH: You are welcome.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Nash. We are  
19 now going to call on Vasha Gerhards.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I think you are having some  
22 technical difficulties with bringing on Vasha  
23 Gerhards, so we are going to now turn to any  
24 questions that Council Members have for this panel.  
25 Turning to our Chairs, if there are any questions at

2 this point and if any other Council Members are on  
3 right now have questions, we just ask that you use  
4 the raise hand function and I will call on  
5 accordingly.

6 Chair Eugene, Chair Eugene.

7 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Yes, I don't have any  
8 questions but I just have a very short comment and I  
9 want to thank the gentleman who came to testify with  
10 such emotion and I want to thank him for his  
11 statement. But I want to - can you hear me?

12 And I just want him to know that - can you hear  
13 me?

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Chair, I think you need to fix  
15 your microphone, we're having a hard time  
16 understanding.

17 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Hello, can you hear me now?  
18 Can you hear me?

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We can hear you but it's  
20 coming in very choppy sir.

21 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Okay, let me do something.  
22 Give me one second, very quick, very quick. Yes,  
23 hello?

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Much better, much better.  
25

3 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: Thank you very much. Thank  
4 you. Ye, I was saying that you know, I want to thank  
5 the gentleman who testified but I want everybody to  
6 know that we in the City Council, what we are doing,  
7 we are fighting on behalf of the people by trying to  
8 improve and to do everything that we can do to serve  
9 the people who are in need of affordable housing and  
10 issues, the human right issue. People have the right  
11 to have access to dignified affordable housing for  
12 themselves and for their children and we will  
13 continue to do that.

14 The other thing that I want to mention and I am  
15 delighted to see as a matter of fact, the picture  
16 from the Speaker Christine Quinn, and I want to thank  
17 her for her participation to this very important  
18 public hearing. You know that address so many issues  
19 affecting the people that we are serving. I know  
20 that she knows her stuff and I commend her for the  
21 way, for her passion, her dedication to fight for the  
22 people who are seeking affordable housing in New York  
23 City.

24 Thank you so very much. Thank you Chair. Thank  
25 you.

3 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you very much Dr. Eugene,  
4 I really, really appreciate that and I learned a lot  
5 working with you and working with Chair Levin, so I'm  
6 great to have the opportunity because of both of your  
7 leadership to have this conversation today and  
8 hopefully to have action very soon. So, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: And thank you again. Thank  
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I also want to thank this  
12 panel for your very valuable insight and for making a  
13 very compelling and data driven case for this  
14 legislation and I greatly appreciate it and Speaker  
15 Quinn, I do want to also offer my condolences on the  
16 loss of your father.

17 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: I'm sorry. Can I extend my  
19 condolences also to you?

20 CHRISTINE QUINN: Of course, of course.

21 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: I didn't know that. I knew  
22 your father, very nice person, a wonderful person,  
23 and I see vividly you know, every time that he came  
24 to the City Council and I think he was a veteran  
25 also.

CHRISTINE QUINN: He was, he was.

3 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: He was.

4 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you both very much. I  
5 haven't really announced it publicly so to speak but  
6 he was a World War II veteran in the Navy. He was  
7 part of the bombing of Wake Island and escorted the  
8 Missouri to the surrender. He got COVID in March and  
9 died from complications of COVID.

10 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: I'm sorry, sorry.

11 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you. He was great up  
12 until the very end. He lived a classic I would say  
13 historic New York life and he loved being at the  
14 Council and you two and so many others were so kind  
15 and generous to him, so thank you for that. I will  
16 always remember it.

17 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: You know, as a former Chair  
18 of the Veterans Committee, I got a great you know,  
19 respect for all the veterans. You know, and I admire  
20 all of them for their service and thank you to you  
21 for your fathers service to this nation. Thank you.

22 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON EUGENE: And God give you the comfort  
24 that you need. Thank you.

25 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Chris.

3 CHRISTINE QUINN: Thanks Steve.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to thank this entire  
5 panel and we're going to do our best at this Council  
6 to make this right. So, greatly appreciate your  
7 time. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this entire  
9 panel and now we are going to call up the members of  
10 our next panel who are going to be in this order,  
11 Joseph Soto, Salik Karim and Alison Wilkey. And we  
12 will begin with Joseph Soto.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 JOSEPH SOTO: Can you hear me now?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

16 JOSEPH SOTO: Okay, my name is Joseph Soto. Good  
17 afternoon everybody. My condolences to Quinn and all  
18 our families that has been affected by the COVID,  
19 including my own.

20 My story is basically the same as everybody  
21 else's. I'm just going to be reiterating what  
22 everybody else has already said but through a  
23 different perspective. I came out of prison last  
24 October. I did 25 years. I was in there since the  
25 age of 17 and I worked real hard, real hard to get  
out of my first parole. You know, I got out, the

1 first summer when I got out of parole, they had seen  
2 how good I was, they let me go. They said, you are a  
3 perfect candidate to get out and they let me go at  
4 level four. I didn't have to work my way up to level  
5 four. That's how hard I worked.

6  
7 Three months after my release, I'm working in the  
8 health department as a peer specialist, this is my  
9 ID, right. Three months after that, I was ready to  
10 leave and get my own place but when I got out of  
11 prison, I had to go straight to a shelter. And then  
12 the Fortune Society was fortunate to let me, I was  
13 fortunate enough to let them let me go and stay in  
14 the academy.

15 However, throughout my stay there, I am listening  
16 to everybody tell me their stories, many stories like  
17 Nash. Nash, I feel your pain. I tried to go through  
18 a voucher program but after six months out of prison,  
19 I still couldn't navigate that system. I said, you  
20 know what, forget that. I'm not going to get stuck  
21 in the system for years. For 25 years I dreamed  
22 about having my own place and being a productive  
23 member to society. I'm already a productive member  
24 of society working as a peer specialist. Now my only  
25 thing I need to do was to get my own place and I did

1  
2 it on my own without the voucher, without no help  
3 from the city because I didn't want to get stuck in  
4 that system. I don't got no help from the city. I  
5 don't got no food stamps; I don't got no voucher. I  
6 don't even got Medicaid. They cut me off of  
7 Medicaid. I'm paying for my own health insurance.  
8 Actually, this month, I can't afford it but it is  
9 what it is. 75 percent of my income goes to my rent.  
10 I shopped around trying to get something that is  
11 decent that is legal but I was denied because this  
12 one place I really, really wanted and I talked to my  
13 broker, I said, I want that place. I will make all  
14 the sacrifices I need but the landlord was like, you  
15 know, he's a felon. And then after that, you know, I  
16 guess he caught himself and then he stuck with that I  
17 don't make enough money.

18 You know, I really wanted that place. That  
19 place, I fell in love with. However, I ended up  
20 here. This is a one bedroom apartment but it is  
21 illegal apartment. It's got one entrance, so it's a  
22 fire hazard and believe it or not, I'm good. I am  
23 happy to be here because I'm not stuck in that system  
24 that a lot of my brothers and sisters are stuck in.  
25 You know, I'm doing - I mean, sometimes I wonder how

1  
2 I am going to feed myself. I wasn't able to pay my  
3 health insurance this month but I keep my phone on  
4 and I'm here. But I remember that one apartment that  
5 I wanted that was as real nice apartment and I  
6 couldn't get in because of my history. And I think  
7 that is one of the main topics we're talking about  
8 here. That's why I decided to testify today. I  
9 still would like to go to that apartment. In fact,  
10 my tenants is ASL school and I am an ASL instructor.  
11 I even tried to use that as an angle to get in there.

12 I said listen, I could help with the assignments  
13 but they didn't want me there. They didn't want my  
14 class of person in there. I refused to be stuck in  
15 the system. I refused to get stuck in the ghetto's.

16 I am in a real private apartment, a private  
17 house. I sleep in the basement. I'm good for now.  
18 I'm struggling but I'm good. I'm going to continue  
19 to do what I can to be a productive member of the  
20 society to help my peers, to help my people and  
21 that's all I got to say. Thank you for letting me  
22 say it.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Soto.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're going to move onto  
25 Salik Karim.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

4 SALIK KARIM: Good afternoon. My name is Salik  
5 Karim and I am Advocacy Coordinator for Justice and  
6 Opportunity. I am also a formerly incarcerated  
7 person living in New York City who has been unfairly  
8 discriminated against in the housing application  
9 process by the use of criminal background checks.

10 In spite of being released from prison in 2005  
11 and maintaining full time employment since May 2005  
12 and received both a bachelor's and master's degree in  
13 social work, I continue to be discriminated against  
14 in the housing process. This discrimination not only  
15 affects me but my family as well.

16 The use of criminal background checks creates a  
17 false narrative about who I am and what I have become  
18 in spite of my past history. It locked me into my  
19 past, it creates barriers blocking movement into my  
20 future.

21 I want to clearly state that housing is a human  
22 right, not a human privilege, a human right.  
23 Therefore, everyone should be able to secure this  
24 human right. The use of criminal background one  
25 second, I'm sorry. The use of criminal background  
checks has impacted not only me but my fiancé, now

3 wife, by not allowing us to use my income as a  
4 resource for potential other housing opportunities  
5 namely fair market, a lot of your apartments, housing  
6 subsidies, [INAUDIBLE 3:08:09].

7 In order to find an apartment together, we got  
8 married and we both had to leave Brooklyn New York  
9 where we both lived for all of our lives. Because I  
10 kept being denied apartments because of my record.  
11 This effectively resulted in displacement from our  
12 family, friends, and community. It has also limited  
13 our selection ability and opportunity to obtain more  
14 secure and stable housing.

15 Though I have recently secured housing in Queens  
16 New York, I could be evicted on a landlords whims  
17 because there are little if any protection available  
18 and then I will be back in the same situation of  
19 being denied apartments after apartments because of  
20 my record.

21 The simple act of moving apartments which most  
22 New York City residents do many times, isn't  
23 available to me and my family. If my landlord raises  
24 my rent -

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

3 SALIK KARIM: And I can't afford it, I might not  
4 be able to find another apartment before my lease  
5 expires. My 24 year old conviction leads me and my  
6 family in housing instability. I am not the only  
7 person in this situation. One in three Black men in  
8 the United States has a felony conviction. By  
9 continuing to allow housing providers to deny housing  
10 based on convictions, we continue a significant  
11 portion of Black men to lifetime housing insecurity.

12 This is one of the reasons so many people need  
13 shelter and why the glaring racial disparities in  
14 shelters. This is why the City Council must pass  
15 Intro. 2047 to ban the use of criminal background  
16 checks due to a person's arrest and all conviction  
17 history.

18 No one should have to live with this sense of  
19 insecurity like I have experienced when it comes to a  
20 human right of housing. Thank you very much.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Karim and I  
22 just want to thank you and acknowledge your work on  
23 this. This bill would not be heard today and on its  
24 way to becoming law if it weren't for your efforts.  
25 You introduced me to this legislative idea and I want  
to just thank you for doing that.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Karim and now,  
4 we are going to have Alison Wilkey.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 ALISON WILKEY: Good afternoon. My name is  
7 Alison Wilkey and I am the Director of Public  
8 Policies at John Jay College Institute for Justice  
9 and Opportunity and I want to thank Chair's Levin and  
10 Eugene for the opportunity to present testimony today  
11 about Intro. 2047 prohibiting housing discrimination  
12 based on arrest or criminal record.

13 The John Jay College Institute for Justice and  
14 Opportunity's mission is to create opportunities for  
15 people to live successfully in the community after  
16 involvement with the criminal legal system by  
17 addressing structural and racial economic  
18 inequalities. While much of our work focuses on  
19 pathways to education, housing policy has become a  
20 focus for the institute because so many of our  
21 college students that we serve who have been impacted  
22 by the criminal legal system have trouble finding and  
23 maintaining housing.

24 Housing instability interferes with the students  
25 ability to enroll in college and to succeed through  
graduation. And in this way and in so many other

3 ways, the inability to access housing is a barrier to  
4 economic opportunity. While my testimony is focused  
5 on discrimination based on conviction history, I also  
6 want to voice support for increased rental assistance  
7 and ending voucher discrimination. All the bills  
8 under discussion today are important cases of the  
9 changes we need to breakdown the racial and economic  
10 barriers that prevent New Yorkers from accessing safe  
11 and affordable housing.

12 I've submitted written testimony but I want to  
13 focus my time here to speak about the issue of safety  
14 and to address any critics who say this bill would  
15 limit the ability of landlords to provide safe  
16 housing for tenants.

17 First, it's really important to be clear that  
18 increasing access to housing increases safety. An  
19 inability to meet economic need is the key driver of  
20 violence. Housing is a core human need, it provides  
21 a foundation for people to get and maintain jobs, to  
22 care for their families, to contribute to their  
23 communities. It's the foundation for economic  
24 wellbeing which decreases violence. And for people  
25 who have been in the criminal legal system, stable  
housing also decreases recidivism. So, when we

3 eliminate barriers to housing, we improve  
4 neighborhood safety for everyone.

5 Second, it is a fallacy to believe that  
6 conviction history tells us who will be a good tenant  
7 or a good neighbor. Using background checks to  
8 determine whether a person is a good tenant simply  
9 infringes our racist criminal legal system.

10 The inequities of our criminal legal system are  
11 well documented and have been brought fully to  
12 attention in recent months from the protests sparked  
13 by the killing of Black men and women by police. Yet  
14 we are still living with the reality that one and  
15 three African American adult men in the United States  
16 has a felony conviction.

17 This reflects the reality that Black people and  
18 other people of color are the targets of law  
19 enforcement and are treated more harshly and have  
20 worse outcomes once in the criminal legal system. I  
21 guarantee you that landlords have White tenants who  
22 have possessed or sold drugs when they were young or  
23 vandalized property or engaged in other criminal  
24 acts. That those White tenants didn't live in highly  
25 policed neighborhoods. So, they didn't end up in the

1 criminal legal system and end up with a lifetime  
2 barrier of the conviction record.  
3

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

5 ALISON WILKEY: Says more about the circumstances  
6 of your birth than the content of your character and  
7 what we think we know about risk turns out to be  
8 false. People with the most serious convictions  
9 typically have the lowest recidivism rates.

10 For landlords who have a genuine concern about  
11 creating safe community, this bill does nothing to  
12 change that. Nothing in this bill takes away the  
13 ability of landlords to do reference checks or to get  
14 information about a person's past tenancy nor does it  
15 take away the ability to address an existing tenant  
16 who is causing problems. So, long is the basis for  
17 that is their behavior, not an arrest or conviction.

18 I'm happy to answer any other questions about the  
19 bill, about Fair Chance Acts and other jurisdictions  
20 and about this issue of safety. Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to everyone on this  
22 panel. If any Council Members or if the Chair's have  
23 any comments or questions at this time, otherwise we  
24 will move onto the next panel.  
25

3 Okay, so I am now going to call on our next  
4 panel. I just want to remind everyone that public  
5 testimony is limited to three minutes and please wait  
6 for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may  
7 begin your testimony before you begin to speak.

8 The next panel will be Reverend Winnie Varghese,  
9 Stanley Richards, and Erobos and we will begin with  
10 Reverend Winnie Varghese.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 REVEREND WINNIE VARGHESE: Good afternoon. My  
13 name is Winnie Varghese. I am a priest at Trinity  
14 Church on Wall Street. Thank you to Council Member  
15 Levin and Eugene for your leadership and persistence  
16 and serving the unhoused and vulnerable in this city.

17 Trinity Church is the convener of faith  
18 communities for just reentry. An interfaith  
19 coalition across the five boroughs working to end the  
20 cycle of homelessness and incarceration in New York  
21 City. This requires that Mayor de Blasio and the  
22 City Council take action to create a just reentry  
23 system that provides for the safety of people  
24 released from jail. Stable housing for justice  
25 involved people and their families and coordinated

1 support services that are held accountable to the  
2 wellbeing of each person.  
3

4 So, thank you for the opportunity to testify on  
5 2047. We are grateful for the leadership of Council  
6 Member's Levin, Powers, Lander, and Cornegy and  
7 Public Advocate Williams in supporting this  
8 legislation that seeks to address rampant housing  
9 discrimination against New Yorkers with criminal  
10 justice records.

11 A criminal justice record is not the measure of a  
12 person, nor should it be used to deny housing. In  
13 New York City, 15,000 to 20,000 New Yorkers are  
14 caught each year in the cycle of homelessness and  
15 incarceration. This cycle is perpetuated by the  
16 discrimination that our neighbors face during reentry  
17 from jail and prison and in some cases, even before  
18 they are convicted of a crime.

19 In New York, the probability that a person with a  
20 criminal record could even view an available  
21 apartment is 50 percent. Ban the Box and the Fair  
22 Chance Act apply in education and employment but not  
23 yet in housing. We must make it possible for a New  
24 Yorker who has served their time to rebuild their  
25 lives.

3 At this time, NYCHA replicates the discrimination  
4 we see in the private market, by preventing people  
5 with criminal records from returning home to their  
6 former households. While federal law prohibits  
7 individuals with some restriction already, who can  
8 come back into federally funded public housing, NYCHA  
9 uses its own broad discretion to deem residents as  
10 dangerous leading to eviction and family separation  
11 through a policy called permanent exclusion.

12 To be clear, NYCHA currently has the discretion  
13 to exclude people who have simply interacted with the  
14 criminal legal system, not yet convicted of a crime.  
15 Upon arrest and prior to conviction, eviction  
16 proceedings can begin. When we think about who  
17 cannot afford bail, we know who gets caught in this  
18 trap. According to the Vera Institute, between 2012  
19 and 2013, 2,200 people formally living at a NYCHA  
20 address, were released from a city jail, and sought  
21 housing in a shelter.

22 As faith leaders, we are called to proclaim the  
23 beloved community. Defined as a society that takes  
24 particular care of the vulnerable, the unhoused,  
25 those in prison. From the time of our agent text,  
the fairness of systems of justice is important

3 enough to be referenced as a sign of a communities  
4 faithfulness. Injustice equals a lack of love and  
5 fear of God.

6 Faith Communities for just reentry calls upon  
7 Speaker Johnson and members of the City Council to  
8 pass the Fair Chance Housing Legislation proposed.  
9 Putting and end to landlord discrimination against  
10 New Yorkers with a criminal record and their  
11 households. We ask that the City Council call for  
12 NYCHA to end discriminatory permanent exclusion  
13 policies.

14 I want to thank the Council again for their  
15 leadership on this issue and I am grateful for the  
16 opportunity to have spoken before you today. Thank  
17 you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Reverend Varghese.  
19 Now we are going to have Stanley Richards.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 STANLEY RICHARDS: Good afternoon. My name is  
22 Stanley Richards and I am the Executive Vice  
23 President at the Fortune Society.

24 The Fortune Society is a 53-year-old organization  
25 that supports successful reentry from incarceration  
and promotes alternatives to incarceration. Thus,

1 strengthening the fabric of our community. We do  
2 this by focusing on three possibilities. One,  
3 believing in the power of people to change. Two,  
4 building lives through service programs shaped by the  
5 experiences of our participants and three, changing  
6 the minds through education and advocacy to promote  
7 the creation of a fair, humane, and truly  
8 rehabilitative correctional system.  
9

10 While many individuals in the criminal justice  
11 system know about the Fortune Society's role in  
12 providing services and performing advocacy for  
13 individuals, who at some point in their lives were  
14 incarcerated. Fewer individuals know that we also  
15 collect rent, refer calls to our Superintendent and  
16 have an annual haunted house party for kids and other  
17 families in the West Harlem community.

18 In other words, we are also the landlord and  
19 service provider for two buildings in West Harlem.  
20 So, we know the in's and out's of the world as well.  
21 As a result of our experience, we know that a  
22 resident or tenants prior arrests or criminal  
23 convictions simply do not predict community safety or  
24 compliance to pay rent, be a good neighbor, or  
25 decrease the safety of the community at large.

3 First, we are the service provider of the Fortune  
4 Academy. One of the people testifying today was a  
5 former resident. Which residents and staff also  
6 refer to as the castle because of its beautiful  
7 architecture. The castle is an emergency and  
8 transitional supportive housing program that provides  
9 a safe, rehabilitative community for homeless people  
10 coming home from incarceration or who have conviction  
11 histories.

12 Through regular case management, we assist  
13 residents with a wide range of needs including  
14 gaining and maintaining more stable permanent housing  
15 and employment, substance use treatment, recovery,  
16 financial planning and management and family  
17 reunification.

18 Second, we are the landlord for the nearby  
19 building Castle Gardens. A mixed use, supportive and  
20 affordable residential development, and service  
21 center in an environmentally sustainable building.  
22 Castle Gardens provides long-term housing solutions  
23 for homeless, justice involved individuals and their  
24 families. As well as low income individuals and  
25 families from West Harlem in the greater New York  
area.

3 Fortune decided to build both buildings in 2002  
4 and then in 2010 because homelessness for people  
5 returning home from jail and prison is a massive  
6 barrier to reentry and stability. We saw and  
7 continued to see the massive impact homelessness has  
8 on the men and woman who walk through our doors  
9 pursuing stability including housing.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 STANLEY RICHARDS: We saw people come to Fortune  
12 seeking employment but having no place to sleep or  
13 staying in the shelter. We hear about the stories of  
14 people staying in the shelter trying to maintain  
15 their sobriety but trying to navigate the massive  
16 drug use that continues in shelters. There are still  
17 no laws on the books that offer protections and  
18 accountability that are needed to ensure that people  
19 with conviction histories can have a fair chance to  
20 seek and obtain affordable and low income housing.  
21 Based on the work that the individuals do to change  
22 their lives, instead of the crime or conviction that  
23 he or she was convicted for.

24 Despite this fact, safety, and community reaction  
25 almost always two reasons that landlords use when  
asked why those chose to use criminal background

3 checks when assessing an individual for housing. But  
4 when it comes to safety, not only does a lack of  
5 housing actually contribute to poor safety conditions  
6 overall, studies have found little connection between  
7 an individual's criminal history and whether he or  
8 she will be a good tenant.

9 As Human Rights Watch has noted, the existing  
10 criteria invite arbitrary rejection of applicants  
11 without careful assessment of any real safety risk  
12 they might pose.

13 As a result of the arbitrary nature of how  
14 landlords use criminal history and the fact that it  
15 does not have a connection to good tenancy, we urge  
16 the implementation of Intro. 2047. Which is similar  
17 to other laws known as the Fair Chance Housing.

18 At the Fortune Society's Castle Garden building,  
19 we do an individual assessment including interviews  
20 to assess a potential tenants application. Instead  
21 of running a name through a computer database, our  
22 staff does a careful case by case analysis of each  
23 one of our potential tenants. In doing so, we rely  
24 on a number of variable factors that demonstrate  
25 rehabilitation instability and not on the structural

3 racism that underlays our criminal justice system  
4 which is also at the core of HUDS concern.

5 The Fortune Society has also kept its promise to  
6 our partners, our tenants, and community at large of  
7 running and operating a safe, congregate, supportive,  
8 and low income housing facility. In fact, a number  
9 of community members have expressed their  
10 appreciation that with the presence of the castle and  
11 Castle Gardens, their neighborhood has become safer  
12 and more beautiful.

13 We have demonstrated how landlords can maintain  
14 safe buildings and communities and integrate diverse  
15 experiences without discriminating based on  
16 conviction histories and/or credit history.

17 As a formerly incarcerated man of color, I know  
18 first hand how it feels when you are judged based on  
19 what you did or how much time you served. I also  
20 know the difference that emerge when you see and  
21 engage people without judgement and you lead with  
22 hope and opportunity. New York City has an  
23 opportunity to end the housing discrimination based  
24 on conviction history which disproportionately  
25 impacts Black and Brown individuals and families and  
the practice now by passing Intro. 2047 and send

1  
2 landlords a message that discrimination in any form  
3 against one person is discrimination against all in  
4 society. Let's lead with hope and redemption and  
5 pass Intro. 2047. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Richards.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Richards and  
8 now we are going to have Erobos as our next witness.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 EROBOS: Hello, good day to everyone. First and  
11 foremost, let me thank the people that made it  
12 possible for me to attend this hearing, which would  
13 be the Fortune Society, Joseph Soto and Aminta  
14 Kilawan and their advocacy capacity.

15 I want to highlight a community that is not you  
16 know, add to the crisis unfortunately is the  
17 undocumented. As a formerly incarcerated  
18 undocumented man of color, I can tell you that I make  
19 up over a million people in the city that's  
20 undocumented. Over 70 percent of us are employed or  
21 seeking employment and we pay taxes, even though we  
22 are undocumented, which means we pay for the police,  
23 we pay for the fire, teachers, we pay for the City  
24 Council and we don't have a voice in this process  
25 because of our legal status or lack thereof. We

1  
2 can't get vouchers; we can't be accessible for any  
3 federal programs. All of that, we are cut out from  
4 and if it were not for GMHC and the Fortune Society,  
5 I'd be stuck in the shelter system I would say over  
6 ten years now or sleeping on somebody's couch and it  
7 was very difficult. Right, I mean, there were times  
8 where you know, I didn't get a work authorization so,  
9 I had no money, no income. People couldn't hire me.  
10 I had to steal to eat. I got arrested for that. I  
11 was getting into problems in the shelter system,  
12 getting into fights. Basically, working my way back  
13 to the incarceration system of which I have done 18  
14 years.

15 So, the Fortune Society took a chance on me with  
16 no vouchers, no nothing and it's safe housing and I  
17 can echo what Stanley said and even Alison Wilkey.  
18 This is a safety issue because if it was not for the  
19 safety of this place, where you know there is no  
20 violence, no parts of violence. It is safe, it is  
21 clean, I have my own place, you know, I'm employed,  
22 so I pay rent. You know, if it weren't for this  
23 place, I could be a danger to society. I could be  
24 out there in desperation which drove me to criminal  
25 factors to begin with, lack of economic opportunity,

1  
2 discrimination, economic oppression is what it is all  
3 dealing with. I could be out there putting myself at  
4 risk and being a danger to the community just to  
5 survive. Back to prison, back to ICE or whatever and  
6 I'm not doing that because of the wholesome culture  
7 and the stability of the castle that Stan spoke about  
8 and you know, I'm wondering if there is any kind of  
9 pathway people are undocumented. Because the only  
10 difference between an undocumented person that's  
11 working and one that's not working, it is just that.  
12 You know, just our status can improve but yet we pay  
13 taxes.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 EROBOS: Yes, Sergeant, I hear you. Keep hope  
16 alive. So, I want to thank the Fortune Society. I  
17 want to thank Aminta Kilawan, Joseph Soto and a last  
18 word for Chair Levin, you have subpoena power. You  
19 should not be begging and asking anybody for data.  
20 Just subpoena them, make them give it to you, any  
21 department. You know, and yeah, thanks for the  
22 opportunity and I appreciate all that's been said.  
23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much sir.  
25 Thank you. Point well taken as well, thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks very much Erobos. And  
4 now we are going to call on our next panel which will  
5 be in this order, Velvet Ross, Michelle Carreras,  
6 Sofia Janz, and Winston Tokuhisa. And we will begin  
7 with Velvet Ross.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 VELVET ROSS: Good afternoon. Thank you Chair  
10 Levin and Chair Eugene. My maternal and paternal  
11 grandparents were a part of the great migration from  
12 the gen pro cell. They stress education as the key  
13 to a better life. Adhere to those tenants, I adhere  
14 to those tenants. I attended a specialized high  
15 school in New York City, took advantage of the  
16 educational opportunities afforded of me. I went on  
17 to undergrad and then graduate school. I am a former  
18 Ms. Flight World New York, former board member of the  
19 Community Board 7 in the Bronx and a former school  
20 teacher.

21 I was told that if I abided by these rules and  
22 did all the right things, I would be fine but I was  
23 wrong. I found that plain respectability politics  
24 did not allow me from becoming homeless. I became  
25 homeless after living in an unsafe apartment that was  
unlivable. That lead to the deterioration of my

3 health and led me to become disabled and unable to  
4 work.

5 With these multiple structural factors, gender,  
6 race, and poverty, it forced me into the shelter.

7 The saving grace was receiving a CityFHEPS voucher.

8 I thought this would give me the opportunity to live  
9 a better environment. A new opportunity to start

10 over and to live a better quality of life. Trying to  
11 find a safe and habitual apartment for a single  
12 person on \$1,246 is a herculean task.

13 I don't have enough Black girl magic for that.

14 With that amount, I'm still living in the modern Jim

15 Crow because data shows that African Americans often

16 face barriers while attempting to move for more

17 favorable neighborhoods. It set me on a path to see

18 the deep, dark, racial gendered classes,

19 institutional divides in housing, homelessness, and

20 eviction.

21 Living a new existence as a displaced, Black,

22 disabled woman, even with my education, navigating

23 the bureaucratic system, amazed of obtaining and

24 keeping and keeping a voucher is still cumbersome.

25 As now, I am dealing with trying to renew my

shopping letter after my case was closed by Homebase

3 while I was hospitalized and because of that, now I  
4 am on the verge of becoming homeless again.

5 The dream of equity and equality that my  
6 grandparents had is still that, a dream. Let's do  
7 the work and make the reality pass. Please pass  
8 Intro. bill 146, so that fair market value is fair  
9 for the next generation. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and now we will  
12 have Michelle Carreras.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 MICHELLE CARRERAS: Hi. Hello. I am here to  
15 testify today. I am a survivor of domestic violence.  
16 I have spent the last two and a half years in a  
17 domestic violence shelter. Myself and my 9-year-old  
18 son.

19 I am currently a student studying to be a medical  
20 center tech while helping my son with his remote  
21 distance learning. My story is one of a billion in  
22 this city. I feel like every day that I am in this  
23 shelter, my safety, my son's safety is put at risk.  
24 I was told domestic violence victims get you know,  
25 you guys get a lot more leeway, you guys get a lot

1  
2 more help and I find that it is harder for us. There  
3 is the stigma attached to it.

4 I speak to landlords; I speak to brokers and I  
5 don't get a call back the minute that I mention that  
6 I have a voucher. The minute that I mention that I  
7 am in a DV shelter. There is very little help for us  
8 in the system that is already broken. Our housing  
9 specialist she is over worked. She will give us  
10 applications, but the applications do nothing for us.  
11 The management companies are telling us they don't  
12 have anything to match our voucher amount. My  
13 information in regards to my voucher and in regards  
14 to how I make my money, that's where I stop hearing  
15 from anybody. It's already been like I said two and  
16 a half years and its to the point where it is very  
17 discouraging and I don't understand how is that why I  
18 have to go back into DHS family shelter system in  
19 order to get help when I am a domestic violence  
20 victim.

21 I have had to have my son added to an order  
22 protection while being in the shelter. So, I'm at my  
23 whit's end, my hands are tied and I'm stuck in the  
24 system and it's a revolving door unfortunately that  
25 we can never get out of. You are just running in

1 circles. [DROPPED AUDIO 3:35:14] happy people and  
2 productive people in society and its impossible with  
3 everything going on in this climate to move forward.  
4

5 I thank you again for listening to us. I really,  
6 really hope you take into the consideration to the  
7 families that are struggling. As I said, I am one  
8 family in this shelter and there is over 50 families  
9 in this shelter.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Michelle. Now I  
11 will call on Sofia Janz.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 SOFIA JANZ: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen  
14 and thank you for allowing me to testify in regards  
15 to my struggle with my family. But this rental  
16 discrimination started even when we were in the  
17 shelter because of the lack of information. The lack  
18 of the right information, because they would give us  
19 in other words, a pie that was empty and we were told  
20 to eat from it. But yet, when we were out searching  
21 for apartments every day, every day of the week, the  
22 weekend, all of these hours and just to get home on  
23 time was a struggle. My children are depressed. We  
24 have all gone through therapy. My youngest has  
25 mental disabilities as well as my middle daughter and

1 we've been struggling with everything to find out  
2 where we can go and thank God for someone giving me  
3 information about Neighbors Together. We've gotten  
4 more information about rental discrimination and it  
5 helped us because we were able to record an agent in  
6 this recording and she made so many mistakes in  
7 regards to the apartment knowing that I was qualified  
8 for it and it was a two bedroom unit. And once she  
9 found out I had a voucher, it was oh, my God, you  
10 don't qualify. The amount is too high for your  
11 voucher. We will not accept.

12 So, with that, it made us go right back to square  
13 one. Feeling like a victim, feeling like we are  
14 never going to get out of the hole and we were  
15 victims of domestic violence, we were in the shelter,  
16 we were switched to another shelter, a regular family  
17 shelter and with all the money that was spent to just  
18 house us there, it was incredible to see the math  
19 behind it and to understand it. We're not even  
20 getting half of the amount that they were charging  
21 the city to keep us there for a month. And we're  
22 still struggling and we've gotten some positive  
23 feedback from it and with the help and the  
24 organization that has been helping us and we've  
25

1  
2 gotten to know them this last year. We are more  
3 knowledgeable. We have more feedback, we have more  
4 information and I've been paying it forward helping  
5 other people, especially my neighbors, especially  
6 people I bump into in the street or at these  
7 interviews for apartments. And we really need to put  
8 some fire behind this motion. This 146 bill, Intro.  
9 sorry, excuse me. The Intro. 146 bill because once  
10 we can get a lease in a month that can cover a one to  
11 two bedroom and look at our family size, we can  
12 actually start living like we are people. Because we  
13 were never supposed to lose the fact that we are  
14 people. We are part of this city, we are part of  
15 this government, we are part of this world.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 SOFIA JANZ: Thank you so much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Sofia. Now, I will  
19 call on Winston Tokuhisa.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, if you could hold the  
22 time for a second. Just before the next person  
23 testifies, I just want to acknowledge that we have  
24 been joined by Council Members Treyger, Dromm, and  
25 Rosenthal and Council Member Rosenthal does have a

1  
2 question. Council Member Rosenthal, do you want to  
3 ask your question now?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Thank you Council  
5 Member Levin. No, I will wait until the end of the  
6 panel. Thank you so much.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you. Okay, my  
8 apologies, you can continue.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I will call on again, Winston  
10 Tokuhisa.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 WINSTON TOKUHISA: Good afternoon. My name is  
13 Winston Tokuhisa. I am inspiring software engineer.  
14 I am also 34 years old and I've been struggling with  
15 housing insecurity for almost half of my life. I  
16 first become homeless in 2006 after my father locked  
17 me out.

18 Since then, I have been actively seeking the  
19 right path out of poverty. After researching a  
20 variety of different career options, I've come to the  
21 conclusion working in the information technology  
22 sector is the best for me. Unfortunately, even the  
23 most in demand skills, the housing authority caused  
24 by the lack of sufficient rent subsidy have become  
25 progressing.

3 When I first seen my FHEPS voucher in the summer  
4 of 2018, I thought things were fine and looking up.  
5 Unfortunately, by the time my voucher turned into  
6 CityFHEPS the following year I realized it was no  
7 where near enough to cover the rent in NYC even with  
8 the increase.

9 Not long until I considered myself beaten, I  
10 tried to get creative in my search for housing.  
11 Unfortunately, even when I was able to find  
12 opportunities, I can neither overcome DHS or HRA's  
13 demands nor source of income discrimination. The  
14 main challenges of finding housing with the CityFHEPS  
15 voucher, I have been finding viable units for the  
16 allowed price and more recently raising the COVID-19  
17 clock. It is virtually impossible to find even a  
18 small studio of the price of \$1,265 and the lack of  
19 chance one does, the landlord will either refuse to  
20 take the voucher or create something they can't.

21 Prior to 2020, one could afford to be patient.  
22 Now, each day spent in a shelter an increased chance  
23 of catching or transmitting COVID-19. These  
24 challenges have affected me and my ability to get  
25 housing by being in the shelter system for over two  
years. And face some unreasonable amount of pressure

3 on DHS vendors, I refuse to move out to anything less  
4 than stable housing. Accordingly, this will  
5 significantly delay my goal of becoming a software  
6 engineer.

7 More recently, I have tested positive for COVID-  
8 19 exposure. Maybe if the city will pay my rent  
9 instead of double that to the shelter, this would not  
10 have happened. The city must increase voucher  
11 amounts at fair market rate for two reasons. First  
12 and foremost, it will enable individuals to move out  
13 of shelters saving their lives by reducing the risk  
14 of COVID-19 exposure and transmission.

15 In addition, it will put a leak in taxpayer  
16 spending by putting money in some of the actual  
17 problem instead of an imagined one. The city must  
18 also create and enforce robust social discrimination  
19 said laws holding the loopholes landlords have abused  
20 to avoid housing to people – to avoid giving housing  
21 to people who need it most.

22 Thank you for taking the time to hear my words.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Mr.  
24 Tokuhisa and I know that Council Member Rosenthal has  
25 a question for this panel. Council Member Rosenthal?

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Great, thank you so  
4 much. I'm actually walking between meetings, so  
5 sorry, I am not flipping the video but I really just  
6 want to thank both Michelle and Sofia for  
7 illustrating the specific experience of women who are  
8 DV survivors seeking the support from the shelter  
9 system. It's their stories and perhaps the next  
10 panel as well that are exactly what we need to hear  
11 about in order to understand what better the city  
12 could do.

13 So, I really just, I just want to thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member  
15 Rosenthal.

16 Seeing no other Council Members with hands raised  
17 for questions for this panel, we will move on to the  
18 next panel. In this order, witnesses will be Annie  
19 Carforo, Nicole McVinua, Shiniqua Bryan, and Lavoune  
20 Witherspoon, and we will begin with Annie Carforo.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 ANNIE CARFORO: Hi everyone. My name is Annie  
23 and I work at Neighbors Together with homeless New  
24 Yorkers who are looking for housing with rental  
25 assistance programs and I am grateful to testify on  
behalf of some incredibly important and frankly long

3 over due bills that will address rental assistance  
4 vouchers and source of income discrimination.

5 Homelessness in New York City, we all know it is  
6 on the rise and more families are falling into the  
7 cycle for longer periods of time. My members,  
8 amazing people, are not homeless because they are  
9 lazy or they are incapable of independent living.  
10 They are homeless for a simple reason, because the  
11 solutions to address homelessness are failing.

12 Contrary to the testimony of Deputy Commissioner  
13 Drinkwater, moveout options from shelter are  
14 extremely limited and the primary tool, CityFHEPS, it  
15 falls so far below market rent that there is not one  
16 neighborhood in the city that has a median asking  
17 rent within \$100 of the current voucher rate.

18 When my members receive their vouchers, they are  
19 left entirely in the dark in terms of how to navigate  
20 the housing market. The Know Your Rights information  
21 Mr. Jordan referred to in his testimony is small box  
22 telling voucher recipients source of income  
23 discrimination is illegal, nothing more. Not what to  
24 do when a broker stops answering your calls or texts.  
25 Not what to do if you are told your income is too low  
to qualify for an apartment.

3 The source of income unit at the City Commission  
4 on Human Rights does incredible work to defend our  
5 members from source of income discrimination, but  
6 that is contingent upon our members having the  
7 information needed to report discrimination and  
8 having access to the unit.

9 This Administration has continuously underfunded  
10 the City Commission on Human Rights shrinking the  
11 current source of income unit. Despite the  
12 shortcomings of the CityFHEPS program, our members  
13 are breaking their backs to look for apartments.  
14 Searching six to eight hours a day, calling,  
15 emailing, texting brokers, talking to friends,  
16 joining Facebook groups, walking the streets looking  
17 for vacancies.

18 For the units they can find within their price  
19 range, they are almost guaranteed to get  
20 discriminated against. And so many of our members  
21 have to accept and internalize the degradation,  
22 humiliation, and frustration of discrimination  
23 because they are not taught their rights.

24 For my members that do find housing with their  
25 vouchers, they are often forced to accept dangerous  
conditions with abusive landlords who will happily

3 accept a signing bonus and then increase the rent  
4 just beyond their voucher rate at the time of a lease  
5 renewal.

6 My members are doing nothing wrong. In fact,  
7 they are doing everything within their power to get  
8 back on their feet. They are trapped in an agency  
9 with an Administration that based off of earlier  
10 testimony does not care to understand the failures of  
11 their programs.

12 For Council Members who want to better understand  
13 what homeless New Yorkers are up against, put the  
14 current system to the test. Go to a housing search  
15 website like Street Easy and look for a studio for  
16 \$1,265. Look at the quality and the locations of the  
17 apartments and assume that at least half of those  
18 available units will discriminate against you, if you  
19 are planning on using a voucher.

20 Now, adjust your search. Increase the maximum  
21 rent for a studio to \$1,665, which is what CityFHEPS  
22 voucher would be worth under Intro. 146. Look at the  
23 quality and the location of those apartments and  
24 imagine that we implement Intro. 1339, you understand  
25 your rights and how to identify and report source of

3 income discrimination and CCHR has the necessary  
4 resources to keep up with the demand.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 ANNIE CARFORO: But by passing Intro. 146 and  
7 Intro. 1339, City Council has the power to give  
8 homeless New Yorkers a real chance to find housing  
9 and fight back against source of income  
10 discrimination. Thank you for your time.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Annie. We will  
12 move on now to Nicole McVinua.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 NICOLE MCVINUA: Good afternoon, my name is  
15 Nicole McVinua and I am the Director of Policy at  
16 Urban Pathways. Urban Pathways is a nonprofit  
17 homeless services and supportive housing provider.  
18 We assist single adults through a unique combination  
19 of street outreach, drop-in services, safe havens,  
20 extended stay residents, and permanent supportive  
21 housing.

22 Urban Pathways serves over 3,700 New Yorkers in  
23 need each year and our ultimate goal is to help those  
24 we serve achieve and sustain their highest level of  
25 independence. To that end, housing rental subsidies  
are an essential tool for helping our clients achieve

1 independent living, and we know that a competitive  
2 voucher has the potential to provide meaningful  
3 access to the private market for low income New  
4 Yorkers. However, rental vouchers must be  
5 competitive in order to be functional and the current  
6 city funded housing voucher CityFHEPS falls short, as  
7 we've heard from many people today.

9 The current maximum apartment rent for a  
10 CityFHEPS voucher holder makes it next to impossible  
11 to find housing in the city's private market, leading  
12 to frustration and to recipients competing for the  
13 same apartments in a very limited pool that matches  
14 the rates. This forces those exiting homelessness to  
15 move to neighborhoods that may be far from their  
16 supportive resources, including their friends, their  
17 family, healthcare and mental healthcare and  
18 employment opportunities.

19 The single adults Urban Pathways serves who  
20 qualify for a CityFHEPS voucher receive a maximum  
21 monthly rental allowance of only \$1,265 for a one  
22 person household. And this amount only accounts for  
23 72 percent of the fair market rent for an efficiency  
24 apartment, which for FY21 would be \$1,760 a month.

3 So, we've heard the numbers. We know it is very  
4 difficult to find an apartment and that is why we are  
5 testifying in full support of Intro. 146, which will  
6 match the maximum rental allowance of any fully city  
7 funded housing rental subsidy to the FMR.

8 Matching the city's voucher rates to the FMR  
9 would make the CityFHEPS voucher much more effective.  
10 It would also prevent folks from getting evicted when  
11 their rent increases since the lease renewal, at a  
12 lease renewal because there would be a raise with the  
13 FMR.

14 This would make a world of difference for our  
15 clients who are in our drop-in center and our safe  
16 havens, especially those who don't qualify for other  
17 housing opportunities like supportive housing. We  
18 would also like to suggest to Council that another  
19 way to improve the efficacy of the CityFHEPS voucher  
20 would be to expand the eligibility to current  
21 supportive housing tenants.

22 We have a number of tenants in our programs who  
23 have had great success and recovered and they are  
24 ready to move on to fully independent housing. And  
25 so, by making the CityFHEPS vouchers available to our  
supportive housing tenants, we could then open up

3 supportive housing slots for the folks coming out of  
4 shelter who really need those supportive services the  
5 most. So, we would like to recommend that to the  
6 Council. And then we would also like to voice  
7 support for Intro. 1339 to provide rental – those on  
8 rental assistance with source of income  
9 discrimination information because we know that that  
10 is a huge barrier also, as we've heard today.

11 Thanks very much and we urge you to pass Intro.  
12 146 and Intro. 1339.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Nicole and now our  
14 next person is going to be Shinique Bryan.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 SHINIQUA BRYAN: Yes, hello, good afternoon. My  
17 name is Shinique Bryan. I am currently a recipient  
18 of the CityFHEPS program. In which I have the  
19 CityFHEPS vouchers for 1580. I currently reside in  
20 one of the homeless hotel shelters with my family. I  
21 have a 13-year-old with special needs and I have a  
22 15-year-old and my spouse.

23 It's a complete struggle. Every day I am calling  
24 brokers, either once I tell them that you know, I  
25 have a voucher, I either get, I'm busy or I don't get  
a response or I get you are not eligible. I have

1  
2 been applying to the HPD Housing Connect, either the  
3 only time we get a response from that is when you  
4 either don't meet the qualifications or your voucher  
5 doesn't you know, cover the whole subsidy amount.

6       It's a really difficult task. I'm also employed  
7 with the Board of Education and you know, it's been a  
8 really trying task with everything that is going on  
9 with COVID and then dealing with you know, my own  
10 personal stress with my children to do remote  
11 learning and it's really a task to be able to  
12 function mentally. You know, it's very depressing.

13       So, that's why passing this, you know, there is  
14 nothing that you can get for \$1,580. The most that  
15 you can get is like a one bedroom. I even said I  
16 would take a one bedroom but a lot of brokers are  
17 like, you can't do that with a family of four people.  
18 So, it's very discouraging. So, that's why I really  
19 vouge for the passing of this bill Intro. 146 and  
20 Intro. 1339. It will really make a difference and it  
21 the problem of homelessness I believe.

22       Thank you so much. I hope that everyone is safe.  
23 Everyone that was affected by this COVID, my deepest  
24 and sincerest condolences and I just wish everyone  
25

1  
2 the best and everyone stay safe and blessed. Thank  
3 you for listening.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Shiniqua.  
5 And now, our next witness is going to be Lavoune  
6 Witherspoon.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 LAVOUNE WITHERSPOON: Hello?

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi Lavoune, we can hear you.

10 LAVOUNE WITHERSPOON: Oh, okay, thank you. My  
11 name is Lavoune Witherspoon. First I would like to  
12 say I am a member of Neighbors Together and I would  
13 like to thank Ms. Annie Carforo as well as the  
14 Council Members for really putting this together  
15 because this situation really to me needed to be  
16 heard.

17 A little bit about myself. I am a CityFHEPS  
18 person right now, but I had the first city voucher  
19 which was linked in 2014. I found the one bedroom  
20 that DHS approved for me and my son to move in and  
21 then when I got there, about coming into the first  
22 year, I had a lot of violations in the apartment.  
23 Long story short, I complained about the issues. Me  
24 and my slum landlord were going back and forth to  
25

1 court, it was in a private house and then he evicted  
2 me.  
3

4 He evicted me in 2017 and for that year, I didn't  
5 want to bring my son back into the shelter system. I  
6 tried to reach out to a lot of people, so somebody  
7 could take notice of what was going on because the  
8 voucher wasn't working for the people. So, that  
9 \$1,268, that what I was able to get, was a slum  
10 landlord apartment.

11 So, as we fast forward to 2020, I'm back in the  
12 shelter, another two years with a new voucher that  
13 was only a \$50 something difference that's still not  
14 working for the people. You know, and this Intro.  
15 146, oh my gosh, it really needs to be passed and  
16 once again, I'm just so happy that you guys really  
17 gave me this opportunity to kind of speak out because  
18 it was kind of quiet for a while coming from the  
19 higher up, you know, but I know we have to stick  
20 together. The low income people, the homeless  
21 families are the working families. We are the ones  
22 that live in the system, the shelter system that's  
23 very bad and a couple of people spoke on it which I  
24 feel like is a catch 22. How can you take thousands  
25 of dollars to live in a homeless shelter that's bad,

3 is dangerous, you don't have the proper food. No one  
4 is helping you. You pay all this money but then you  
5 won't advance the vouchers and what is more bad is  
6 that, if my voucher is \$1,023 and I find a one  
7 bedroom for \$1,500, we are not allowed to add the  
8 balance of the rest of the money to add up for the  
9 \$1,500. If that's not a catch 22, I don't know what  
10 is. Because it's like okay, you gave me the voucher,  
11 I don't have enough money but I'm willing to pay the  
12 difference. We're not allowed to do that or we could  
13 lose our voucher and get in trouble.

14 You know, so, I just want to say again thank you  
15 because when I spoke with Annie, I just cried because  
16 it was like finally. You know, we as people, we  
17 really have to stick together. It's not a one man  
18 thing. It's all of us, we have to stick together but  
19 I'm grateful for you guys you know.

20 So, I don't know if my time is up but that's just  
21 what I wanted to say. I just wanted to say thank you  
22 again. I'm just so happy that it's actually being  
23 noticed really now, it's really being noticed. This  
24 is very serious, it's a problem. Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: That concludes this panel.

4 Thank you Ms. Witherspoon. Chair Levin, do you have  
5 any remarks or questions for this panel? Otherwise,  
6 we will move onto the next one.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just want to thank Ms.  
8 Carforo and Neighbors Together. When I met with them  
9 oh, probably almost two years ago now, you know, they  
10 confirmed on the ground what we had suspected and had  
11 been talking about which is just the – you know, how  
12 difficult in real terms it is. And so, they pointed  
13 out how they are able to navigate for their clients  
14 and a lot of it is just, it's like shoestring stuff  
15 and it also involves working with the Commission on  
16 Human Rights and so, I just want to acknowledge that  
17 you know, they are – it is so, so difficult and so, I  
18 just want to really acknowledge all of the clients  
19 and providers that are out there every day trying to  
20 make this work despite these huge obstacles in their  
21 way and Ms. Witherspoon, you are absolutely right.  
22 You know, the catch 22 and the frustration of having  
23 you know, an apartment that you could make up the  
24 difference for but because of a policy decision that  
25 they decided on several years ago, you know, they

1  
2 make it literally impossible to have anything out of  
3 reach of whatever the CityFHEPS amount is.

4 And so, we could be doing so much better by all  
5 the clients out there. So, thank you so much to this  
6 panel.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I will call on our next  
8 panel. The witnesses for our next panel will be in  
9 the following order. Sharon White-Harrigan, Kendra  
10 Clark, Shawn Void and Victor Herrera. We will begin  
11 with Sharon White-Harrigan.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 SHARON WHITE-HARRIGAN: Thank you so much and  
14 thank you Chair Levin for the work that you do and  
15 the City Council Members for having this hearing. My  
16 name is Reverend Sharon White-Harrigan and I am the  
17 Executive Director of the Women's Community Justice  
18 Association, also known as WCJA. The Co-founder of  
19 the Justice for Women Task Force and a member of the  
20 Faith Communities for Just Reentry. And we support  
21 the bills that are on the table and as a person who  
22 is also a returning citizen, I too have been the  
23 target of housing discrimination because of my record  
24 and on the other end of the spectrum, having ran a  
25 shelter contracted with DHS, the vouchers as we know

3 it make it impossible for people to succeed and it's  
4 appalling to be here having to testify to things that  
5 should be a natural human right and asking for a fair  
6 chance in housing.

7 When will the city get the message that those  
8 closest to the problem have the solutions. Policies  
9 and regulations are constantly created for a  
10 population that they do not understand. How many  
11 people in DHS have been homeless or incarcerated?  
12 People need stability to further their course in life  
13 and the current voucher system is designed to keep  
14 the Black and the Brown community oppressed because  
15 that is the population that is in the shelter system.  
16 And then you have people in DHS, like Arlene Bogart,  
17 a Program Administrator in the Directors meeting not  
18 knowing people's history, calling people with justice  
19 histories garbage.

20 And is this the entity we ought to believe and  
21 trust in to help the people effectively and have  
22 their best interests at heart, to care about the  
23 community that they serve when there is zero  
24 accountability. We need to change how we do things  
25 and who you have doing it. The reality is that the

1 systems are never going to work until you bring we,  
2 us, the people to the table.  
3

4 So, let's do the right thing here. Let's pass  
5 these bills because the vouchers as it is, is just  
6 another knee on our necks and guess what? We still  
7 can't breathe. Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Reverend.  
9 And now, we will have Kendra Clark to deliver  
10 testimony.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 KENDRA CLARK: Yes, hi, can you all hear me?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.

14 KENDRA CLARK: Sorry, my video for some reason is  
15 failing to work today. I am Vice President of Policy  
16 and Strategy with Exodus Transitional Community. We  
17 are a preventative reentry and advocacy organization  
18 with locations in East Harlem as well as upstate New  
19 York and we also have hotels that we're currently  
20 servicing for people who are released from  
21 incarceration during COVID in Queens and Manhattan.

22 I just want to start today by really thanking  
23 Council Member Levin. Every one who spoke, Devon  
24 Nash, I really appreciated your testimony. You know,  
25

1 getting to hear from all the folks first hand is  
2 really important for us.

3  
4 As a directly impacted organization, 90 percent  
5 of our staff have criminal justice histories as well  
6 as you know, 100 percent of our residents.

7 I wanted to fully support as an agency all three  
8 of the bills today, Intro. 2047, 146, and 1339. Just  
9 to speak briefly on the issue with the vouchers, you  
10 know, as a MOCJ funded hotel in April when we opened  
11 up the hotels during COVID, you know, we were told  
12 that we were not because we were not a DHS funded  
13 shelter, our folks would not be considered homeless  
14 right. They wouldn't qualify for any of these  
15 housing vouchers.

16 I just want to personally let you know it took me  
17 four months of working and you know, really fighting  
18 the system and working with HRA and really pulling in  
19 CSH and I really want to give them a shout out on the  
20 phone because I think if wouldn't have been able to  
21 pull them in, we would still probably be sitting here  
22 today not having access to the cap system or access  
23 to the voucher system for our residents.

24 With that being said, when I got access to the  
25 cap system, I called the HRA number for a week

1 straight, left voice mails. I never heard a  
2 response. It was not until I had to take it up to a  
3 higher you know ranking official at HRA for them to  
4 be able to actually give me my password, so I could  
5 actually move through the cap system.  
6

7 So, there is definitely a lack of communication  
8 and coordination. If I was calling the HRA hotline  
9 for a week, trying to get this as a Vice President, I  
10 can only imagine how frustrating it is for our  
11 residents and our participants to continuously call a  
12 number and not have anyone answer or not get any  
13 response back.

14 In addition to that, I have folks who have had  
15 expired FHEPS vouchers and now, we are reissuing you  
16 know, getting them reissued. One person that just  
17 came to me in the last two days, about ten people  
18 have showed me expired FHEPS vouchers that they need  
19 to get renewed. One was from March of last year, so  
20 it has been about 18 months.

21 So, you know, from our experience, what we're  
22 seeing, people are having these vouchers for 18  
23 months, two years and they are still not able to get  
24 housing. So, any you know, improvements that we can  
25 make upon the voucher systems, I think is really

1  
2 important. In addition to that, I just want to let  
3 you all know it took me five years after coming home  
4 from prison as a White woman to find housing. I had  
5 to stay in a relationship that I was not happy in -

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 KENDRA CLARK: Because I was not able to qualify  
8 for all the housing vouchers. And again, five years  
9 is just such a long waiting period for someone to try  
10 to get housing when you are coming home and working  
11 and doing what's right.

12 In addition, I wanted to just respond a little  
13 bit to Council Member Holden. You know, he spoke a  
14 lot about how we could demonstrate that we've been  
15 rehabilitated or he talked about consequences to  
16 tenants and you know for me personally, it kind of  
17 almost seems like we should just wear a sign across  
18 our neck that says, I'm a formerly incarcerated six  
19 times felon. And that's what I should just have to  
20 wear around no matter how long I've been home because  
21 apparently that's kind of more important than giving  
22 people housing and housing is a human right.

23 We should not be talking about consequences or  
24 demonstrating rehabilitation when this is a human

3 right. Folks need to come home and get on their feet  
4 and they can't do so without housing.

5 In addition, I think that we should also you  
6 know, really think through if you wanted to talk  
7 about demonstrating rehabilitation, who would  
8 demonstrate that? As a formerly incarcerated woman,  
9 I haven't even applied for a certificate of good  
10 conduct, because I would have to demonstrate and  
11 rehabilitate it to parole and parole had nothing to  
12 do with my rehabilitation.

13 They did not help me when I came home, so just  
14 thinking through, who do we have to demonstrate these  
15 things to, I think is a very important point in this  
16 and I really want to stand firm that this should - do  
17 we want to plant prohibition on this and that we  
18 should not have any waiting periods. There should  
19 not be any display of rehabilitation. Housing is a  
20 human right and you know; we are here to fight for  
21 that.

22 So, thank you very much.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Kendra. We will  
24 now move onto Shawn Boyd is our next witness.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 SHAWN BOYD: Good afternoon. Thank you for  
4 giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Shawn  
5 Boyd. I was recently released this past December  
6 from prison after serving 30 years for a crime that I  
7 did not commit.

8 When I was released, I had no idea of how  
9 difficult it would be to find housing here in New  
10 York. There is no system in place that will prepare  
11 you for this difficult transition or challenge and  
12 words cannot describe what one will face upon  
13 entering in a city shelter.

14 Imagine preparing every day for your release from  
15 prison and your first day at home being placed in an  
16 environment that lacks structure, caring or basic  
17 hygienic necessities, where drug addiction and mental  
18 disabilities are allowed to run freely.

19 Housing is a fundamental right of every human  
20 being. Housing is just as vital to our society as  
21 liberty and justice for all. Yet, we have in a  
22 society that denies us this fundamental right.

23 I get up and go to work every day. I am taking  
24 classes online to further my education. I'm active  
25 in my community working with the youth. I'm a law  
abiding citizen and I pay my taxes and I still cannot

3 find affordable housing. The laws that govern  
4 housing in New York, whether we look at the process  
5 of background checks, NYCHA using B misdemeanors to  
6 deny applicants. This system is no different than  
7 the Black calls that were instituted during the past  
8 reconstruction period of slavery, to keep former  
9 slaves from keeping progress in society.

10 There are many former prisoners like myself who  
11 have educated themselves and who really want to be  
12 given an opportunity to be an integral part of  
13 society but by denying us a fair chance at housing,  
14 you stack the deck against us before we even answer  
15 the door.

16 We need to address these problems that denies the  
17 fundamental right of fair housing. I thank you for  
18 giving me the time to speak.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Mr. Boyd, thank you.

21 SHAWN BOYD: Yes.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now call on Victor  
23 Herrera is our next witness.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

25 VICTOR HERRERA: Hi everyone. I am going to  
basically go off of what I already wrote okay,

3 because honestly it can't be no clearer than what  
4 basically I've been going through.

5 My name is Victor Herrera, I am a native New  
6 Yorker and it directly impacted individuals who spent  
7 three years in the Department of Homeless Services  
8 inadequate shelter system. I want to thank the  
9 panel, especially the Chair Stephen Levin for pushing  
10 many of the concerns on the City Council Committee on  
11 General Welfare.

12 Much of the discrimination faced by the homeless  
13 and formerly incarcerated are three fold. Mental  
14 health discrimination, criminalization and the use of  
15 homeless status income based discrimination to keep  
16 the economically challenged from equally benefiting  
17 from the programs that's enforced.

18 As someone who was also formerly incarcerated,  
19 the highly policed shelter environment manifests  
20 serious trauma for me as the person in the  
21 environment feels no different in a correctional  
22 setting. While in the shelter system, including 30  
23 Street Men's Shelter, I was criminalized and  
24 subjected to unlawful uses of practices under the  
25 guys reporting emotionally disturbed persons by VHS  
police on account of my reform activities. And have

3 provided previous testimony on the subject of housing  
4 discrimination to this Committee.

5 I am presently faced with a hold over eviction  
6 and am increasingly concerned about how I will find  
7 alternate housing as I have been overlooked many  
8 times over with no reasons of clear justification.  
9 Even while applying for units within my own community  
10 board for which I am supposed to be able to benefit  
11 from community preference.

12 I have always believed that changes do occur when  
13 you change the environment of those affected.  
14 Whether from good to bad or bad to good. The tests  
15 only can be demonstrated by the history of planning  
16 and implementation. Those changes cannot occur when  
17 we continue to deny those human beings economic  
18 equality where programs we can clearly see have not  
19 worked.

20 One example is NYC Connect. Implemented by the  
21 City of New York Housing Preservation Development and  
22 Housing Development Corporation under the umbrella of  
23 Department of Homeless Services. That was intended  
24 to provide an online portal to find and apply for  
25 affordable housing. I have tried to use this  
resource but discriminatory assessment and selection

3 criteria have prevented me from qualifying though I  
4 have submitted 50 to 100 online applications. I saw  
5 clear evidence of income based discrimination when I  
6 applied for a unit priced at \$509 monthly which I  
7 could more than afford with a monthly voucher for  
8 \$1,265 from CityFHEPS. But the unit required a  
9 yearly income of \$24,600 which I did not meet.

10 This requirement allowed the developer and a  
11 nonprofit to escape accountability and deny me  
12 eligibility. The practice is a barrier for many of  
13 the homeless and formerly incarcerated. People to  
14 obtain affordable units which only perpetrates  
15 homelessness on a higher level.

16 I also want to bring to the Council's attention  
17 further concerns related to housing discrimination  
18 and treatment of people experiencing homelessness  
19 which are not directly addressed by these bills and  
20 ask that you consider amendments of further  
21 legislation to address these issues. I am personally  
22 deliberately over livid by how the City of New York  
23 is permitted to use and disseminate housing  
24 situations as those of the homeless and developers  
25 who then use to pick and choose through  
disqualification poverty stricken individuals from

3 benefiting and to add insult to injury to the  
4 Department of Homeless Services who are very familiar  
5 with my advocacy and reformats activities has  
6 included, which has included federal litigation. Has  
7 lead me to question whether the lottery system is  
8 actually a controlled type process that discriminates  
9 against the homeless and poor community as well as  
10 with disabilities, conviction records and mental  
11 health. The growth in homelessness [INAUDIBLE  
12 4:12:10] to house the homeless individuals.

13 All the legislation, the Council is concerned  
14 today [dropped audio 4:12:22] need to be passed  
15 immediately. We must remove the stigma many of has  
16 been subjected to in violation of the Equal Housing  
17 Opportunity Act. Housing is a human right. The City  
18 collectively preferred to wait the prison to shelter  
19 pipeline.

20 Thank you for letting me speak.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Mr.  
22 Herrera.

23 Seeing no Council Member questions for this panel  
24 and I'm not sure that Council Member Levin has any  
25 questions as well. We will move on to our next panel  
and I will call Eric Lee, Joseph Loonam, Nicole

3 Branca, and Giselle Routhier. We will begin with  
4 Eric Lee.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 ERIC LEE: Hi, good morning. My name is Eric  
7 Lee, I am the Director of Policy and Planning for  
8 Homeless Services United. Thank you Chair Levin and  
9 Chair Dr. Eugene and Members of the Committee, both  
10 Committee's for allowing me to testify today.

11 In the sake of time, I will summarize my written  
12 testimony. HSU strongly supports Intro. 146 to  
13 increase city funded housing voucher rent levels to  
14 FMR. If vouchers do not better reflect the true cost  
15 of housing in New York, not just the cheapest, many  
16 more households will be evicted in the coming months  
17 and we will see a new wave of families entering  
18 shelter.

19 Homebase providers are already seeing households  
20 that never would have needed their services before.  
21 There are tenant who previously had higher incomes  
22 who are living in higher rent apartments that are now  
23 unable to make rent. Since their rents are too high,  
24 these tenants would lack future ability to pay, which  
25 is a requirement for one shot deals and if tenants

3 cannot find a way to make their own rent, they are  
4 eventually going to be evicted.

5 Raising CityFHEPS to fair market rent would also  
6 help families and individuals currently residing in  
7 shelter to move out more quickly. In response to  
8 First Deputy Commissioner Drinkwater's comments about  
9 how personal preferences can impact housing  
10 searching. By increasing rent amount levels, you  
11 will give more households more options.

12 We also urge the Council to consider expanding  
13 eligibility for CityFHEPS in the community to serve  
14 more individuals. Many individuals at risk of  
15 eviction never have been homeless previously would  
16 not qualify for a CityFHEPS voucher and they would  
17 have to go to shelter in order to qualify.

18 HSU also supports Intro. 1020 which does  
19 reporting around StateFHEPS. It's critical to  
20 understanding to what degree families are able to  
21 access this benefit as well as to maintain it in a  
22 timely manner. There is currently no way for  
23 families to actively request assistance with applying  
24 for FHEPS or if there is issues with the current  
25 application through the Access HRA app. Without this  
ability, we don't know whether or not they can

1 maintain it. We recommend that the data for this be  
2 parsed by zip code as well as by HRA catchment area,  
3 as well as increasing the frequency from quarterly to  
4 monthly reports, so that you can better get real time  
5 tracking for how this is going.  
6

7 Prior to COVID, homebased providers reported that  
8 families are being inappropriately referred by HRA  
9 centers to them. Every time someone is referred,  
10 there is another chance they may fall between the  
11 cracks. To try to get at this, it would be helpful  
12 to also track the number of new cases that were  
13 submitted, new FHEPS cases submitted by HRA without  
14 needing Homebase referrals, as well as the number of  
15 HRA referrals to Homebase specifically for FHEPS  
16 issues.

17 We also recommend broadening the reporting  
18 requirements for other city subsidized rental  
19 assistance to include in community versus moveouts  
20 from street or shelter, so that we can -

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 ERIC LEE: Better understand the ability of if  
23 people can access FHEPS or whether or not they might  
24 then secondarily qualify for CityFHEPS if they get  
25 turned down for FHEPS or can't access it. And

3 finally, for Council Member or Chair Levin's  
4 Preconsidered 6576. We welcome the opportunity to  
5 work with Council Member Levin and the Committee to  
6 further identify bottlenecks in the CityFHEPS  
7 application process and how we can help solve for  
8 them.

9 Thank you for your time and for allowing me to  
10 testify.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Eric. I  
12 will call on Joseph Loonam as our next witness.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 JOSEPH LOONAM: Alright, thank you for allowing  
15 me the opportunity to testify. The COVID-19 pandemic  
16 has put unprecedented pressure on housing resources  
17 in New York City and we are bracing for a rise in  
18 homelessness this winter and into 2021.

19 The City Council must take every step available  
20 to ensure that housing for all people and vulnerable  
21 populations are not disproportionately impacted by  
22 the current and growing housing crisis. Currently,  
23 there are two bills being considered by the Council  
24 that could have a major impact on New Yorkers ability  
25 to secure permanent and dignified homes. Intro. 146  
which would expand CityFHEPS vouchers to a market

3 rate and ensure 204 which would prevent a landlord  
4 from inquiring about a criminal history.

5 We know that criminal conviction reduces the  
6 probability of a landlords allowing perspective  
7 tenants to view an apartment rental by more than 50  
8 percent and formerly incarcerated people are nearly  
9 ten times more likely to be homeless than the general  
10 public.

11 If New York City is to make good on its  
12 progressive reputation, the City Council must  
13 eliminate these discriminatory practices with a first  
14 step being a clear prohibition.

15 These issues are directly related to the  
16 controversy emerging in the upper west side. Where  
17 temporary shelter placed in a hotel to allow for  
18 physical distancing during COVID-19. Residents have  
19 come out and drove to defend homeless members of  
20 their community for horrific attacks, threats of  
21 violence, but unfortunately until recently our Mayor  
22 has not shown the same courage.

23 Last week, we found out that there were plans to  
24 clear out family shelters, fire current employees  
25 working there and move the residents from the Lucerne  
Hotel. This is just the latest injustice that

1 residents from the Harmonious Shelter are faced.  
2  
3 Many have languished in a shelter for years because  
4 they cannot find apartments with their CityFHEPS  
5 voucher. It is all too a common story for members of  
6 local New York. People often spend years fighting to  
7 get CityFHEPS vouchers believing that once they have  
8 a shopping letter in hand, they will soon have a home  
9 of their own. Only to realize that getting a voucher  
10 is simply the start of the fight.

11 A research project led by Vocal New York leaders  
12 and Take Root Justice engaged directly impacted  
13 people, people who have experience as I deemed, to  
14 try to reveal how prevalent this problem is. They  
15 found the voucher holders are three times less likely  
16 to hear back from the Department than those with  
17 income. When they do hear back, they are less likely  
18 to be invited for a viewing. In several cases, they  
19 were told bluntly, we do not accept vouchers.

20 We found though that the largest barrier is the  
21 simplest act that the vouchers do not pay enough.  
22 When we began our research into the issue, it was our  
23 intention to only test listings that were within the  
24 range of the CityFHEPS voucher or mainly test listing  
25 that were in the range of the CityFHEPS voucher.

3 But what we quickly realized as that there were  
4 simply not enough apartments on the market for us to  
5 get the kind of data we needed for our report.

6 Currently, the average rent for a one bedroom  
7 apartment in every single one of the five boroughs is  
8 higher than what the CityFHEPS voucher will pay.  
9 That means, every day thousands of voucher holders  
10 are competing for a woefully small number of  
11 apartments that by definition are the cheapest and  
12 worst maintained housing in New York City.

13 Rather than a ticket out of the shelter system,  
14 vouchers have become tickets to humiliation. Many  
15 people who are set to be transferred out of the  
16 Harmonious Shelter, had vouchers for months or even  
17 years. They have watched voucher after voucher  
18 expire while the rents in New York City climb further  
19 and further out of reach. This is a public policy  
20 failure of the worst kind because it offers people  
21 false hope. It allowed city officials to claim they  
22 are doing all they can to help people secure  
23 permanent housing while more and more people endure  
24 the indignities of shelter because their vouchers are  
25 useless.

Thank you for your time.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Joe. I will now  
4 call on Nicole Branca as our next witness.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 NICOLE BRANCA: Thank you for the opportunity to  
7 testify today. My name is Alisa Kyle, testifying in  
8 place of Nicole Branca and I am the Director of the  
9 Housing Link at New Destiny Housing Corporation. A  
10 26-year-old nonprofit committed to ending the cycle  
11 of domestic violence and homelessness by connecting  
12 families to safe, permanent housing and services.

13 New Destiny supports all of the legislation  
14 introduced today and thanks the Council for their  
15 work on behalf of our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

16 I would also like to thank the people with lived  
17 experiences who have shared their stories today.

18 Most notably, I would like to address Intro. 146 and  
19 the significant affect it would have on the lives of  
20 domestic violence survivors and their children.

21 Domestic violence is the number one reason families  
22 become homeless in New York City.

23 In Fiscal Year 2018, 12,541 people entered DHS's  
24 shelter system due to domestic violence and another  
25 6,400 entered HRA's separate domestic violence  
shelter system. Yet, there are few housing resources

1  
2 made available for survivors and their families with  
3 the less competitive city and state subsidies  
4 typically being the only one.

5 As a result, these families struggle to find  
6 apartments below the fair market rent. We know this  
7 first hand. For the past six years, New Destiny in  
8 partnership with the Mayor's Office to end domestic  
9 and gender based violence, has worked out of the  
10 city's family justice centers to provide housing  
11 assistance.

12 Our program, called Housing Link connects victims  
13 of domestic violence with safe, permanent housing  
14 around New York City. 74 percent of our families  
15 with subsidies have CityFHEPS or FEPS. Our clients  
16 typically remain in shelter for several months while  
17 our team searches for landlords that will accept this  
18 lower rental subsidy.

19 Bringing maximum rent allowances for CityFHEPS up  
20 to fair market rent would provide a far greater  
21 access to housing for low income New Yorkers like our  
22 Housing Link clients.

23 According to the 2017 New York City housing and  
24 vacancy survey, the vacancy rate in New York City is  
25 3.63 percent and as low as 1.18 percent for the most

3 affordable apartments in the city. Simply stated  
4 CityFHEPS voucher holders and therefore many  
5 survivors of domestic violence are forced to compete  
6 in an incredibly tight market with a subsidy that is  
7 almost \$400 a month lower than Section 8.

8 New Destiny also supports the removal of time  
9 limits for participation in the CityFHEPS program.  
10 This too would put CityFHEPS holders on more equal  
11 footing with Section 8 holders and mitigates the  
12 risks of our families returning to shelter.

13 In order for CityFHEPS to be the impactful city  
14 funded voucher program it was developed to be, it  
15 must ensure every family holding a voucher is able to  
16 utilize the assistance by aligning the voucher levels  
17 with the fair market rate and eliminating the current  
18 time limit which places an unrealistic expectation on  
19 families.

20 New Destiny strongly encourages the Council to  
21 pass Intro. 146. Thank you for the opportunity to  
22 speak today and I welcome any questions.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and now we will ask  
24 Giselle Routhier to deliver testimony.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 GISELLE ROUTHIER: Good afternoon. My name is  
4 Giselle Routhier. I am the Policy Director at  
5 Coalition for the Homeless. I want to thank the  
6 Council and the Committee's today for the opportunity  
7 to testify. We have submitted detailed written  
8 testimony in conjunction with Legal Aid Society but I  
9 will cover some main points now.

10 On Intro. 146, the Coalition for the Homeless and  
11 the Legal Aid Society support raising CityFHEPS rent  
12 levels to the fair market rent. A critically  
13 important result of this change is that it will  
14 significantly expand the number of studios and one  
15 bedroom apartments available to homeless single  
16 adults. By increasing the CityFHEPS rent levels for  
17 studio apartment by nearly 40 percent and the one  
18 bedroom CityFHEPS rent levels by 36 percent.

19 Maximum rent levers for larger apartments will  
20 increase upwards of 25 percent as well. This will  
21 greatly expand the pool of available apartments for  
22 homeless individuals as well as families.

23 In support of this goal, we have several  
24 important recommendations for amending the current  
25 bill language. First, the bill language must be  
amended to explicitly raise the CityFHEPS rent levels

1 to the most recent FMR's. As the bill is written, it  
2 requires city vouchers only to be indexed to FMR.  
3 Thereby leaving open the possibility that voucher  
4 increases will simply mirror FMR increases without  
5 matching their levels exactly.  
6

7 Second, we support adding requirements that  
8 apartments rented with CityFHEPS be subject to unit  
9 inspection standards similar or equal to the Section  
10 8 housing quality standards. Using the higher  
11 federal standard for all city subsidies would promote  
12 housing quality, streamline the inspection process,  
13 reduce confusion among city and shelter staff,  
14 consumers, and landlords, reduce source of income  
15 discrimination and maximize the availability of  
16 federal dollars for New York City tenants.

17 Third, the bill language should expand the  
18 definition of rental assistance voucher to include  
19 all city initiated vouchers rather than vouchers that  
20 are fully city funded.

21 In some cases, CityFHEPS and its predecessor  
22 Link, had some portion of funding allocated from the  
23 state and federal governments. That should not  
24 preclude CityFHEPS or any future programs from  
25 abiding by the requirements to meet the FMR standard.

3 Lastly, the language should also specify that the  
4 city can and should use state and federal money to  
5 fund the increase of city initiated vouchers to FMR.  
6 Thereby providing a sounder financial footing for the  
7 continuation of the program.

8 For too long, the state and federal governments  
9 have failed to contribute an appropriate level of  
10 funding for rent assistance programs.

11 The coronavirus pandemic has clearly highlighted  
12 the indisputable fact that housing is healthcare.  
13 New York City was grappling with record homelessness  
14 prior to the pandemic. The Department has noted  
15 several times in their testimony, the decrease in the  
16 shelter Census over the past few years but I think it  
17 is important to dive into that more clearly.

18 Over the course of this pandemic and in the  
19 months and years before, we have seen diverging  
20 trends in homelessness among families and single  
21 adults. Disturbingly, the number of single adults in  
22 shelters has reached all-time record highs many  
23 nights during 2020.

24 In the latest comprehensive data from July, there  
25 were more than 19,500 single adults each night in  
Department of Homeless Services, shelters, safe

1 havens, stabilization beds, and veterans beds,  
2 representing a 9 percent increase from the previous  
3 year and 122 percent increase from 2010.  
4

5 Even at the same time that the number of families

6 -

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS:

8 GISELLE ROUTHIER: And I will wrap up. The  
9 importance of raising CityFHEPS to FMR is that it  
10 will significantly raise the levels for studios and  
11 one bedrooms, a critical tool for helping to reduce  
12 homelessness among single adults and adult families.

13 All homeless adults and families regardless of  
14 whether they are homeless prior to the pandemic or as  
15 a result of the pandemic, urgently need an effective  
16 way to leave homelessness and return to stable  
17 housing as quickly as possible.

18 I want to thank you for the opportunity to  
19 testify today and please see our written testimony  
20 for our full comments, including information on the  
21 other bills being heard today. Thank you so much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony  
23 Giselle. I am now going to call up our next panel.  
24 In the following order witnesses will be Basha  
25 Gerhards, Suzanne Adler, Victoria Phillips, Irene

3 Linares, and Justin La Mort. And we are going to  
4 begin with Basha Gerhards.

5 BASHA GERHARDS: Good afternoon. My name is  
6 Basha Gerhards, Vice President of Policy and  
7 Planning.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 BASHA GERHARDS: Oh, time started. Thank you for  
10 the opportunity to speak today. To the Chair's and  
11 for those who have shared their experiences. REBNY  
12 strongly support efforts to expand access to rental  
13 assistance programs. The data is clear that  
14 expanding access to vouchers is an effective tool to  
15 help integrate neighborhoods of opportunity and  
16 provide financial security for tenants and  
17 neighborhoods experiencing significant change.

18 Stabilizing households prior to experiencing  
19 housing instability, the trauma of an undeserved  
20 eviction process and entering the shelter system is  
21 simply the right thing to do. Housing instability is  
22 particularly acute in communities of color and for  
23 people experiencing mental health challenges because  
24 of the deep unjust impact at the justice system on  
25 those communities. Fair Housing guidance also  
recognizes this disparate impact. For this reason,

1 REBNY appreciates the efforts being made by the City  
2 Council to expand access to stable housing. The  
3 principle criteria for identifying if a tenant is  
4 qualified for housing should be their ability to pay  
5 without regard to the source of income. An owner has  
6 an equal obligation to tenants already in the  
7 building to provide a safe, healthy, and livable  
8 environment. The warrant of habitability. Indeed,  
9 achieving this balance is important and consistent  
10 with the Fair Housing Act, which only prohibits  
11 arbitrary and overly broad bans related to criminal  
12 history.  
13

14 Fair Chance Housing Statutes at the Detroit Fair  
15 Chance Housing ordinance strikes a reasonable  
16 balance. The law states that owners may only  
17 investigate the applicant's criminal history for  
18 crimes relevant to the safety of other people or  
19 property. Coupled with implicit bias training and  
20 other education tools, if the Council modifies Intro.  
21 2047 to mirror that model, it will better support the  
22 obligation to tenant safety and will be consistent  
23 with existing fair housing guidance.

24 Additionally, government should consider  
25 solutions that allow individuals who have been

3 convicted of certain criminal history to have their  
4 records sealed and expunged, so that property owners  
5 are not able to view any criminal history in relation  
6 to minor and nonviolent charges.

7 Thank you for the consideration of these points.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Ms. Gerhards. I  
9 also want to remind everyone who is testifying,  
10 members of the public, that we are limiting testimony  
11 to three minutes. Please try to the best of your  
12 ability to limit your testimony to three minutes. If  
13 you are submitting written testimony, we have it in  
14 its entirety to be submitted for the record and we  
15 have lots of individuals signed up to testify today  
16 and we want to make sure we get to everyone.

17 So, please to the extent you can, please limit  
18 your testimony to three minutes and also wait for the  
19 Sergeant to announce that you may begin before  
20 delivering your testimony.

21 So, we will continue on with this panel to  
22 Suzanne Adler.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 SUZANNE ADLER: Hello everyone. Thank you so  
25 much for having me. My name is Suzanne Adler and I  
am a Licensed Real Estate Agent with Triplemint and I

3 am also a housing advocate with Neighbors Together  
4 and I am speaking today in support of Intro. 146. I  
5 am glad to have my voice included in this because I  
6 think that it's a voice that's really missing from  
7 this conversation and it is a voice that really is  
8 necessary in making any real and lasting change  
9 because I think that the CityFHEPS voucher can work  
10 but I think that the way that it is set up right now  
11 is not working and by raising the amount to market  
12 value is going to be a really, really good start.

13 I want to just to tell a quick story because I  
14 think that that will be the most compelling for  
15 everyone listening and that is, my first experience  
16 with dealing with a CityFHEPS voucher and this was  
17 when I was just starting off in real estate a few  
18 years ago. I had a listing with a landlord. It was  
19 a small studio right underneath the train in  
20 Woodhaven Queens and I listed it based on the size  
21 and based on you know, where it was the location. I  
22 listed it for \$1,200. And I proceeded to receive 100  
23 emails. I'm not even kidding, 100 emails about this  
24 apartment and then, I was trying to navigate all of  
25 those emails, so I decided to have an open house and  
I had 60 people come to the open house. There was a

3 line around the block. All people with CityFHEPS  
4 vouchers. I had no idea what any of this was and I  
5 couldn't believe how many people were looking for an  
6 apartment that couldn't find one.

7 And in the end, I convinced the landlord to take  
8 the voucher. We went through what I would describe  
9 only as a nightmarish experience of dealing with the  
10 bureaucracy of the CityFHEPS voucher process, the  
11 application process and in the end, it was  
12 heartbreaking but this tenant did not get the  
13 apartment and the deal fell apart.

14 And I mean, if this is happening over one  
15 apartment and there is thousands of people that are  
16 looking and there is tens of thousands of people who  
17 are not in stable housing, can you imagine going to  
18 look for an apartment and you are standing in line  
19 with you know, 50 people to try to look at and you,  
20 you know, are wondering if you are going to be chosen  
21 and you also don't sleep well at night because you  
22 are living in a shelter.

23 It just seems to me like this is a financial,  
24 like a good business decision to raise the voucher  
25 amounts. I think that landlords would be open to it  
if they are educated to it. You know, I know they

3 have no choice but like, I feel like we would have a  
4 lot more buy in if we could really all work together  
5 and the real estate industry really needs to have a  
6 seat at the table with that and I think that you  
7 know, there is good agents out there. Like myself  
8 and many of my colleagues.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 SUZANNE ADLER: I thank you very much and I hope  
11 you pass it.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Suzanne. Now I  
13 will call on Victoria Phillips as our next witness.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 VICTORIA PHILLIPS: Hello, can you hear me?

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.

17 VICTORIA PHILLIPS: I'm good, I'm not choppy,  
18 right?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No, we hear you very well.

20 VICTORIA PHILLIPS: Okay, I wanted to make sure  
21 because you all don't tell people when it is choppy.  
22 Good afternoon Chair Council Member and all others.  
23 My name is Minister Dr. Victoria A Phillips, known  
24 more as Ms. V and I am the Community Health and  
25 Justice Organizer at the Mental Health Project Urban  
Justice Center and founder of Visionary V.

3 Over the past two decades of my career of medical  
4 and criminal justice, I have been fortunate to work  
5 in various settings as nursing staff, mental health  
6 professional, and even the director of the reentry in  
7 hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and jails and  
8 within New York City shelter system. In my current  
9 position I also have times working in the position of  
10 monitoring those in New York City Corrections with a  
11 mental health diagnosis Brad H and part of that  
12 includes discharge plan.

13 Are you aware that currently about 52 percent  
14 incarcerated in New York City are individuals with a  
15 mental health concern? They all need housing. I  
16 observe on a daily basis the importance of affordable  
17 and nondiscriminatory housing to support the positive  
18 and stable foundation for returning citizens from  
19 incarceration with mental health concerns. Our  
20 nation has a nasty habit of creating unbearable  
21 conditions or situations and then turning back to our  
22 citizens while saying, do better or pull yourself up  
23 out of boot straps.

24 Just look at how we disregard our veterans who  
25 also cycled throughout our criminal legal system,  
hospital, and shelter system. Let's be honest, our

3 criminal justice system is built on White Supremacy.  
4 That is clear by the large imprisonment of Black and  
5 Brown people.

6 I have worked as a case manager attempting to  
7 locate clients housing and heard the blatant  
8 discrimination. I have been the mental health  
9 professional working through the anguish of helping  
10 people that are constantly being judged by  
11 convictions and stepping outside of my affiliations.  
12 I would like to say, with a mother buried in the  
13 military cemetery, I say greater things to any  
14 Council Member who says a human being on domestic  
15 sole must prove themselves before being afforded a  
16 safe place of shelter. In a society where I have  
17 seen how easily one could be caught up in a criminal  
18 legal system, one third of Black men have records and  
19 such known corruptions within the largest gang in New  
20 York City, the NYPD.

21 A conviction should not be the barrier to stop  
22 someone from stable foundation to do better. Shall I  
23 remind you of great men who also had records? Like,  
24 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who wasn't respected by  
25 the nation until he wasn't alive. Or even Nelson

1  
2 Mandela, two individuals are often used as examples  
3 in my reentry groups.

4       Anyone can become great when supported to do so.  
5 Lastly, I'd like to remind you all that during this  
6 pandemic there has not been one day when a political  
7 figure or a media has not mentioned once mental  
8 health. Imagine the agony of maintaining your  
9 stability mentally while finding shelter. Imagine a  
10 parent returning home eager to be reunited with their  
11 children and needing shelter. The soldier who was  
12 not properly discharged, forced to self-medicate and  
13 cycle throughout all our systems. They are our  
14 vulnerable populations. They are often disabled,  
15 elderly and often forgotten and overlooked.

16       It is time to remove the bigotry out of our City  
17 Council and real estate communities and house the  
18 homeless. Remove renting a place of refuge as a  
19 privilege and return it back to being an enforced  
20 human right.

21       Thank you for sponsoring this bill Intro. 2047  
22 Council Member Levin and all other Co-Sponsors. You  
23 all stay blessed. Peace and blessings.

24       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Ms. V for  
25 your testimony.

3 Now I will call on Irene Linares as our next  
4 witness.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 IRENE LINARES: Great, hi. Good afternoon  
7 everyone, my name is Irene Linares and I am the  
8 Research and Policy Coordinator at TakeRoot Justice.  
9 TakeRoot provides legal participatory research and  
10 policy support to strengthen the work of Grassroots  
11 and community based groups in New York City to  
12 dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression.

13 I am here with Vocal New York with whom we  
14 partnered on a research project documenting the  
15 search for housing using housing vouchers. New York  
16 City's rental assistance programs were designed to  
17 help communities like Vocals access stable housing by  
18 guaranteeing and portion of their rent but as others  
19 here will testify, source of income discrimination is  
20 pervasive throughout New York City. Subsidy holders  
21 often do not have the information on the rights  
22 available to them and voucher amounts are too low to  
23 keep up with market rent.

24 These issues and more are highlighted in Vocal  
25 and TakeRoots new research report Vouchers to  
Nowhere. How source of income discrimination happens

3 on the policies that can fix it. Our primary  
4 research method was matched pair testing. A method  
5 used to test for differential treatment and  
6 discrimination. We contacted 114 real estate agents  
7 with listings on Zillow and Trulia, presenting as  
8 someone having a housing subsidy and then contacted  
9 the same agent again presenting as having income from  
10 employment.

11 Our findings show that people with housing  
12 subsidies heard back from agents nearly three times  
13 less often than those callers with income from  
14 employment. When subsidy holders did hold back from  
15 agents, they were more likely to be told that units  
16 were not available. Several also experienced blatant  
17 source of income discrimination being told that  
18 subsidies were not accepted.

19 Subsidy holders were less likely to be invited to  
20 view apartments than people with income from  
21 employment. Subsidy holders waited longer to hear  
22 back from agents than people with employment income  
23 and the resource she provided by the Human Resources  
24 Administration to subsidy holders seeking housing in  
25 Brooklyn is outdated and ineffective as a resource.

3 Our testing process also made clear the  
4 limitations of the CityFHEPS voucher. Setting  
5 housing search parameters on websites like Zillow and  
6 Trulia using only the CityFHEPS voucher amount,  
7 yields relatively few results demonstrating that the  
8 current maximum payment amount of the voucher  
9 relegates recipients to compete for a small pool of  
10 lower quality housing.

11 We urge the City Council to take immediate action  
12 to protect renters from source of income  
13 discrimination. During the COVID-19 crisis access to  
14 housing is the more urgent need than ever. We call  
15 for the city to pass Intro. 146 which calls for  
16 increasing the CityFHEPS voucher to market rate.  
17 Pass Intro. 1339 to ensure that subsidy holders know  
18 their rights and how to report source of income  
19 discrimination. Increase the financial penalties for  
20 source of income discrimination, so that the serve as  
21 meaningful deterrence. Expand the triggering  
22 criteria for the City Certificate of No Harassment  
23 program to include cases in which landlords  
24 discriminated against applicants or tenants based on  
25 source of income. Pass legislation to illuminate  
credit checks for subsidy holders.

3 Those recommendations and more are detailed in  
4 our report.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

6 IRENE LINARES: It is imperative that the City  
7 Council ensure that every New Yorker has safe  
8 housing. Thank you for your time.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Irene. Our next  
10 witness will be Justin La Mort.

11 JUSTIN LAMORT: Thank you very much for the  
12 opportunity to testify today. My name is Justin La  
13 Mort and I am a Supervising Attorney at Mobilization  
14 for Justice.

15 MFJ envisions a society in which there is equal  
16 justice for all and we have been doing so for the  
17 last 50 plus years. And we try to achieve this  
18 through providing the highest quality direct civil  
19 legal service assistant providing community education  
20 and partnerships engaging in policy advocacy and  
21 bringing impact litigation.

22 I would also like to recognize that Brooklyn Law  
23 Schools Housing Right clinic who drafted a report.  
24 We've had many friends and partners today speak and I  
25 will try to be very brief and not go off what was on  
our written testimony and focus on a few amendments

3 we would like to see. MFJ broadly supports a slate  
4 of legislation that is being brought today. It is  
5 practical and long overdue. We support the move to  
6 try to make a discrimination free NYC but believe  
7 there could be a few changes that would make those  
8 bills even better.

9 First, we would like to see Council Member Powers  
10 bill which makes the important change from six to  
11 three households move down to two. So, that would be  
12 aligned with what happened at the state level. We  
13 agree with our partner that TakeRoot, Neighbors  
14 Together and Vocal that by making source of income  
15 discrimination a triggering criteria to the  
16 Certificate of No Harassment program by HPD would be  
17 a powerful motivator to prevent landlords from trying  
18 to profit through discrimination.

19 And we would also want to make sure that the city  
20 adequately funds the source of income discrimination  
21 unit at New York City Council Commissions for Human  
22 Rights as enforcement is always the biggest challenge  
23 when it comes to source of income discrimination.

24 Our office recently handled a case, the Fair  
25 Housing Justice Center and Housing that took months  
over a year. A real estate broker told our client

3 who has HASA that he will not take that program. Our  
4 client, Mr. C said he felt defeated and that even  
5 though he had this government money, when they tell  
6 you that they won't work with you, thought he was  
7 lost. But only with a coalition of attorney's and  
8 testers who investigation through litigation were  
9 able to be successful.

10 So, making sure there is adequately funding for  
11 enforcement is the only way to prevent source of  
12 income discrimination. We also want to applaud the  
13 efforts to address housing as healthcare and housing  
14 as important through racial justice by making sure  
15 that people are trying to reenter based on a history  
16 of conviction are no longer discriminated towards  
17 housing.

18 Lastly, as to the bills addressing the vouchers,  
19 we applaud the use of creating better access and  
20 transparency towards those vouchers. But as many  
21 people said, the numbers simply do not add up. We  
22 agree with Coalition for the Homeless that instead of  
23 using the term index, we should make sure that we are  
24 using the far caps, so that way a future  
25 administration which will be changing soon will not

3 make sure that we have an artificially low rent  
4 level.

5 We would also like to see an expansion of  
6 restorative justice that the Human Rights Commission  
7 has been doing by putting set aside for vouchers.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 JUSTIN LA MORT: And see that program expanded to  
10 other affordable housing programs such as 421-A or  
11 other lotteries.

12 Thank you for your time and we hope that these  
13 bills are passed so that we have a discrimination  
14 free NYC and we see vouchers that people can actually  
15 use. Thank you very much.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Justin. We will  
17 now call our next panel, which will be in this order.  
18 Jacob Malafsky, Alexandra Dougherty, Reverend Wendy  
19 Calderon Payne, Alfonzo Riley, and Katie Shaffer and  
20 we will begin with Jacob Malafsky.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 JACOB MALAFSKY: Thank you everyone. My name is  
23 Jacob Malafsky and I am a Tenants Rights Attorney.  
24 Today I want to speak about the necessity that passed  
25 Intro. 2047 which would prohibit landlords from  
discriminating based on conviction history. As a

3 tenants attorney, I have learned that the general  
4 culture of landlords in housing court is their  
5 believe that justice involved individuals don't  
6 deserve housing in their building.

7 This belief is generally not qualified and  
8 explanations are not give why individuals with  
9 criminal record should automatically be denied  
10 housing.

11 If you was currently protected by the law, which  
12 allows landlords to conduct background checks and  
13 deny housing to individuals with conviction histories  
14 as well as their families. This culture and belief  
15 that individuals conviction histories are not  
16 entitled to housing is dangerous to both the  
17 individuals who are reentering and society as a  
18 whole. Many of my clients are or have the potential  
19 to become very productive members of society but  
20 there are still so many obstacles to overcome such as  
21 finding stable housing.

22 My clients have worked very hard to rebuild their  
23 lives, find employment and/or go back to school. It  
24 is not uncommon for landlords to overlook these  
25 accomplishments and only focus on the mistake they  
made in the past, often which are decades old.

3 While many of clients are protected from  
4 discrimination from the past in employment and  
5 education, they do not have the same protections in  
6 housing. They leave the decision whether someone is  
7 rehabilitated and therefore entitled to one of the  
8 most fundamental necessities up to a landlord.  
9 Housing is integral to maintain employment and being  
10 successful in school and to prevent recidivism.

11 I often find myself confused that if my clients  
12 completed their debt to society, that we deny them  
13 housing. Ideally, many of my clients who have family  
14 in NYCHA or other federally funding housing would go  
15 live with their family and to provide support.  
16 However, under current law and policies, this option  
17 is generally not available. If the only viable  
18 option to find a stable home and to continue to  
19 rebuild their lives is a private apartment.

20 However, because of the current law, many  
21 landlords make this possible. Given a person in the  
22 family to live in the street or shelter. It is a  
23 particular concern during COVID-19 for many families  
24 are expected to lose their homes due to financial  
25 hardships. The additional burden of trying to find  
an apartment with a conviction history during these

3 trying times will only exacerbate the living eviction  
4 of homeless crisis.

5 I don't think I would have been able to finish  
6 college, graduate law school and pass the bar if I  
7 didn't have stable housing after I reentered. It is  
8 necessary to pass Intro. 2047 today and ensure that  
9 everyone is given a fair chance to rebuild their  
10 lives through stable housing.

11 Thank you everyone for the opportunity to testify  
12 today.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Malafsky. We  
14 will now call on Alexandra Dougherty.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 ALEXANDRA DOUGHERTY: Can you hear me?

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

18 ALEXANDRA DOUGHERTY: Alright, good afternoon.  
19 My name is Alex Dougherty, I am a Senior Staff  
20 Attorney in Policy Counsel of the Civil Justice  
21 Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services.

22 I'd like to thank the Committee's and Chairs  
23 Eugene and Levin for inviting us to testify today and  
24 I would like to take this opportunity to speak in  
25 support of removing barriers to permanent affordable  
housing for New York City tenants.

3 Brooklyn Defender Services clients are already  
4 embroiled in multiple legal systems and therefore  
5 they routinely face barriers to stable and affordable  
6 housing. It is easy to understand why our clients,  
7 like many of the folks who offered powerful testimony  
8 already today are frustrated by the existing programs  
9 and guidelines. Their experiences demonstrate a  
10 clear need for more concrete options for every New  
11 Yorker facing housing instability.

12 BDS supports all of today's bills. Our  
13 colleagues in the Fair Chance for Housing Campaign  
14 have made clear how discriminatory background checks  
15 perpetuate cycles of homelessness, as well as the  
16 systemic racism of the criminal legal system. An  
17 arrest or conviction should not constitute a  
18 permanent barrier to stable housing, yet BDS clients  
19 leaving Rikers are likely to enter the shelter system  
20 because they are routinely denied permanent housing.

21 Prohibiting discrimination on the basis of an  
22 arrest or conviction record is an important step  
23 towards guaranteeing equal access to stable housing.  
24 We also support Intro. 146. Rental assistance  
25 vouchers are a vital resource for New Yorkers  
experiencing homelessness who are at risk of eviction

3 but rent caps and source of income discrimination  
4 strictly limit the pool of housing available to  
5 voucher holders.

6 This housing is already the most competitive in  
7 the city. The need for all of these bills is made  
8 even greater by the impending eviction crisis fought  
9 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rents have been rising in  
10 the neighbors hardest hit by the pandemic and those  
11 neighborhoods also see the highest rates of eviction  
12 filings in the city.

13 BDS clients searching for stable housing have  
14 been universally unsuccessful since March. Most of  
15 these clients are voucher holders and we have found  
16 that the voucher eligible housing stock has  
17 dramatically decreased since March. BDS applauds the  
18 Council's commitment to removing barriers to housing  
19 for all New Yorkers but with that commitment in mind,  
20 we urge you to consider public housing residents and  
21 applicants going forward.

22 Today's bills will provide support for New  
23 Yorkers hoping to gain access to private housing but  
24 they will not apply to state or federally funded  
25 housing including NYCHA which is home to as many as a  
million people. NYCHA's own regulations go

1 significantly further than federal law requires from  
2 barring potential tenants and evicting tenants who  
3 have any contact with the criminal and legal system.  
4 BDS represents clients who are denied by NYCHA after  
5 years on the waiting list or who face eviction from  
6 their long time homes because of NYCHA's restrictive  
7 and cumulative policies. Amidst the city's  
8 affordable housing crisis and rampant gentrification,  
9 these clients have no where else to go.  
10

11 We ask that the Council consider 2047 as a  
12 necessary and important starting point in our goal to  
13 ensure truly equal access to stable housing for  
14 everyone. Thank you.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Ms. Dougherty. We  
17 will now call on Reverend Wendy Calderon Payne as our  
18 next witness.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 REVEREND WENDY CALDERON PAYNE: Hi guys. I am  
21 Reverend Wendy Calderon Payne; I am the Executive  
22 Director of Bronx Connect and Manhattan Connect.  
23 Since 1999 we have successfully supported justice  
24 involved young people and families as they navigate  
25 their way out of destructive lifestyles and into

3 fulfilling productive lives. We have found few  
4 components are central in helping a young person make  
5 the behavioral change they need to live an adult free  
6 – sorry. To live an adult life free of justice  
7 involvement. We find that at Bronx Connect seeing an  
8 exciting future for a young person starts with seeing  
9 people who look like you and sound like you. Bronx  
10 connect youth are surrounded by staff and mentors who  
11 have walked in their shoes and ended up on a healthy  
12 path. Our staff have highly similar stories of  
13 struggles and yet, they are living, breathing proof  
14 that things can change and with the right support  
15 changes, support systems change, people can overcome  
16 their circumstances. Our model proves that a  
17 difficult circumstance like justice involvement  
18 doesn't have to be a life sentence.

19 In 2019, we were pleased to purchase two R7 Zone  
20 residential buildings. This experience has given us  
21 an upfront experience with CityFHEPS as we inherited  
22 a family with the CityFHEPS voucher. As we have had  
23 to move this single mom out of that old basement  
24 moist apartment, we spent over six months trying to  
25 find anyone, and I mean anyone who would take this  
working mom with four children on a \$210 voucher. No

3 one was willing to help me or this woman, even I  
4 offered to pay to match the CityFHEPS four month  
5 benefit. No one wanted this woman for three reasons.  
6 One, outright CityFHEPS had a terrible reputation of  
7 red tape and not paying all the time.

8 Two, they could easily get \$2,010, they could get  
9 more than that for a two bedroom apartment in the  
10 Bronx and finally, what one developer who I know to  
11 be an honest person said Wendy, in four years, this  
12 woman is going to have four teenagers in an apartment  
13 with two bedrooms and it's going to be a nightmare.  
14 Those six months were nerving. There were multiple  
15 times when CityFHEPS stopped paying. I could never  
16 find a case manager and then I realized that  
17 CityFHEPS families don't have case managers, only  
18 unless they are about to be evicted, then they get a  
19 Homebase Case Manager.

20 I was actually told that I had to evict this lady  
21 in order to get her permission to move. Though I  
22 knew this wasn't correct, I still paid a lawyer to  
23 start the process, although she and I knew we weren't  
24 going to do this.

25 In the end, I convinced the board to buy another  
building, so that I could move her into the top floor

1 apartment there. But even then, I was being told I  
2 had to "evict her". Finally, I was able to advocate  
3 to somebody in HRA and -

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

5 REVEREND WENDY CALDERON PAYNE: I am going to  
6 finish. I am going to broadly support moving this  
7 legislation forward today. I would just like to make  
8 a point. There is money in the budget because so  
9 many of these CityFHEPS vouchers are not being used.  
10 They are being given out like candy but everybody  
11 knows no one will find a landlord who will take them.

12 In addition to that, what really shocked me is  
13 when I read in an article that what the city was  
14 paying in the homeless shelter for this family of  
15 four, was significantly less than what I paid on the  
16 mortgage for a four family house. And I thought this  
17 is the biggest waste of money ever. We could empower  
18 nonprofits to take houses and renovate them and get  
19 homeless families in there and get regular people in  
20 there. We could change the market if we thought  
21 about where our money was going and that's why I  
22 would like to support these bills but I would also  
23 like to just have an honest conversation about why we  
24 are spending so much money on homeless shelters that  
25

3 do not help people get out of poverty and  
4 homelessness. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Reverend. We will  
6 now call on Alfonzo Riley as our next panelist.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 ALFONZO RILEY: Good afternoon distinguished  
9 members of the New York City Council and others. My  
10 name is Alfonzo Riley and I am employed by the Legal  
11 Aid Society as a Paralegal Case Handler.

12 I want to thank Council Members Levin and Eugene  
13 for the opportunity to present today testimony in  
14 support of Intro. 2047, prohibiting housing  
15 discrimination based on arrests or a criminal record.  
16 I can speak to the need for this legislation because  
17 I have been denied housing because of a criminal  
18 record.

19 In December 2018, I was granted executive  
20 clemency by Governor Cuomo after serving 30 years, 10  
21 months, and 24 days in prison for a crime that I  
22 committed when I was 18-years-old.

23 While in prison, I earned a bachelor's degree and  
24 many certificates including a paralegal certificate.  
25 I was released from prison the following month in  
January 2019, approximately 20 minutes after I was

3 released from prison, I was offered and accepted a  
4 freelance paralegal job. I continued to work  
5 steadily as a freelance paralegal for three months  
6 until I secured employment by the Legal Aid Society.  
7 I mentioned that to say that I have been gainfully  
8 employed since I was released yet, despite my gainful  
9 employment as a paralegal, I have been denied housing  
10 because I was incarcerated.

11 I applied for at least three apartments where the  
12 brokers or landlords said there will be a criminal  
13 background check, which I had to pay for. Prior to  
14 the background checks, I was told there shouldn't be  
15 a problem with me getting the apartments. I was  
16 denied each time however based on what could only be  
17 in my criminal record.

18 As mass incarceration and over policing have  
19 disproportionately affected minority communities,  
20 housing discrimination based on a criminal record by  
21 extension will continue to adversely affect the same  
22 communities.

23 To deny a New York City resident housing of their  
24 choice, that they are able to afford, not only  
25 negatively affects a person with a criminal record  
but also puts their children at a disadvantage as

3 well. Housing discrimination continues to affect the  
4 schools children can attend, the air they breathe,  
5 the playgrounds they have access to etc.

6 This type of discrimination can affect  
7 generations starting from a single household.  
8 Housing based on one's choice and abilities should be  
9 a human right. The events that led to my conviction  
10 occurred over 32 years ago but the collateral  
11 consequences of those events last to this day despite  
12 my transformation which was demonstrated by the fact  
13 that I was granted the extraordinary relief of the  
14 executive clemency.

15 I am not the person that made a bad decision that  
16 many years ago as a teenager. I am a law abiding  
17 taxpaying and voting resident of New York City and I  
18 want to be judged on the decisions I am making now,  
19 not the one's I made as a youth.

20 I am one example among many which is the reason  
21 Intro. 2047 should be passed.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

23 ALFONZO RILEY: Thank you very much.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Alfonzo for  
25 your testimony. I will now call up the next panel.  
In this order, witness will be Robert Desir, Antonio

3 Garcia, Wendy O'Shields, and Forest Genier

4 Denton[SP?] will have Amy Blumsack deliver her  
5 testimony. We will begin with Robert Desir.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 ROBERT DESIR: Good afternoon. I am Robert  
8 Desir, Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Society  
9 Civil Law Reform Unit. This testimony is on behalf  
10 of the Legal Aid Society and the Coalition for the  
11 Homeless. I thank Chair's Levin and Eugene, Members  
12 of the Committee on General Welfare and on Civil and  
13 Human Rights and Members of the City Council for  
14 holding this hearing and for taking the lead in these  
15 important matters.

16 You have our written testimony that is submitted  
17 in tandem with the Coalition for the Homeless. My  
18 testimony will focus on the source of income  
19 discrimination expansion Intro. 2047, Intro. 1339,  
20 and Intro. 146. The Legal Aid Society supports the  
21 Council's proposal to expand prohibitions on source  
22 of income discrimination to buildings with three or  
23 more units.

24 Since the source of income law has been passed,  
25 it has been an important tool in lifting New Yorkers  
out of homelessness allowing them to leave

3 substandard conditions and overcome the prejudice  
4 that prevents them from exercising choice, to live in  
5 an apartment they can afford without being  
6 stigmatized because they use a voucher or subsidy to  
7 pay the rent.

8 We suggest that the projections be expanded to  
9 include the smaller nonowner occupied units as is the  
10 case with the state law. This housing stock  
11 comprises a growing portion of the rental stock as  
12 speculators move past the multifamily buildings and  
13 look towards opportunities within this market.

14 The Council should also consider that source of  
15 income discrimination takes many forms and owners  
16 knowing the law, use credit checks where irrelevant  
17 and impose minimum income requirements or rent to  
18 income ratios that effectively put an apartment out  
19 of reach for those with subsidies creating a  
20 disparate impact.

21 We support Intro. 2047. The disproportionate  
22 impact of over policing and incarceration on  
23 communities of color is one driver homelessness among  
24 Black and Latinx New Yorkers. We view stable housing  
25 as the first vital step to a successful reentry to a

3 society and towards keeping people from becoming  
4 further justice involved.

5 Moreover, it is well recognized that arrest  
6 records are hardly evidence of misconduct and that  
7 landlords borrow against perspective renters who have  
8 not been convicted of crimes is unacceptable.

9 This bill would advance racial justice by  
10 reducing barriers to permanent housing for a large  
11 subset of people currently languishing in shelters  
12 and on the streets. We support the Council in  
13 raising apartment seekers awareness of their rights  
14 and protections and support Intro. 1339.

15 Although source of income protections have been  
16 in place for over a decade, the various forms of  
17 illegal rejections remain rampant and many remain  
18 unaware of their rights. We know that the apartment  
19 search is highly time sensitive and very competitive  
20 particularly at the rent levels available to those  
21 with vouchers and subsidies. Tenants who are aware  
22 of their rights are certain to fair better.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 ROBERT DESIR: With respect to Intro. 146, we  
25 defer to the coalition but we will add that raising  
FMR to allow the vouchers to meet asking rents is a

3 vital component of moving homeless New Yorkers into  
4 permanent housing, increasing choices available to  
5 renters, and attacking patterns of housing  
6 discrimination.

7 I thank you for the opportunity to testify.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Desir. I will  
9 now call on Antonio Garcia as our next panelist.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 ANTONIO GARCIA: Good afternoon and thank you for  
12 the opportunity to testify on Catholic Charities  
13 Eviction Prevention Services and how proposed changes  
14 to the city's rental assistance programs can help us  
15 serve those who are at risk of homelessness due to  
16 loss of employment on expected expenses or high rent  
17 burden.

18 My name is Antonio Garcia and I am the Director  
19 of Preserving Housing. A homelessness prevention  
20 program of Catholic Charities Community Services.  
21 Through our preserving housing programs, Catholic  
22 Charities operates four home base offices in the  
23 Bronx and one office in Harlem. All funded by the  
24 city and the state of New York.

25 Using housing subsidies such as CityFHEPS and  
FEPS, we assist families and individuals who left the

3 shelter system by providing after care services that  
4 include relocation to other apartments. Not for this  
5 subsidy supplementing the inadequate shelter  
6 allowance provided by the family assistance and  
7 safety net programs, public assistance recipients  
8 could not afford to pay the current rent levels in  
9 New York City.

10 Nevertheless, current fair market values have  
11 outpaced this subsidies maximum rental allowances,  
12 leading applicants, and housing advocates to have  
13 little success finding suitable apartments within  
14 this limit. Landlords continue to deny apartments to  
15 tenants because this subsidies rent levels are too  
16 low and others enter into the so-called side deals  
17 that are so detrimental to the housing stability of  
18 the voucher holders.

19 Finding suitable and affordable apartments for  
20 families and individuals coming out of the shelter  
21 system is an integral part of the homelessness  
22 prevention work that Catholic Charities does. We  
23 know how difficult it is to find apartments that are  
24 affordable for the working poor of New York City,  
25 especially for those receiving public assistance and  
how increasingly important these subsidies will be as

3 families recover from lasting economic and medical  
4 consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why  
5 we support Intro. 146 which will allow the maximum  
6 rent of New York City's housing subsidies to increase  
7 annually at the same rate as HUDS fair market rents.  
8 And also remove limits on how long otherwise eligible  
9 households could receive rental assistance.

10 By providing the means for families to access and  
11 maintain safe, stable, and affordable housing, Intro.  
12 146 will help usher in a period of sustained and  
13 equitable recovery. Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Garcia. We  
15 will now call on Wendy O'Shields as our next  
16 panelist.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 WENDY O'SHIELDS: My name is Wendy O'Shields and  
19 I am the Homeless Rights and Housing Advocate in New  
20 York City. I am the Co-Founder of the Urban Justice  
21 Safety Net Activist and I support amending Intro.  
22 bill 146-2018.

23 Let the record show as per September 15, 2020,  
24 worldometer statics counts the United States  
25 coronavirus cases at 6 million. Total deaths  
199,000a and recovered are 4 million.

3 The U.S. Center for Disease Control death count  
4 is comparable. Currently our country has 50 million  
5 unemployed and counting post COVID-19. We are in a  
6 compound emergency with infectious disease as the  
7 driver for our unprecedented economic disaster.  
8 There are direct actions the city can take to mediate  
9 our emergency circumstances.

10 Number one, the HUD U.S. Final 2020 Fair Market  
11 Rent for a studio will be \$1,760 and a one bedroom is  
12 \$1,801 in the New York City Metro area. The metro  
13 area includes upstate Putnam County and Rockland  
14 County. Their inclusion pulls down the monthly  
15 rental amount for the New York City metro area. The  
16 HUD fair market – excuse me. The HUD fair market  
17 will be inadequate for our expense of New York City  
18 five borough market.

19 Number two, increase CityFHEPS voucher and  
20 calculate the monthly rent on the market rent for our  
21 five boroughs.

22 Number three, house DHS and nonprofit long term  
23 shelter stayers with the increased CityFHEPS market  
24 rent voucher. Begin with the residents residing in  
25 shelter for 25 to 15 years then 15 to 5 years and the  
subsequent 4 years to 12 months.

3 Number four, house the DHS COVID-19 shelter  
4 residents with the increased market rent CityFHEPS  
5 voucher.

6 Five, house the pre-COVID-19 DHS and nonprofit  
7 shelter hotel residents with the increased market  
8 rent CityFHEPS vouchers.

9 Six, the CityFHEPS voucher disclaimer does not  
10 guarantee payment of rent and it should be removed.

11 Suggestions: Number one, post COVID-19 -

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

13 WENDY O'SHIELDS: I will submit the rest. Thank  
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. O'Shields.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you and now we will  
17 have Forest Genier Denton, we will have Amy Blumsack  
18 deliver testimony.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 AMY BLUMSACK: Good afternoon and thank you to  
21 the Chairs and other City Council Members for the  
22 opportunity to testify. My name is Amy Blumsack, I  
23 work at Neighbors Together and will be testifying on  
24 behalf of our member Shanere Denton[SP?] in support  
25 of Intro. 146 and Intro. 1339.

3 My name is Shanere Denton, I am a mother of three  
4 and I am determined to strive for greater for my  
5 children. It is hard keeping hope and faith but I am  
6 fighting. My children understand what is happening  
7 only to a degree. They ask, did you find anything  
8 yet mom? When are we going to have our own beds  
9 because we bundle up in a room space. We're making  
10 it work.

11 I am CityFHEPS voucher holder. My voucher should  
12 cover all utilities and rent in the amount of \$1,580.  
13 I received this voucher from Housing Corp because I  
14 was going to become homeless. This voucher is to  
15 help prevent homelessness and I've had my voucher  
16 since October 2019. I have to do an intake twice to  
17 renew the voucher and currently, I am still searching  
18 endlessly day and night to find a place my children  
19 and their minds can focus and be at peace. A place  
20 to call home.

21 The great issue here is that you cannot find  
22 anywhere in New York's five boroughs for \$1,580. If  
23 anyone knows of a realtor or broker or a home owner  
24 renting a one bedroom to a family size of four, let  
25 me know. I, and many others would be very interested  
to know.

3 Housing Connect, affordable housing in Section 8  
4 and Serve NYC all cite the same response. Your  
5 voucher subsidy does not cover available units or we  
6 have no units available for your household size.  
7 When they are asking households of three and up for  
8 incomes of \$80,000 and better.

9 As a single parent, I only have a job, not a  
10 career. It is very, very depressing. Every day it  
11 is a rejection. It hurts mentally and emotionally,  
12 as if I am not trying and I know I paid over \$300 all  
13 together or more in application fees.

14 The scammers make it even harder because we are  
15 desperate trying to provide a way for our family. We  
16 are faced with so many challenges. Where is the help  
17 for homeless people really? Please tell us.

18 Thank you for your time.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Amy. I'm  
20 going to call up our next panel, which is our last  
21 panel for today. Chrystal Neavus, Debra Berkman,  
22 Yamina Sara Chekroun, Abraham Gross, Theo Chino. We  
23 are going to begin Chrystal Neavus.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.  
25

3 CHRYSTAL NEAVUS: Hello, I am Chrystal  
4 Neavus[SP?]. I am here to sorry. I am testifying  
5 for Intro. 1339 and Intro. 146.

6 My mother, she is legally blind, we have the  
7 CityFHEPS voucher through Housing Court and APS. Can  
8 you hear me?

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

10 CHRYSTAL NEAVUS: Okay, I'm sorry. So, I'm with  
11 my mother. She is legally blind. We got CityFHEPS  
12 through the Housing Court, APS as well because of her  
13 blindness and we've been looking all over the places  
14 and every where we look, they would leave us red.  
15 They wouldn't answer back and these Intro.'s and laws  
16 would help us and benefit the people of the community  
17 and of New York City by reducing homelessness with  
18 these new vouchers that we are trying to propose.  
19 Because 1580, when I search for a two bedroom or one  
20 bedroom. A one bedroom is already \$1,700. A two  
21 bedroom is about \$1,800 to \$1,900, almost close to  
22 \$2,000 and she has a child who also has her same  
23 disease of macular degeneration and might become  
24 legally blind as well.

25 And we are trying to find a place and everyone is  
always turning us away, saying that they don't

1 accept, that they don't accept. That it is not  
2 accepted here, as well as when they gave it to her,  
3 they didn't give her laws to know what she qualifies  
4 for. What happens if a landlord tells her that they  
5 don't accept it and everything.

7 If they would have gave it to us with our rights,  
8 it would be much easier and much faster to try to  
9 help find us an apartment. And it is just horrendous  
10 trying to look for an apartment out in New York City.

11 I don't know what else to say. I would think  
12 that Intro. 1339 with the Know Your Rights bills is a  
13 very good thing for the citizens of New York City, so  
14 that they can know their rights and the Intro. 146,  
15 for the Increase Your Voucher because the rent is  
16 expensive.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

18 CHRYSTAL NEAVUS: Thank you so much. That's  
19 mostly what I got to say for now.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Ms. Neavus.  
21 We are now going to call on Debra Berkman as our next  
22 panelist.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.  
24  
25

3 DEBRA BERKMAN: Chair's Levin and Eugene, Council  
4 Members and staff, good afternoon and thank you for  
5 this opportunity to speak.

6 My name is Debra Berkman and I am Coordinating  
7 Attorney in the Public Benefits Unit and in the  
8 Shelter Advocacy Initiative of the New York Legal  
9 Assistance Group or NYLAG. Which is a free legal  
10 services provider serving low income New Yorkers.

11 Our Shelter Advocacy Initiative provides legal  
12 services and advocacy to people in the shelter system  
13 and we also have a very robust tenants right unit  
14 that represents people in housing court eviction  
15 cases, advocates before administrative agencies, and  
16 obtains and preserves rent subsidies.

17 The proposed legislation to expand the  
18 prohibitions against discrimination based on legal  
19 source of income is a sorely needed adjustment that  
20 should help permanent housing become more attainable.

21 However, it does not go far enough. In order to  
22 truly fix source of income discrimination, this  
23 Council must look at all of the causes of this  
24 discrimination. According to many NYLAG clients, so  
25 much of landlords reluctance to rent to voucher  
holders stems from the New York City Department of

3 Social Services own practices. Not from the clients  
4 themselves.

5 Many NYLAG clients have rental vouchers but  
6 cannot obtain apartments with them. Of course, most  
7 importantly, the rental amount cap is far below  
8 market in New York City which the Council seeks to  
9 address today and which is wonderful, but even when  
10 NYLAG clients are able to find apartments that fit  
11 within the rental guidelines, the process of getting  
12 an apartment approved for a voucher is slow and  
13 overly burdensome for landlords and is often riddled  
14 with administrative errors by DSS.

15 After a client finds an apartment and a landlord  
16 willing to take CityFHEPS it can take months for that  
17 apartment to be approved for CityFHEPS voucher use.  
18 One reason for this delay is that for clients in  
19 shelter who are seeking to use a voucher, housing  
20 specialists or case workers are the ones processing  
21 the application and act as an intermediary between  
22 DSS and the landlord. Clients report a total  
23 breakdown of information between their shelter case  
24 workers, DSS, and landlords. And if a willing  
25 landlords makes a mistake on an application, which so  
often happens, it can take many days or even weeks

3 before that information is relayed from DSS to the  
4 case worker, to the landlord.

5 Clients also report that often DSS is not able to  
6 schedule apartment inspections in a timely manner.  
7 And even when a landlord is willing to hold an  
8 apartment to complete the process, often after  
9 several weeks, they will be forced to rent an  
10 apartment to someone who can start the lease more  
11 quickly.

12 Once an apartment is approved and the client  
13 moves in, problems with DSS persist. Clients who  
14 rely on vouchers report that DSS does not pay their  
15 rent on time and many people report that their rent  
16 is paid late every month and sometimes that rent  
17 paying is discontinued without notice to either our  
18 client or to the landlord.

19 Indeed, landlords have created a website  
20 [www.nyc.fheps.com](http://www.nyc.fheps.com) to warn each other about the  
21 pitfalls of renting to voucher holders. Although  
22 some of the stories posted complaint about so-called  
23 difficult tenants. Most complaints state that they  
24 will not rent to voucher holders because of DSS's  
25 slow processing time and late rents.

3 Additionally, while we wholly support Intro. 146,  
4 in addition to these proposed changes, we want to  
5 urge this Council to expand CityFHEPS eligibility to  
6 specifically include long term tenancies.

7 Expanding current eligibility criteria would  
8 allow more families access to this aid and reduce  
9 long term shelter costs. Currently, New York City  
10 must meet one of the following criteria in order to  
11 be eligible for CityFHEPS. Have veteran status, have  
12 prior shelter history, receive APS services or Adult  
13 Protective Services, or live in a rent controlled  
14 apartment. But prior to its supersession by  
15 CityFHEPS, the city's special exit and prevention  
16 supplement which is known as SEPS didn't allow  
17 program administrators to grant the supplement to  
18 long term tenants.

19 And once the program converted to CityFHEPS, the  
20 long term tenancy criteria was eliminated. Only a  
21 small fraction of NYLAG's clients meet the current  
22 CityFHEPS criteria, while many meet the prior long  
23 term tenancy criteria.

24 Many tenants with nonpayment housing court cases  
25 are elderly and have resided in their apartments for  
decades and have rent and income thresholds that meet

3 CityFHEPS guidelines. Yet remain ineligible due to  
4 this restrictive criteria.

5 In fact, in New York, 20 percent of people older  
6 than 25 live in poverty and many tenants rely on  
7 monthly Social Security incomes that are usually not  
8 enough to keep up with the cost of the rent even with  
9 rent freezes.

10 Excuse me, expanding CityFHEPS eligibility  
11 criteria for long term tenants will also save the  
12 city hundreds of thousands of dollars in shelter  
13 costs. Thus, we strongly recommend that this Council  
14 pass the state of resolution and expand current  
15 CityFHEPS criteria -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

17 DEBRA BERKMAN: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Debra.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Debra, can I ask a quick  
20 question? A follow up question here? So, you said,  
21 I was a little confused earlier when Deputy  
22 Commissioner Drinkwater was speaking about CityFHEPS  
23 criteria. I don't know if you heard that. Where she  
24 said that some long term tenants could apply for  
25 CityFHEPS. She said you know that there were some

1  
2 CityFHEPS vouchers that could be applied to people in  
3 the community, I think she said.

4 DEBRA BERKMAN: Well, there are criteria that can  
5 be applied to people in community but long term  
6 tenancy. So, if people who are long term tenants  
7 also meet one of the other criteria for people in the  
8 community, then they can.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What criteria -

10 DEBRA BERKMAN: Long term tenancy itself is not a  
11 criteria.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, so it would have to  
13 meet one of those veterans APS case.

14 DEBRA BERKMAN: Right, APS case is the most  
15 common.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see, okay, okay.

17 DEBRA BERKMAN: Because long term tenants and APS  
18 clients go hand and hand at times.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see and just to reiterate  
20 that criteria because I encountered this when I tried  
21 to get people a CityFHEPS voucher and was told oh,  
22 they don't apply because you know, they are not a  
23 veteran, not APS, not in a rent controlled apartment,  
24 not rent stabilized, rent controlled apartment.

25 DEBRA BERKMAN: Exactly.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Which means they would have  
4 had to have start living there in like 1971.

5 DEBRA BERKMAN: Right, or if they had a prior  
6 shelter history but if they haven't had a prior  
7 shelter history, so it's veteran status, prior  
8 shelter history, APS services. Or there is one more  
9 or live in a rent controlled apartment. Exactly, not  
10 rent stabilized.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that way they could  
12 potentially get a CityFHEPS voucher?

13 DEBRA BERKMAN: Right, so when they say that  
14 certain people who had been in the community for a  
15 long time would be eligible, it would be because they  
16 were eligible under one of those other criteria.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, so they would have had  
18 to had been in a shelter before? If you had never  
19 been in a shelter before and didn't meet those other  
20 criteria, you are not getting a voucher.

21 DEBRA BERKMAN: Exactly. Not a CityFHEPS  
22 voucher.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not a CityFHEPS voucher.

24 DEBRA BERKMAN: Right.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You can get a Section 8?

DEBRA BERKMAN: It's a possibility.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Possibility. I've seen it  
3 happen once or twice. Literally once or twice.

4 DEBRA BERKMAN: Right.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, alright, thanks so  
6 much. I appreciate it.

7 DEBRA BERKMAN: Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, now we will call on  
9 Yamina Sara Chekroun.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 YAMINA SARA CHEKROUN: Good afternoon everyone.

12 My name is Yamina Sara Chekroun and I am a Civil  
13 Defense Attorney at New York County Defenders  
14 Services, a public defender office in Manhattan.

15 Our office is in support of the several proposed  
16 bills that were on today's agenda and I have  
17 submitted testimony addressing each of the seven  
18 bills and I'm going to speak about one of them today.

19 Please read the rest of my comments for my full  
20 comments. The prohibitions on discrimination  
21 outlined in these bills should be expanded to protect  
22 all New Yorkers regardless of the type of housing  
23 that they live in and regardless of who they live  
24 with.

3 Every day, I represent clients with criminal  
4 legal system involvement who are facing housing  
5 insecurity. Their safety and their ability to  
6 protect themselves and their families from COVID-19  
7 depend on their ability to access safe and permanent  
8 housing. With these bills, NYC does take some  
9 important and long overdue steps to protect renters.

10 These bills will ensure that subsidies are usable  
11 in conjunction with fluctuating rental market rates.  
12 They also make applications and status approval  
13 accessible to all parties, which will assist tenants  
14 and advocate in court.

15 While these bills offer some critical protections  
16 against discrimination for those with involvement in  
17 the criminal legal system, they fail to adequately  
18 protect all persons. For these reasons NYC supports  
19 the passage of Intro. 2047-2020 the bill to prohibit  
20 housing discrimination on the basis of arrest or  
21 criminal record.

22 Though we recommend it with amendments. We  
23 recommend that the bills should be amended to remove  
24 the exceptions contained in paragraphs D1 and D2 on  
25 the basis that the U.S. Commission on Human Rights  
has explicitly recommended that consideration of

3 criminal history for housing purposes be removed from  
4 the providers discretion.

5 Paragraph D1 should thus be amended in that way.  
6 The exception contained in D2, should be removed on  
7 the basis that there is no legitimate interest in  
8 permitting discrimination when the units owner,  
9 owners family resides in the housing accommodation.

10 Low income renters often rely on room rentals and  
11 permitting such discrimination unfairly harms those  
12 who have come into contact with the criminal legal  
13 system particularly people of color.

14 Our communities are made safer when people have  
15 access to housing in their communities. They are not  
16 made safer when we use a very small snapshot of  
17 someone's past to make a decision as to whether or  
18 not they would make a good tenant or neighbor.

19 We have an obligation to recognize the inherent  
20 inequality in the criminal legal system and to make  
21 sure that we do not drive other forms of systematic  
22 oppression based on that reality.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

24 YAMINA SARA CHEKROUN: By passing these bills, we  
25 send a message of hope not of fear. Thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Yamina. We will now  
4 have Abraham Gross as our next witness.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 ABRAHAM GROSS: Good afternoon honorable Council  
7 and Chair – can you hear me Chair Levin?

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you.

9 ABRAHAM GROSS: Okay. Chair Levin, respectfully,  
10 we heard your conversation with the Assistant  
11 Commissioner and I am very troubled by what I heard  
12 because from my own personal life experience, no,  
13 that is not true. Before you are eligible for one of  
14 these vouchers, the criteria is a lot of times, when  
15 I was forced into shelter, they said to me no, you  
16 have to stay in shelter for a minimum of three  
17 months. In some cases, six months.

18 So, what she is saying that you could just check  
19 out of the shelter with one of those vouchers is not  
20 true. And the question is why? Our government  
21 agencies have the resources to help the homeless  
22 population. They have the ability; the money is  
23 there. There is a more fundamental problem and if  
24 she, in a live Zoom conversation with you is lying  
25 about such a critical thing as to whether or not  
there is any option to get out of the shelter with

1  
2 one of these vouchers, I think there is a more  
3 fundamental problem here. And that is what I want to  
4 bring to your attention. And that is what I am  
5 respectfully asking you to please follow up with me  
6 after my testimony. I have been aggrieved by the  
7 system and by other Council Members in ways that  
8 cannot be imagined.

9 Just very briefly give you the facts, after ten  
10 years of applying to affordable housing, I qualified  
11 for the single time. I won the lottery out of 74,000  
12 applicants; my number was 103. I went through a four  
13 month process, gave 350 financial documents showing  
14 that I was eligible. I was supposed to sign a lease  
15 on June 10, 2019 after which I was rejected four  
16 times for four different reasons. Some of which are  
17 specifically prohibited by the regulatory agreement.  
18 Such as, inconsistent information without saying what  
19 it was.

20 For the past year, my life has been destroyed. I  
21 have been forced into a legal battle with HPD and  
22 Breaking Ground and you know, what I could tell you  
23 is, what has come out in litigation is that out of  
24 74,000 applicants, they rejected, admitted to  
25 rejecting 99 percent of the applicants. Yet at the

3 same time, more than 60 percent of those apartments  
4 have gone to people who are egregiously unqualified.  
5 Why? Either because they own million dollar  
6 apartments out of state or because they are friends  
7 and family of people within HPD and the message I'm  
8 trying to communicate to you, is that the evidence is  
9 so incriminating and the Department of -

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 ABRAHAM GROSS: I just, I want to conclude this  
12 point please, is that you know, this is happening  
13 primarily in my humble opinion because people in  
14 positions of power have invested financial interest  
15 and you know, this is, homeless people should not  
16 have to suffer because of corruption and greed. And  
17 you know, I was about to be forced into a shelter in  
18 September and I begged for some kind of help for  
19 preventive. They said to me, no, you have to go into  
20 a shelter. Once I was in the shelter, respectfully  
21 shelters are a lot worse than what people think.

22 They said to me, you know, you have to stay here  
23 for three months. So, the system is broken but what  
24 I'm imploring with you to please understand is that  
25 there is very deep corruption here. I'm not a  
conspiracy guy person but I'm someone who has watched

3 as these powerful organizations which I'm just  
4 wrapping up here. Which are meant to help the  
5 homeless population, instead have spent more than  
6 \$600,000 that doesn't include HPD, which is free by  
7 Corporation Counsel. But Breaking Ground has hired a  
8 top law firm to deny me a prose litigant the only  
9 opportunity he got in ten years.

10 That is inhuman especially at COVID considering  
11 the facts they told you, please understand I did not  
12 say a single allegation that I cannot back up with  
13 evidence and you seem like a compassionate person of  
14 integrity.

15 The last thing I will say really is that one of  
16 the Council Members who is on this call saw my  
17 grievance, promised to help, hung me out to dry, did  
18 not respond and then was awarded a luxury apartment  
19 in the complex from which I was rejected.

20 So, we need help. We need public officials of  
21 integrity like yourself. Thank you for your work.  
22 Please follow up with me in some way. Please ask me  
23 a question. Please say something. Please, don't let  
24 this just be you know, if what I'm saying is true,  
25 then we really need serious help from people like

3 yourself of integrity and people in positions of  
4 power.

5 Thank you for letting me go over the time.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Gross. I will  
7 follow up. If you send me an email to slevin [s-l-e-  
v-i-n@council.nyc](mailto:s-le-v-i-n@council.nyc) we can follow up that way.

8 ABRAHAM GROSS: Thank you so much. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mr. Gross for your  
11 testimony. We will call on Theo Chino as our last  
12 panelist for this panel but then we do also have one  
13 more panel before we conclude for today.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 THEO CHENO: Thank you. The law in it's majestic  
16 equality forbid rich and poor alike to sleep on the  
17 bridge, to beg in the street, and to steal their  
18 bread and Aneto France wrote that a long time ago.

19 My name is Theo Chino. I live at 640 Riverside  
20 Drive, two blocks away from the Fortune Society,  
21 which are tenant association approved in the  
22 neighborhood a long time ago.

23 I am the Co-founder of the website Around my  
24 Block to teach and educate New Yorkers about getting  
25

3 into politics and I am a candidate for Public  
4 Advocate because Jumaane Williams is useless.

5 My grandfather is a World War II veteran from the  
6 442<sup>nd</sup> Division and is the cofounder with Mr. Farmer  
7 of the Congress for Racial Equality, as a Japanese  
8 man.

9 I am testifying today because all those bills are  
10 just band aid. Band aid that the City of New York  
11 and the City Council keep putting one after the  
12 other, after the other, after the other.

13 I can't talk to you about the Department of  
14 Homeless Services given the 168<sup>th</sup> Street armory to  
15 help homeless people and to help the community new  
16 balance to cover that building and millions of  
17 dollars funnel for the Westchester rich people to run  
18 around the track and 50 kids from the community to  
19 have access to the armory.

20 Excel GDS, a nonprofit that build, that was  
21 participating in rebuilding the armory has been  
22 evicted by Homeless Services. The only thing they  
23 did is bring children from the community, poor  
24 children that could not hang out with the [INAUDIBLE  
25 26:56] from Westchester.

3 There is a lawsuit, so you will read about it.

4 The problem is, if we want to fix homelessness, we

5 have to provide what I have, \$160 apartments. I have

6 a three bedroom for \$169 a month. To this day,

7 nobody is asking me why. HPD is corrupt to the core

8 and it needs to be investigated from the bottom up.

9 Mary Ann Hendrickson needs to be investigated, fired

10 if she needs to be fired and the City Council needs

11 to look into it. People from all over time went from

12 NYCHA resident, like [INAUDIBLE 27:40] met with

13 President Trump and nothing was done.

14 It's President Trump, so we cannot expect much.

15 But we have talked to the AG, to the Public Advocate,

16 to Council Members all over the City of New York and

17 nothing has been done.

18 So, now what do we have left? Capitalism works

19 only if it is fair, transparent and every body is

20 playing under the same rule. When one group is

21 playing under a different rule, it does not work.

22 So, thank you Mr. Levin. If you have any

23 questions, please ask but I will join Mr. Gross in

24 saying everything is corrupt and it needs to be

25 looked at from the bottom up to the top. Please, as

a Council Member, please use your power to

2 investigate HPD, NYCHA, and OSS. Thank you very much  
3 for your time.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Chino.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'm going to call up our last  
6 panel at this time. We will begin with Suhali Mendez  
7 and then proceed to Aracelous Figorora[SP?] and  
8 finally Katie Shaffer. And so, we will begin with  
9 Suhali Mendez now.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 SUHALI MENDEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon  
12 everyone. Good afternoon Chairs and Members of the  
13 Council along with the general public.

14 My name is Suhali Mendez, I am a Senior Advocate  
15 in the Disability Justice program at New York Lawyers  
16 for Public Interest.

17 The organization I am working for is a life  
18 organization with a robust instability rights  
19 practice and advocates in housing for people with  
20 disabilities, which is a very important part of our  
21 work. And part of our work in housing is  
22 representing matters of tenants involved in the  
23 reasonable accommodations such as apartments in  
24 common area retrofitting. Transfers to accept for  
25

1  
2 apartments and use of service animals as well as  
3 other housing discrimination issues.

4 I would like to talk more about Council Member  
5 Powers bill to ensure that people with disabilities  
6 continue to live meaningful lives in their  
7 communities.

8 With regards to the bill, according to 2017, the  
9 report shows that there are 900,100 people with  
10 disabilities that reside in New York City yet, the  
11 housing stock in New York City is inaccessible to  
12 people with disabilities. In our work, we see  
13 various forms of housing discrimination which  
14 continues to be an issue for New Yorkers.

15 Source of income discrimination and failure to  
16 provide reasonable accommodations are often  
17 interconnected. Obviously, there are discriminatory  
18 in nature and can include individuals with  
19 disabilities. [DROPPED AUDIO 31:23] which is  
20 obtaining housing and obtaining housing due to the  
21 doctors and these actions can include isolation and  
22 engagement within their communities and obviously  
23 there are many examples of discrimination which has  
24 been discussed by previous individuals.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

2 SUHALI MENDEZ: In other situations. And the  
3 other thing we would like to point out is that there  
4 needs to be more stricter laws around this. There  
5 needs to be more accountability [DROPPED AUDIO 32:26]  
6 and not accepting the individuals and acting in  
7 discriminatory matters.

8 So, I admire the Administration's effort towards  
9 this and I also want to point out to the City Housing  
10 Preservation Development HPD's report that everyone  
11 take into consideration that housing laws -

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 SUHALI MENDEZ: For income and many other forms  
14 of discrimination should be considered. Thank you  
15 for your time.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Suhali and I just  
17 want to note that you were coming in and out. So, if  
18 you do have written testimony you would like to  
19 submit, we heard most of what you said but I just  
20 want to be sure that we get the full testimony. So,  
21 you can submit written testimony if possible.

22 And now, we will move on to Aracelous Figorora is  
23 our next panelist.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

3 Good afternoon. My name is Aracelous Figorora  
4 and I'm from District 9 in the Bronx. I sit as a CC  
5 Board Member as well in the community and I advocate  
6 for parents with children with special needs.

7 I have been struggling with obtaining help with  
8 the CityFHEPS. This Intro. or laws that are going to  
9 take in effect, the 1339 and the 146 hopefully can  
10 help not only me but a lot of fellow New Yorkers who  
11 are struggling as me finding a place to live that we  
12 can afford.

13 Unfortunately, the vouchers are not enough for  
14 the rent of New York City and that's something that  
15 has to be looked into. How they budget these  
16 vouchers for each family. It is very important and I  
17 think if you guys are taking the time to listen to  
18 us, that means it is a positive outcome. It could be  
19 a positive outcome. So, I advocate, I urge you to  
20 take the right decision and to look into this. It's  
21 not only one, two, three, it's a lot of people,  
22 thousands of people going through the same thing in  
23 shelters and in their own house. In city courts,  
24 trying to find a place that they can afford and  
25 unfortunately, the budget for this CityFHEPS program  
is not being the right budgeting. It needs to be

1  
2 increased because the rent in New York is super  
3 expensive.

4 And like I say, thank you for listening to me  
5 today and this shows that you guys are working  
6 towards to resolve this problem who is affecting  
7 millions of people. Thank you and have a blessed  
8 day.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Ms. Figorora. I  
10 will now call on Katie Shaffer as our last panelist.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 KATIE SHAFFER: Okay, thank you. Hi, my name is  
13 Katie Shaffer, I am the Director of Advocacy and  
14 Organizing at Center for Community Alternatives.  
15 Thank you all for hosting this hearing, particularly  
16 Council Member Levin and Council Member Eugene. I  
17 really appreciate it.

18 I am here speaking in support of all of the bills  
19 being discussed but in particular Intro. 2047  
20 legislation to prohibit housing discrimination on the  
21 basis of an arrest or criminal record.

22 CCA is an organization with offices across New  
23 York State including in New York City. We provide  
24 direct services, organizing and advocacy and through  
25 those we support and build power with New Yorkers

1  
2 directly impacted by the criminal legal system and we  
3 advocate for changes in New York laws and policies  
4 that would make a difference to the folks that we  
5 work with.

6 I think as you all know the legislation before  
7 City Council today is of critical importance. Each  
8 day members and clients of CCA are funneled into the  
9 shelter system because they are discriminated against  
10 in both the public and the private housing systems.  
11 When members of our community cannot live with their  
12 families in NYCHA housing, they can't rent an  
13 apartment due to discrimination based on their  
14 record, they are forced into the shelter system or  
15 into street homelessness. This is unconscionable.  
16 Housing is a human right and we have to treat it and  
17 protect it as such. We also have to recognize the  
18 discrimination on the basis of arrest or conviction  
19 is fundamentally, racially discriminatory. Systemic  
20 racism in our policing and criminal legal system mean  
21 that Black and Latinx New Yorkers are stopped,  
22 searched, frisked, arrested in far greater numbers.

23 It means the discrimination on the basis of  
24 records disproportionately impacts Black and Brown  
25 people in New York City.

3 The jail to shelter and prison to shelter  
4 pipeline also makes New York less safe. Shelters are  
5 traumatizing as you all have heard to people who have  
6 been in carceral settings. They pose a health risk  
7 as the COVID-19 pandemic has made abundantly clear.

8 For CCA leaders and participants struggling with  
9 substance use, homelessness makes recovery even  
10 harder. Housing is fundamentally foundational to a  
11 stable life. Access to housing like access to jobs  
12 and education and healthcare is important to  
13 individuals but also for their families in their  
14 larger communities.

15 When each of us has what we need to thrive, all  
16 of us are safer. It is therefore critical that City  
17 Council reject the false and fear mongering claims  
18 made by landlord industry groups ensuring safe and  
19 stable housing increases community safety.

20 While more work is needed at the city, state, and  
21 federal level to pass automatic expungement laws and  
22 end permanent exclusion at NYCHA and other public  
23 housing authorities across the state, this bill is a  
24 critical step forward –

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

3 KATIE SHAFFER: Towards ensuring that all New  
4 Yorkers have a roof over their heads. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Katie. At  
6 this time, I would like to state that if there is  
7 anybody on this Zoom meeting right now who we  
8 inadvertently missed that would like to testify,  
9 please at this point, use the Zoom raise hand  
10 function and we will call on you in the order in  
11 which your hand was raised.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm sorry Katie, what is your  
13 organization?

14 KATIE SHAFFER: Center for Community  
15 Alternatives.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, thank you.

17 KATIE SHAFFER: We work with about 2,500 New  
18 Yorkers every year.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks so much. Thank you  
20 for your testimony.

21 KATIE SHAFFER: Thank you Council Member.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Seeing no raised hands, I  
23 will turn this over to Chair Levin to deliver closing  
24 remarks and adjourn our hearing for today.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to thank everybody's  
patience today and for everyone who delivered

3 testimony. We greatly appreciate it and I'm very  
4 proud to have this record of this hearing set today  
5 and look forward to passing this set of legislation  
6 as quickly as we can. This is legislation that  
7 cannot come too soon and we look at this with the  
8 knowledge that this won't solve all of our problems  
9 or resolve all of the issues that we face as a city  
10 but we will be making a positive impact one step at a  
11 time.

12 So, we want to thank everybody for your time and  
13 attention and appreciate it very much. And with  
14 that, this hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL] Thank you  
15 all.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date SEPTEMBER 24, 2020