

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

----- X

November 24, 2020  
Start: 10:06 a.m.  
Recess: 1:43 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin  
Chairperson

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 (CONTINUED)

Julie Farber  
Deputy Commissioner ACS

Ina Mendez  
Associate Commissioner ACS

Raymond Singleton  
Assistant Commissioner ACS

Yurij Pawluk  
Associate Commissioner ACS

Michael Moiseyev  
Deputy Commissioner ACS

Stephanie Gendell  
DSS Deputy Commissioner

Erin Drinkwater  
Deputy Commissioner at DSS

Chelsea Velez  
Lawyers for Children

Chawani Sing

Tamisha Simon  
Good Shepherd Services

Ericka Francois  
Fair Futures

Samantha Guyadine [sp?]  
Fair Futures

Elizabeth Garcia  
Good Shepherd Services

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

Erica Palmer  
Advocates for Children New York

Joyce McMillan

John Sentigar  
Covenant House

Sarah Kroon Chiles  
Redlich Horwitz Foundation

Jimmy Meagher  
Safe Horizon

Jamel Robinson  
Child Welfare Reform Initiative



2 UNIDENTIFIED: Recording to the computer  
3 started.

4 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Recorded.  
5 Recording to the cloud all set.

6 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. And we'll  
8 start with Bianda [sp?]. Please start with his  
9 opening statement.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes. Good morning  
11 everyone and welcome to today's remote New York City  
12 Council hearing on the Committee on General Welfare.  
13 At this time, would all panelists please turn on  
14 their videos for verification? Once again, if all  
15 panelists could please turn on their video for  
16 verification. To minimize disruptions, we ask to  
17 please place electronic devices on silent or vibrate  
18 mode. If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so  
19 at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Again, that is  
20 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Thank you for your  
21 cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
23 Sergeant. Good morning everybody and welcome to this  
24 hearing on the City Council Committee on General  
25 Welfare. Today, the Committee will conduct an

1 oversight hearing on the progress of the Foster Youth  
2 Taskforce and consider Intro. 148, a bill that I  
3 sponsored to require the Department of Homeless  
4 Services to recognize time spent in foster care as  
5 "homelessness" for the purpose of meeting eligibility  
6 requirements for the CITYFEPS rental voucher. Since  
7 2015, my office has hosted an annual Foster Youth  
8 Shadow Day where foster youth spend the day with  
9 Council Members. Many great legislative ideas came  
10 out of our first shadow day, including establishing  
11 the foster youth taskforce, which was established by  
12 Local Law 144 of 2016. The taskforce was comprised  
13 of advocates, youth, parents, providers of foster  
14 care services and government officials, including my  
15 office, with the intention of examining the foster  
16 care system and making recommendations for  
17 improvement. Since the release of the first  
18 taskforce report the number of children in foster  
19 care has continued to drop. Those in-- sorry. Those  
20 in care are much more likely to be with family  
21 instead of strangers, and parent engagement has been  
22 more of a priority at ACS. There have been many  
23 successes, but as we have seen from the recently  
24 released report, "experiences and wellbeing of sexual  
25

1 and gender-diverse youth in foster care in New York  
2 City," there are still significant needs within the  
3 foster care system. The committee will examine what  
4 progress has been made on the taskforce  
5 recommendations, what gaps in service remain, and how  
6 COVID-19 has impacted these goals. Additionally, the  
7 committee will consider Intro. 148 which will ensure  
8 that foster youth leaving care have access to  
9 CITYFEPS rental vouchers. In 2018, 23 youth who aged  
10 out of foster care ended up in the DHS system, in the  
11 DHS shelter within one year of aging out. This is  
12 absolutely unacceptable. These are youth that were  
13 in the City's care, and the City needs to ensure that  
14 these teen and young adults have a permanent home.  
15 We also know that young adults are more likely to  
16 couch surf rather than end up in the City's shelter  
17 system. Now, although they are not formerly  
18 considered homeless and are not included in much of  
19 the data, these young adults are not in stable  
20 housing. They are not on a lease. They have no  
21 rights, and are completely dependent on the whims of  
22 the friends that they stay with. I understand under  
23 the CITYFEPS rules that ACS can and has referred  
24 foster youth to DSS for CITYFEPS voucher. And while  
25

1  
2 I'm grateful that a process exists for foster youth  
3 to obtain a voucher, a current or former foster youth  
4 should not have to rely on a bureaucratic system to  
5 submit a referral to yet another bureaucratic system.  
6 We need to ensure that the young adults leaving the  
7 ACS system have the autonomy to apply for a voucher  
8 themselves, to look for an apartment themselves, and  
9 they control their own destiny. While New York City  
10 is in a challenging financial crisis, we need to  
11 decide what our priorities are and what we stand for  
12 as a city. in December 2019, ACS launched the Fair  
13 Futures initiative aimed at enhancing and improving  
14 outcomes for foster care youth ages 11 to 21 in the  
15 areas of education, employment, housing, and  
16 permanency. Despite unprecedented challenges due to  
17 a nine billion-dollar revenue shortfall from the  
18 COVID-19 pandemic, the Council was successful in  
19 preserving this initiative in the Fiscal 21 budget. I  
20 appreciate the efforts by my colleagues to join in  
21 the fight to maintain this funding and I'm hopeful  
22 that we can continue to leave a more robust social  
23 safety net, especially during difficult times. I want  
24 to thank the advocates and members of the public for  
25 joining us today. I want to thank representatives of

1 the Administration for joining us today, and I look  
2 forward to hearing from you on these critical issues.  
3 I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues that have  
4 joined this hearing, Council Member Bob Holden,  
5 Council Member Barry Grodenchik-- I don't think I see  
6 any others at the moment, but we certainly expect  
7 more members of the committee to be joining this  
8 hearing. I want to thank my staff Jonathan Bouche  
9 [sp?], my Chief of Staff, Elizabeth Adams, my  
10 Legislative Director, and my committee staff, Amenta  
11 Killawon [sp?], Senior Counsel, Crystal Pond, Senior  
12 Policy Analyst, and Natalie Almarie [sp?], Policy  
13 Analyst. I want to thank the Administration  
14 officials that are here today. I see Deputy  
15 Commissioner, Julie Farber, is here, and Associate  
16 Commissioner Ina Mendez. I look forward to hearing  
17 Assisting Commissioner Raymond Singleton, Yurij  
18 Pawluk, Deputy Commissioner, Michael Moiseyev, and  
19 I'm not sure if we have any others, but I look  
20 forward to hearing from all of you this morning, and  
21 with that, I will turn it over to-- oh, we've also  
22 been joined by Council Member Keith Powers, as well.  
23 And I see Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner at DSS  
24 and Stephanie Gendell [sp?] at ACS as well. Now,

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

I'll turn it back to Counsel of the Committee to introduce the Administration.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Levin. Good morning everyone. I am Aminta Kilawan, Senior Counsel to the General Welfare of the New York City Council. I will be moderating today's hearing. Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that you are going to be on mute until you're called on to testify. At that point, you'll be unmuted by the host. I'll be calling on panelists to testify. At that point you'll be unmuted by the host. I'll be calling on panelists to testify. Please listen for your name to be called. I will be periodically announcing who the next panelists will be. So the first panel will be members of the Administration. For the Administration for Children's Services we have Julie Farber, Deputy Commissioner, and with her for questions and answers will be Michael Moiseyev, Deputy Commissioner, Ina Mendez, Associate Commissioner, Yurij Pawluk, Associate Commissioner, Raymond Singleton, Assistant Commissioner, and for the Department of Social Services we have Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner. I'm going to call on each of you when it is your turn to speak. During

1  
2 the hearing, if Council Members would like to ask a  
3 question, please use eh Zoom raise hand function, and  
4 Chair Levin will call on you in order. We're going  
5 to be limiting Council Member questions to five  
6 minutes, including answers. I'm now going to call on  
7 members of the Administration to testify. Before I  
8 do so, I'm going to deliver the oath to each member  
9 of the Administration. So one at a time, I'll call  
10 your name and deliver the oath to you. We will begin  
11 with Deputy Commissioner Julie Farber. Do you affirm  
12 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but  
13 the truth before this committee and to respond  
14 honestly to Council Member questions?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Deputy  
17 Commissioner. And now Michael Moiseyev? Do you  
18 affirm to tell the truth, [inaudible] to respond  
19 honestly to Council Member questions?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Deputy  
22 Commissioner. Now, I'll call on Ina Mendez. Do you  
23 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
24 but the truth before this committee and to respond  
25 honestly to Council Member questions?

2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: I do.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Associate  
4 Commissioner. And now I will call on Yurij Pawluk.  
5 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
6 nothing but the truth before this committee and to  
7 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

8 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PAWLUK: Yes, I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Associate  
10 Commissioner. Now, I'll call on Raymond Singleton.  
11 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
12 nothing but the truth before this committee and to  
13 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER SINGLETON: I do.  
15 I was waiting for the unmute. I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And  
17 finally, I will call on Erin Drinkwater. Do you  
18 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
19 but the truth before this committee and to respond  
20 honestly to Council Member questions?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: I do.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Deputy  
23 Commissioner. And now I will turn it over to Deputy  
24 Commissioner Julie Farber.

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER JULIE FARBER: Thank  
3 you very much. Before I start my testimony today, I  
4 want to recognize the passing of Mayor David Dinkins,  
5 and we at ACS send our condolences to his family and  
6 friends and all New Yorkers in recognition of his  
7 commitment to our city. Moving to my testimony.  
8 Good afternoon, Chair Levin, and members of the City  
9 Council Committee on General Welfare. I am Julie  
10 Farber, the Deputy Commissioner of the Division of  
11 Family Permanency Services, FPS, at the New York City  
12 Administration for Children's Services. With me today  
13 are Michael Moiseyev, Deputy Commissioner of the ACS  
14 Division of Financial Services, and my colleagues in  
15 FPS, Ina Mendez, Associate Commissioner, Office of  
16 Strategic Program Support, and Yurij Pawluk,  
17 Associate Commissioner and Ray Singleton, Assistant  
18 Commissioner, both in the Office of Education and  
19 Employment Initiatives. Also with us is Erin  
20 Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental  
21 and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social  
22 Services. We are extremely pleased to be here to  
23 reflect on the important and very successful work of  
24 the Interagency Foster Care Task Force and to talk  
25 about ACS's efforts to strengthen our foster care

1 system going forward. I first want to thank Council  
2 Member, and General Welfare Chair, Stephen Levin, for  
3 authoring the bill that created the Task Force. And  
4 not only did Council Member Levin author the bill,  
5 but he participated in every single taskforce meeting  
6 and every single subcommittee meeting of which he was  
7 a member, and we're inspired by his dedication and  
8 commitment to children and families in the foster  
9 care system. The Interagency Task Force was created  
10 following the enactment of Local Law 144 of 2016,  
11 which was signed into law by Mayor de Blasio on  
12 November 6, 2016. The law established the  
13 composition of the Task Force to include a range of  
14 perspectives, experience and expertise. The Task  
15 Force was chaired by the Commissioner of the  
16 Administration for Children's Services, and its  
17 designated members importantly included youth  
18 currently and previously in foster care; parents;  
19 advocates; representatives from foster care agencies;  
20 the Public Advocate; the Speaker of the City Council;  
21 the Chair of the General Welfare Committee; the  
22 Commissioners of DSS, DYCD, DOHMH, the Chancellor of  
23 DOE, and the Chair of the New York City Housing  
24 Authority. The legislation charged the Task Force  
25

1 with issuing recommendations to improve services and  
2 outcomes for youth both in and aging out of foster  
3 care. In addition to issuing a report on the  
4 recommendations, the Task Force was required to  
5 produce two follow-up reports on the implementation  
6 of the recommendations, at which time the law sunset.  
7 The Task Force's initial report was released in March  
8 2018 and included 16 very strong and valuable  
9 recommendations to improve services and outcomes for  
10 youth in and aging out of foster care. All of those  
11 recommendations were incorporated into the ACS'  
12 Foster Care Strategic Blueprint which guides our  
13 work. ACS issued the one-year Progress report from  
14 the Task Force in March 2019, and we issued the final  
15 two-year progress report in March of this year, March  
16 2020. Our sister agencies in City government,  
17 parents, youth, advocates and provider agencies have  
18 truly been incredible partners with ACS in  
19 implementing the recommendations. I am extremely  
20 grateful for the shared expertise and collaboration  
21 that has really been instrumental in moving this work  
22 forward. While the Task Force concluded its work  
23 following the submission of its third and final  
24 report in March 2020, we appreciate the opportunity  
25

1 today to highlight the many, many accomplishments of  
2 the Task Force, and to discuss the ways that we are  
3 further advancing its recommendations. So,  
4 specifically, today I'm going to focus on the  
5 progress we've made in all three domains that the  
6 Task Force covered. The first is improving  
7 Permanency Outcomes. The second is improving Health,  
8 Mental Health, and Education Services for Children in  
9 foster care, and the third is improving prospects for  
10 young adults who are leaving the foster care system.  
11 As you will hear, we have continued to focus our  
12 efforts on ensuring that children and youth in foster  
13 care, and their families, have what they need to  
14 flourish, even as we continue to adapt our work to  
15 address health and safety throughout the COVID-19  
16 pandemic. I'm going to first speak to our critically  
17 important work around improving permanency outcomes.  
18 Permanency is a top priority and the Task Force made  
19 several recommendations designed to reduce the time  
20 that children spend in foster care. Our mission  
21 across all of ACS is to promote child safety while  
22 supporting and strengthening families. It's hard to  
23 imagine that there were nearly 50,000 New York City  
24 children in foster care 25 years ago, and 17,000  
25

1 children just a decade ago. Today we have under  
2 8,000 children in foster care, as a result of  
3 investments in our nationally recognized continuum of  
4 prevention services that are highly effective in  
5 keeping NYC children safe and supported at home with  
6 their families. Through our ongoing efforts in New  
7 York City, temporary foster care placement is an  
8 increasingly rare intervention, and it is used as a  
9 last resort only if there are no alternate plans  
10 available to keep children at home safely. It's  
11 important to note that we've also made significant  
12 progress reducing the time children spend in foster  
13 care when they do have to enter care. Chapin Hall, an  
14 independent national child welfare expert, conducted  
15 an evaluation of our Title IV-E waiver program and  
16 found that through the waiver interventions that we  
17 implemented such as reduced foster care caseloads and  
18 increasing therapeutic supports for parents of young  
19 children, we reduced length-- median length of stay  
20 in foster care by nine percent an, average of 50 days  
21 per child, a concrete result in reduction in length  
22 of stay in foster care. And despite the federal  
23 waiver ending, ACS has maintained these key  
24 components of the waiver initiatives through federal  
25

1 transition funds. ACS contracts with and oversees 26  
2 non-profit foster care agencies that provide foster  
3 care services for New York City children and their  
4 families. That partnership is critical. Those  
5 agencies are working every single day to support the  
6 needs of children, parents, and foster parents. For  
7 those children for whom foster care is a necessary  
8 safety intervention, our goal is to reunify children  
9 with their families as soon as possible.  
10

11 Reunification is the permanency outcome for the vast  
12 majority of children who enter foster care. We know  
13 that children fare best with their families. When  
14 reunification is not safely possible, ACS and our  
15 providers work to achieve permanent families for  
16 children through adoption or through kinship  
17 guardianship. One key area addressed by the Task  
18 Force was enhancing our practices to increase placing  
19 children with "kinship" resources, such as relatives  
20 or family friends, whenever children need to come  
21 into foster care. National research shows that  
22 children in foster care fare best when they're placed  
23 with a kinship resource. This can help reduce  
24 trauma, preserve community connections, increase  
25 placement stability and improve emotional well-being.

1  
2 It also increases the overall likelihood of achieving  
3 permanency and reduces the risk of re-entry into  
4 foster care after exiting. During the last three  
5 years, and we're very proud of this achievement, ACS  
6 has successfully increased the proportion of children  
7 in foster care placed with kin from 31 percent to 41  
8 percent, and even during the COVID-19 pandemic we  
9 have seen this percentage increase further, and it  
10 has inched up all the way to 41.6 percent at this  
11 point. We achieved this important increase through a  
12 range of strategies across the system. We created  
13 dedicated Kinship Specialists, in our Division of  
14 Child Protection, and they are focused on finding and  
15 engaging kinship caregivers for children when they're  
16 first entering foster care so children don't have to  
17 spend even one night with a stranger. We also  
18 launched a Find Family and Friends First campaign  
19 with training and education materials to help our  
20 frontline child protective staff prioritize this  
21 important effort, and there are posters and flyers  
22 and materials throughout all of the Division of  
23 Children Protection offices that continue to  
24 reinforce this campaign and this message. With an  
25 FY2020 investment from the City, we procured Binti, a

1 software that will make the foster home certification  
2 process digital, and this is one of many steps that  
3 ACS has taken over the last four years to increase  
4 and leverage technology to provide better services  
5 for children and families. The Binti software will  
6 make foster parents certification and recertification  
7 more user-friendly and will reduce paperwork for  
8 foster parents, as well as for foster care agency  
9 staff. Binti has been working with our foster care  
10 providers to customize the forms and the workflows  
11 for each agency, and we're implementing a phased  
12 pilot, starting with nine agencies this winter. In  
13 the coming months, we are extremely excited to make  
14 the online applicant portal available to prospective  
15 foster parents and the current foster parents who are  
16 recertifying, and enabling all of our foster care  
17 agencies to use the Binti software to enhance the  
18 tracking and certification and foster parent  
19 recruitment and support processes. Supported by City  
20 investments in FY19 and FY20, we were also able to  
21 provide four foster care agencies with funding to  
22 launch pilots aimed at increasing kinship placements.  
23 This has been one piece of our overall range of  
24 strategies to increase kinship placement. These  
25

1 agencies implemented a range of strategies, including  
2 kinship caregivers and staff in a joint trainings,  
3 hosting virtual support groups for kinship  
4 caregivers; collaborating with CityMD to make medical  
5 clearances process easier; and having staff dedicated  
6 to supporting kinship caregivers. Since the pilots  
7 have ended, we have sure to share the lessons learned  
8 across all of our foster care agencies so that we can  
9 incorporate the successful strategies into practice  
10 system wide. The Task Force also identified  
11 increasing the quality and quantity of family time,  
12 which is also known as visiting, and refers to the  
13 time that children in foster care with their parents  
14 spend together. This is a key strategy to improve  
15 permanency outcomes. We know that the quality and  
16 quantity of family time is a direct predictor of  
17 successful family re-unification. So, we've taken a  
18 number of steps in this area, including implementing  
19 two new tools with foster care agencies to help  
20 encourage positive family experiences during Family  
21 Time and to aid decision-making around child safety  
22 and progression of visits, all with the goal of  
23 achieving more timely and safe reunifications. The  
24 first tool helps agencies assess family readiness to  
25

1  
2 move from supervised to unsupervised visits. The  
3 second tool is a Family Time Space Assessment Tool to  
4 help foster care agencies evaluate and improve the  
5 quality of their visiting areas so that they are  
6 family-friendly and really create the kind of space  
7 that supports families and children's interactions.  
8 Prior to the pandemic, ACS expanded its visiting  
9 program at Riker's Island and we released a video  
10 that we made in conjunction with the Osborne  
11 Association, to promote family time for children of  
12 incarcerated parents. To improve family time for  
13 children with parents living in shelter, in May 2018,  
14 we issued and implemented guidance to foster care  
15 provider agencies regarding appropriate alternative  
16 visiting locations, with instructions for how to  
17 request ACS approval and payment for when parents  
18 lack appropriate housing to have overnight visits  
19 with their children. Supported by City investments in  
20 FY19 and FY20, ACS and four foster care agencies  
21 piloted additional Family Time improvement  
22 strategies, including visit coaching, case aides  
23 accompanying families on visits outside the agency,  
24 identifying offsite visiting spaces where you can  
25 have more natural interaction, providing kits with

1 supplies to encourage and support family-- positive  
2 family interactions. Here again, as with the Kin  
3 pilots, we've gathered key takeaways from these  
4 Family Time pilots about enhancing Family Time that  
5 we have shared and encourage all foster care agencies  
6 to use, such as: holding more visits outside agency  
7 walls, utilizing supervision by kinship resources;  
8 dedicating staff who are focused on coordinating  
9 visits from the moment a foster care has agency is  
10 assigned a new case; offering food and activities as  
11 a way to encourage high-quality visits and positive  
12 interactions between parents and foster parents;  
13 using technology to include parents in everyday  
14 activities such as bedtime stories; offering visit  
15 coaching to help families overcome obstacles to  
16 reunification; and facilitating virtual parenting  
17 skill-building and support groups. Our work with the  
18 Task Force has contributed also to stronger  
19 relationships with parent advocacy organizations and  
20 additional strategies to enhance parent voice  
21 throughout ACS's programs, planning, and policy. We  
22 created the new role of Parent Engagement Specialist  
23 at ACS in 2019, to increase the voice of parents with  
24 lived experiences in all aspects of ACS's work. Our  
25

1  
2 Parent Engagement Specialist, Sabra Jackson, supports  
3 the Parent Advisory Council, otherwise known as the  
4 PAC, which regularly meets, shares recommendations  
5 and engages in difficult and challenging  
6 conversations with ACS leadership, including  
7 Commissioner Hansell, myself and others, to hold us  
8 accountable and strengthen our work with families.  
9 We also collaborated with Rise, the parent advocacy  
10 organization, to develop tools and resources to  
11 support quality Family Time and to create a training  
12 curriculum for foster care agencies to focus on  
13 strengthening relationships between parents and  
14 foster parents. This helps all of the adults in a  
15 child's life work together to provide a safe and  
16 stable environment and move more quickly towards  
17 permanency. Parents with lived experiences in child  
18 welfare have been generous and forthright in sharing  
19 their stories with ACS and calling us to action to  
20 continually improve our support for other parents,  
21 and we are truly grateful for their leadership. With  
22 input from parents, parent advocates, legal advocates  
23 and other key stakeholders, ACS is currently updating  
24 two documents. The first is the "Parent's Guide to  
25 Child Protective Services" and the "Handbook for

1 Parents with Children in Foster Care.” While the  
2 finalization of these documents was temporarily  
3 delayed, we will soon be sharing the documents with  
4 the PAC, the Parent Advisory Council, for their  
5 feedback and we plan to finalize and issue these  
6 documents as soon as possible. We remain committed to  
7 ensuring that parents receive relevant and  
8 informative materials to help them understand what to  
9 expect during an investigation, and when a child is  
10 placed in foster care, and the ways to access more  
11 help and support and advocacy throughout their  
12 involvement with ACS or foster care. The Task Force  
13 permanency initiatives are incorporated into the  
14 ongoing priorities that we at ACS are aggressively  
15 implementing through our Foster Care Strategic  
16 Blueprint. Through our Home Away from Home  
17 initiative, we remain focused on efforts to increase  
18 kinship placements, foster home recruitment, and  
19 support for foster parents. We are continuing our  
20 focus on kinship care, and we have implemented a  
21 range of strategies that successfully increased new  
22 foster parent recruitment by 50 percent from FY 17 to  
23 FY 19. We achieved this by focusing on strategies  
24 that leverage current foster parents as credible  
25

1  
2 messengers to recruit other foster parents. We also  
3 built better supports for kinship and non-kinship  
4 foster parents, including a focus connecting foster  
5 parents to one other as key peer supports. ACS  
6 continues to provide data and intensive technical  
7 assistance to the foster care agencies to help them  
8 analyze and enhance business processes and to  
9 implement best practices to improve kinship placement  
10 as well as foster parent recruitment and support.  
11 Parent voice remains at the forefront of our  
12 activities, and we recently announced an extremely  
13 exciting and very important new parent advocate  
14 initiative called "Parents Supporting Parents." The  
15 purpose of this initiative is to improve  
16 reunification and race equity outcomes. In the  
17 initial pilot, two foster care agencies, Graham and  
18 Rising Ground, will be staffed with a total of nine  
19 parent advocates who have lived experience, personal  
20 experience of their own with the with the child  
21 welfare system, and they will receive training and  
22 support and technical assistance from Rise. They  
23 will become central members of the case planning  
24 team, the foster care case planning team at those two  
25 agencies, and they will be working with parents to

1  
2 achieve reunification. These parent advocates will  
3 be crucial allies to empower parents and help  
4 dismantle bias in the foster care system by bringing  
5 their lived experience to strengthen parents' self-  
6 advocacy and voice within the process, and also  
7 helping ACS and our foster care provider agency  
8 partners shift organizational culture to more  
9 authentic parent engagement approaches. We raised  
10 funds from major national and local foundations to  
11 launch this pilot, and we hope that it will lay the  
12 groundwork for full implementation, which would mean  
13 having a parent advocate assigned to every parent  
14 with a goal of reunification across the foster care  
15 system. Now, I'd like to switch gears and turn to  
16 the second area of focus for the Task Force, which  
17 was around improving health, mental health, and  
18 education services for children in foster care.  
19 Seven of the Task Force's recommendations were  
20 designed to improve the wellbeing and educational  
21 attainment of children while in care. Research  
22 consistently shows that children in care are at a  
23 significant educational disadvantage. They may enter  
24 care already behind in schooling. They may experience  
25 higher school absence rates, have a greater

1  
2 likelihood of trauma-induced behavioral challenges,  
3 and face difficulty in developing and sustaining  
4 supportive relationships with teachers and  
5 counselors, which is a key ingredient in resilience  
6 and overall well-being. Youth in foster care have  
7 also, of course, experienced trauma that can affect  
8 their physical and mental health, leading to further  
9 challenges such as placement instability or  
10 difficulty in school. Children in foster care, and  
11 the families supporting them, need ready access to a  
12 variety of trauma-informed healthcare services in  
13 order to achieve more positive outcomes. ACS and our  
14 partners have implemented the Task Force's  
15 Recommendations in this area focusing on core  
16 educational, health, and mental health needs of youth  
17 in care, and resulting in enhanced array of services,  
18 as well as coordination among service providers and  
19 our sister agencies to bereft young people in foster  
20 care. Thanks to these coordinated efforts among  
21 child welfare and other nonprofit agencies,  
22 foundations, advocates, and inspirational young  
23 people who comprise the Fair Futures Coalition, and  
24 with dedicated support from Chair Levin to urge the  
25 City's investments, we successfully launched Fair

1 Futures, a combination of two Task Force  
2 Recommendations, to improve education, employment,  
3 housing and permanency outcomes for youth in foster  
4 care, by providing youth with coaches, tutors and  
5 other supports. I want to specifically acknowledge,  
6 and I know she's on here to testify, Erica François  
7 and the Fair Futures Youth Board, who have done  
8 absolutely tremendous work to promote the importance  
9 of these services and to share with all of us the  
10 significance and importance of these services to  
11 their experience in foster care and to the young  
12 people coming up behind them. I just want to say  
13 kudos to Erica and the Fair Futures Youth Board. New  
14 York City is the first jurisdiction in the nation to  
15 implement an initiative for youth in foster care of  
16 this breadth and scale, which provides dedicated  
17 coaches, tutors and education specialists, employment  
18 specialists, housing specialists who work with youth  
19 in foster care ages 11 to 21 to help achieve their  
20 academic and career goals. The initiative started as  
21 a seven-month pilot in FY20, and for FY21, ACS  
22 received a 2.7 million dollar investment at budget  
23 adoption. With state matching funds, as well as one-  
24 time additional revenue in the ACS budget, ACS has  
25



1 created a website page on foster care and added it to  
2 its online resource hub. DOE also hired 100  
3 community-based, school-based, Community Coordinators  
4 to connect young people, including students in foster  
5 care, to a range of supportive services. Youth in  
6 foster care with attendance challenges benefit from  
7 access to DOE Success Mentors who are caring adults  
8 who identify the underlying causes of chronic student  
9 absenteeism and address barriers to attendance that  
10 ensure that students can reach their full academic  
11 potential. ACS regularly works with the DOE to  
12 navigate individual educational challenges and to  
13 help children in foster care establish and maintain  
14 strong educational connections and supports. Prior  
15 to the pandemic, the Task Force's collaboration led  
16 to an increase in the number of middle school  
17 children in foster care who were enrolled in DYCD's  
18 after-school programs. With the pandemic, ACS has  
19 been collaborating with both DYCD and DOE to ensure  
20 children in foster care who are in need of support on  
21 days that they are learning remotely, are enrolled in  
22 Learning Bridges. The Task Force is also focused on  
23 health and mental health, where we have made  
24 significant progress in strengthening the health and  
25

1  
2 mental health supports for children and youth in  
3 foster care. We worked across city and state systems  
4 to enhance access to programs like Nurse-Family  
5 Partnership for youth who are first-time parents,  
6 home visiting program. We've worked on the Home and  
7 Community Based Waiver Services for youth who are  
8 transitioning out of care who have significant  
9 physical or mental health care needs or developmental  
10 disabilities; and we've worked on increasing  
11 utilization of crisis and behavioral health support  
12 services through the ongoing state Medicaid redesign.  
13 This refers to the CFTSS services, which stands for  
14 Children and Family Treatment Support Services, which  
15 is a new range of services available through  
16 Medicaid. We continue to collaborate our partners  
17 and refer youth in foster care to these important  
18 programs. Children and youth in foster care also  
19 continue to benefit from trauma-informed mental  
20 health supports that ACS originally implemented as  
21 part of our federal Title IV-E waiver. This includes  
22 our efforts to improve foster children's access to  
23 appropriate, evidence-based mental health  
24 interventions, and improving communication and  
25 collaborative treatment planning between child

1 welfare and mental health services. We have also  
2 expanded the ABC program, Attachment and Bio-  
3 behavioral Catchup, which is an evidence-based  
4 intervention that helps new parents and foster  
5 parents practice nurturing, responsive caregiving  
6 behaviors that promote healthy development and  
7 improved attachment for infants and toddlers. One  
8 key area of progress that the Task Force advanced and  
9 that we are very pleased to highlight, and we know is  
10 of interest to the Council, is in accessing the New  
11 York State Office of Mental Health's web-based  
12 application called PSYCKES which stands for  
13 Psychiatric Services and Clinical Knowledge  
14 Enhancement System. This is an important system that  
15 provides Medicaid data regarding the health and  
16 behavioral diagnoses and treatments for Medicaid  
17 recipients, including children in foster care. By  
18 providing ACS now with access to this system, it will  
19 enhance quality improvement, care planning, and  
20 clinical decision-making for individuals receiving  
21 behavioral health services through Medicaid,  
22 including children in foster care who are receiving  
23 these services. After intensive coordination and a  
24 lot of work with the State OMH and OCFS to ensure  
25

1 that all of the legal requirements pertaining to  
2 health information sharing and confidentiality are  
3 met and that we had strong data privacy procedures in  
4 place, I am pleased to share that ACS now has access  
5 to individual child-level information from PSYCKES.  
6 We are now working to build out internal capacity to  
7 implement access to the individual child-level  
8 information for the clinical, medical, and nursing  
9 staff in our health and mental health offices, who  
10 work directly with and/or support for youth-- and/or  
11 support care for youth in foster care. And then the  
12 next step is working together with OMH, DOITT and our  
13 IT and analytic team to produce aggregate data  
14 reports, which we anticipate will be completed this  
15 winter. Now, shifting to the third area, I want to  
16 talk about the Task Force work and our work moving  
17 forward around improving prospects for young adults  
18 leaving foster care. While as I said earlier, most  
19 children and youth in foster care return home, or  
20 they're adopted, or they achieve permanency through  
21 kinship guardianship. However, in Calendar Year  
22 2019, approximately 600 young people transitioned  
23 from foster care to independent living. We are  
24 committed to providing older youth in care with the  
25

1 necessary services and supports to acquire the skills  
2 to live a healthy, productive and self-sufficient  
3 adult life, and we welcomed the Task Force's focus on  
4 this really tremendously important goal. Housing  
5 stability for youth leaving care is a top priority  
6 for ACS, and it is one that the Task Force focused  
7 on, and where substantial progress was made. I want  
8 to clarify that ACS does not and will not discharge  
9 any youth from foster care if they do not have a safe  
10 and stable living arrangement in place. This was the  
11 case prior to COVID, and it remains the case now.  
12 Even once a youth reaches age 21, which is the legal  
13 age limit for foster care reimbursement in New York  
14 State and nationally, ACS has an established  
15 procedure to provide continued care and support  
16 through City funds for the foster youth and maintain  
17 them in their current foster care placement when  
18 needed. In other words, young people do not exit  
19 care at 21 if they do not have stable housing. We  
20 keep them in their foster care placement supported  
21 with city funds until we're able to identify stable  
22 housing for them. The Task Force made significant  
23 strides to increasing overall housing access for  
24 foster youth, with a workgroup focused on expanding  
25

1 access to key housing resources, and we achieved  
2 concrete progress in this area, and I'll run through  
3 a few of those. As I previously discussed, we're  
4 thrilled to launch Fair Futures, and that includes  
5 helping young people prepare for important life  
6 transitions, and it includes additional housing  
7 search supports. We also worked with our partners at  
8 NYCHA to ensure that all ACS-referred youth are  
9 receiving the highest housing priority which is known  
10 as the N-zero priority, regardless of whether the  
11 youth resided in a foster home or residential  
12 facility within the five boroughs, a neighboring  
13 county, or was attending college outside of New York  
14 City. The Task Force also recommended city advocacy  
15 to increasing the housing assistance that is provided  
16 to foster youth and child welfare-involved families  
17 at that state-level, and ACS did join the advocacy  
18 effort that led to the enactment of a state law  
19 change regarding the child welfare housing subsidy.  
20 The legislative change makes it clear that the  
21 housing subsidy can be used in living arrangements  
22 where the beneficiary has roommates, as many youth  
23 and families do. So, previously, there wasn't  
24 clarity, and this legislation has now provided that  
25

1 clarity that this can be used in roommate situations.  
2 Additionally, we partnered with HPD to secure federal  
3 Housing Choice Vouchers through the Family  
4 Unification Program, otherwise known as FUP, and to-  
5 date, 85 of these vouchers have been awarded.  
6 Through the City's 15/15 Supportive Housing  
7 Initiative, ACS is also able to refer single youth  
8 and pregnant or parenting young adults to this  
9 critical supportive housing resource. The Task Force  
10 also focused on supporting youth to achieve their  
11 employment and post-secondary employment goals. This  
12 work is centralized within ACS's Office of Education  
13 and Employment Initiatives, and which is headed by  
14 Associate Commissioner Yuriy Pawluk and Assistant  
15 Commissioner Raymond Singleton who are joining me  
16 today, and that work is not only continuing during  
17 this difficult time, but if anything, accelerating.  
18 The Office regularly partners with the DYCD to  
19 connect youth with the Advance and Earn Paid  
20 Internship Program, as well as available Summer Youth  
21 Employment Program opportunities. This past summer,  
22 several hundred older and younger youth in foster  
23 care participated in the SYEP Summer Bridge, a career  
24 exploration and skill building program sponsored by  
25

1  
2 DYCD. To help address the need to connect youth with  
3 jobs in light of the pandemic, ACS held its first  
4 ever virtual Youth Career Fair in Spring 2020, which  
5 connected more than 100 youth with paid employment  
6 opportunities. We had some great company that joined  
7 us for the career fair. ACS also leverages public-  
8 private partnerships to support hundreds of youth in  
9 foster care to achieve their education and workforce  
10 goals. In addition to all of the work that I've  
11 described in the context of Fair Futures, we have  
12 launched numerous initiatives including the LifeSet  
13 program in partnership with New Yorkers for Children  
14 and Youth Villages that promote successful  
15 transitions to adulthood. We have a mentored  
16 internship program that has served nearly 400 young  
17 people across 12 foster care agencies, and that's in  
18 partnership with the Pinkerton Foundation. We've  
19 implemented the YA WORC program, which stands for  
20 Young Adult Work Opportunities for Rewarding Careers.  
21 That's a model that we've implemented across 10  
22 foster care agencies, and that is supported by Warren  
23 Gates at the Workplace Center at Columbia University,  
24 and we were thrilled this summer, in addition to all  
25 of that, to deliver a Virtual Summer Internship

1  
2 Program for 100 young people through a grant from the  
3 Robin Hood Foundation in partnership with New Yorkers  
4 for Children this summer. During that six-week  
5 program, which was conducted entirely online, youth  
6 gained valuable work experience by being paired with  
7 supervisors from ACS, New Yorkers for Children, and  
8 foster care agencies. Participants also benefited  
9 from skills training, educational workshops, and  
10 other career-related activities. Support from the  
11 Robin Hood Foundation likewise enabled ACS, for the  
12 first time, given the incredible success of the  
13 summer internship program, Robin Hood and ACS  
14 launched a Fall Internship Program, and also for 100  
15 young people. And this was just launched last month.  
16 This program has provided work experience, training,  
17 and career-related activity. This fall internship  
18 program is targeted towards: young people in foster  
19 care who are in college, as well as young people who  
20 are opportunity youth, or disconnected youth who are  
21 neither employed nor attending school. The program  
22 includes supports for the youth to enhance literacy  
23 skills and obtain their HSE diplomas. I also want to  
24 touch on the Fostering College Success Initiative  
25 which is also known as the "Dorm Project" which ACS

1 established in partnership with CUNY and the New York  
2 Foundling. This program is continuing to operate,  
3 continuing to provide year-round financial, academic  
4 and socio-emotional support for foster youth in  
5 college. Now, at the height of COVID, when CUNY  
6 announced that all dorms other than at Queens College  
7 would be closing in March 2020 due to the pandemic,  
8 ACS worked closely with the foster care agencies and  
9 students themselves to safely house all students who  
10 needed to relocate. During this challenging time, we  
11 continued to support youth, including by continuing  
12 to provide stipends, tutoring, career counseling,  
13 coaching and other supports. Recently, we had some  
14 very exciting news from CUNY when CUNY informed ACS  
15 that a new dorm at Hunter College would be made  
16 available to youth in foster care. In addition, CUNY  
17 made additional slots available at the existing  
18 Queens College dorm. As such, there are now enough  
19 dorm rooms available for all dorm project students  
20 who were displaced during the pandemic, as well as  
21 additional dorm beds available for new students  
22 joining the program. Through workshops,  
23 individualized coaching sessions, tutoring, and  
24 career advising, New York Foundling is ensuring that  
25

1 students remain engaged and committed to their  
2 academic success even during the pandemic, and  
3 especially during the pandemic. Students are  
4 studying, they're meeting with advisors. They're  
5 assessing their current course load. They're  
6 thinking about registering for the spring semester.  
7 The program also added a career counseling service  
8 this fall for the first time. Through a dedicated  
9 team of career counselors, the FCSI, Fostering  
10 College Success Initiative, the FSCI students receive  
11 one-on-one career counseling as well as participate  
12 in career development workshops. Now, I'd like to  
13 turn to talking about the support that we have been  
14 providing to children and families during the  
15 pandemic, since March. As the Task Force concluded  
16 its work in March 2020, we all simultaneously pivoted  
17 to face an unprecedented national crisis with the  
18 onset of the COVID pandemic. The foundations we  
19 established and the core values that we collectively  
20 embraced through the Task Force have been especially  
21 critical as ACS and our partners have worked to  
22 respond to this crisis. While the personal and  
23 professional challenges that all of us have faced  
24 have impacted our daily lives for the significant  
25

1  
2 portion of this year, I am inspired by the resilience  
3 of children and families, and by the frontline  
4 heroism of my colleagues at ACS, staff at foster care  
5 agencies, and foster parents, and I'm in awe of the  
6 creativity, and the dedication, caring that we have  
7 seen throughout this pandemic from all of our  
8 colleagues and partners. During this difficult time,  
9 the comfort and support of family is essential. As I  
10 mentioned, our focus on kinship has remained strong  
11 throughout the pandemic, and we are continuing to  
12 press this forward. And as I mentioned, kinship has  
13 increased from 31 to 40 percent, and has continued to  
14 increase even during the pandemic. We have  
15 consistently and consistently emphasized the critical  
16 importance of visits, family time, communication  
17 between children in foster care and their parents  
18 which are essential to support the child's well-  
19 being, minimizing trauma, and working towards  
20 reunification. We have issued emergency guidance.  
21 All of the guidance is on our website. This guidance  
22 instructs our foster care agencies to carefully  
23 review and weigh child safety needs and the family's  
24 potential health risks when determining if contacts  
25 should be held in person or virtually. Our guidance

1 makes clear that agencies cannot have blanket  
2 regarding family time and visiting, but rather these  
3 decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis. Our  
4 guidance specifically directs agencies and authorizes  
5 them to purchase technology for youth, families and  
6 staff to support virtual visits, if this is  
7 determined to be the best option for the family.  
8 Since the pandemic began, ACS has hosted several  
9 webinars with hundreds of foster care agency staff on  
10 how to best approach Family Time whether it's in  
11 person or virtually. With the Family Court's limited  
12 operations during the pandemic, ACS has taken  
13 aggressive, proactive steps to safely progress cases  
14 toward reunification. Early on in the pandemic, we  
15 launched a review of the cases of almost 2,000  
16 children in foster care with a goal of reunification.  
17 The purpose of those reviews was to determine if  
18 these cases could move forward either to increased  
19 visiting, trial discharge or final discharge back to  
20 their families. In cases that could move forward, we  
21 worked with the parent's attorney and children's  
22 attorney where necessary to sign stipulations and  
23 submitted these agreements to the court for its  
24 approval. This process has helped to move  
25

1 reunification cases forward even without the Court  
2 holding hearings. Given the Court's continued  
3 limited operations, at this time, we are currently  
4 launching another round of reviews of reunification  
5 cases, and our Division of Family Court Legal  
6 Services, FCLS, continues to identify cases that  
7 could be resolved with agreements between the parties  
8 and then we submit these to the court for approval.  
9 Attorneys representing parents and children have also  
10 provided lists of cases they think are appropriate  
11 for resolution, including release of children to the  
12 parent or allowing an excluded parent to return to  
13 the home, and we have an approach to reach  
14 resolutions whenever possible. This work, this  
15 proactive work has been extremely critical to enable  
16 families to continue to move towards and to achieve  
17 reunification during the pandemic. ACS also worked  
18 with foster care agencies to ensure that adoption and  
19 kinship guardianship cases are ready to proceed as  
20 soon as the Court begins hearing these matters. We  
21 are advocating for the Family Court to schedule  
22 hearings in all reunification, adoption and kinship  
23 guardianship cases. While judicial resolution of  
24 permanency issues has slowed dramatically during  
25

1 COVID-19, we stand ready to move these cases forward  
2 as soon as Family Court capacity will allow.  
3 Ensuring that youth in foster care are able to  
4 participate in remote learning is another critical  
5 priority for ACS. Starting in spring 2020, we  
6 partnered with the DOE to provide thousands of young  
7 people in foster care with remote learning devices,  
8 including children at the Children's Center and the  
9 Youth Reception Centers. With the start of the new  
10 school year, ACS has continued to work closely with  
11 DOE staff to expedite delivery for children and youth  
12 newly entering care who require devices. ACS and  
13 providers also are furnished students with tablets  
14 and computers whenever needed while students are  
15 awaiting arrival of their DOE devices. DOE has also  
16 issued a guidance on supporting students in temporary  
17 housing, foster care and ACS-involved students with  
18 return to school, prioritizing these populations to  
19 make sure they're receiving their remote learning  
20 devices and targeting them for outreach and support  
21 from DOE Community Coordinators, and from the Success  
22 Mentors who can provide a range of assistance and  
23 supports. In addition, ACS and DOE have collaborated  
24 to enhance the capacity of foster care agency staff  
25

1 to support students in foster care with remote  
2 learning. We've conducted a series of trainings on  
3 how to assist families in navigating remote learning  
4 technology. We have also partnered with DOE on a  
5 series of information sessions about remote learning  
6 for both parents and for foster parents, and we've  
7 held sessions in both the spring and the fall,  
8 regarding key issues for remote and hybrid learning,  
9 again for both parents and foster parents. Children  
10 in foster care have also been prioritized to  
11 participate in Learning Bridges, New York City's  
12 child care program for children in 3K through 8th  
13 grade who were participating in blended learning.  
14 Children who are in foster care also have access to a  
15 full continuum of medical and mental health supports,  
16 including trauma-informed services. During COVID-19,  
17 many of these services have been taking place  
18 effectively via telehealth delivery to help minimize  
19 the spread of the virus, and our foster care  
20 providers have provided technology as well as Wi-Fi  
21 plans whenever needed for youth, parents and foster  
22 parents to access services and make sure that they're  
23 staying connected. Finally, I want to turn to  
24 Introduction 148 2018. As I mentioned, stable  
25

1 housing for foster youth who are discharged to  
2 independent living is a key focus for ACS and an  
3 important priority for our partners who participated  
4 in the Task Force. The Committee is hearing  
5 Introduction 148-2018 today, sponsored by Chair  
6 Levin. The bill would require the Department of  
7 Homeless Services, DHS, to recognize time spent in  
8 foster care as homelessness for the purpose of  
9 meeting rental voucher eligibility requirements. ACS  
10 and our colleagues at DHS are interested in  
11 continuing to work with the sponsor to assist young  
12 adults aging out foster care to address their housing  
13 needs and to prevent future homelessness. We  
14 appreciate the Council's dedication to our shared  
15 goal of assuring that older youth in care have access  
16 to stable housing resources. Finally, in conclusion,  
17 the Interagency Foster Care Task Force was an  
18 incredibly valuable, substantive, productive, and  
19 important partnership among key stakeholders to  
20 identify important priorities to enhance outcomes for  
21 children and youth in foster care. We are truly  
22 grateful for the dedication of our partners on the  
23 Task Force—and we continue to work closely with all  
24 them on a number of fronts as we talked about today,  
25

1 even though the Task Force itself has concluded. We  
2 are especially grateful for the focus of Chair Levin  
3 and the City Council to help secure resources to  
4 advance the Task Force recommendations. While we  
5 remain in a time of tremendous budget challenges and  
6 an ongoing pandemic, ACS is committed to a continual  
7 state of quality improvement and reform, and we will  
8 continue to aggressively implement strategies to  
9 assure that youth in foster care and their families  
10 achieve the best possible outcomes. Thank you to the  
11 Council and our other vital partners in this work,  
12 and we are happy to take your questions.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: thank you so much,  
15 Commissioner Farber, and I just wanted to say that  
16 the reason why the taskforce was so successful in my  
17 opinion was the willingness of Commissioner Hansell  
18 and yourself and everyone else at ACS, your  
19 willingness to take it on with an open mind and with,  
20 you know, a level of excitement and exuberance and  
21 interest in bringing people together and making it a  
22 very collaborative endeavor and having, you know,  
23 different voices at the table, you know, making sure  
24 not everybody was there as a rubber stamp to-- you  
25 know, just to agree with a pre-determined line, this

1  
2 was a-- it was a successful model that I think, you  
3 know, as other future administrations and future  
4 councils look at how to collaborate. It's a good  
5 model for how to make a taskforce actually result in  
6 some good policy changes, and obviously that was  
7 highlighted by the many new initiatives that you  
8 highlighted in your testimony that have kind of come  
9 out of this process. So, a lot of what I  
10 acknowledged, all the work that you've done with your  
11 team, it's really pretty extraordinary.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Thank you,  
13 Council Member. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Welcome. There's  
15 still a lot of work to do, but it's good to see. I  
16 just wanted to also acknowledge other Council Members  
17 that have joined us, Council Member Treyger, Council  
18 Member Rosenthal, Council Member Lander, Council  
19 Member Gibson, and Council Member Torres. Our--  
20 while we still have him as Council Member, our  
21 Congress Member elect, if Ritchie's still on the  
22 hearing, actually, if you have any federal issues  
23 that you want to address in the next congress, I  
24 would suggest taking this opportunity. Ritchie's  
25 going to Washington, so we're all very excited. So,

1  
2 actually, my first question, speaking of federal  
3 issues,-- the Title 4E waiver, can you speak a little  
4 bit about how that factored into ACS' efforts over  
5 the last several years, and if there's oppor-- you  
6 know, with the incoming Administration in Washington,  
7 are there opportunities? How does that work, the  
8 waiver? Is that a discretionary action by the  
9 Administration, or are there opportunities for  
10 additional funds that you could see on the horizon,  
11 and maybe speak a little bit about that overall  
12 picture?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Sure, and  
14 I'll speak a little bit about, you know, what we did  
15 programmatically in the waiver, and then I will turn  
16 to my colleague, Michael Moiseyev, who can speak to  
17 the sort of financial components of it. But  
18 essentially, the waiver ran for about five years, and  
19 we, through the waiver, lowered caseloads. Foster  
20 care caseloads had been, you know, from 18 to 22 and  
21 we lowered them to 10 to 12, so it's very significant  
22 lowering of caseloads. And then we implemented a  
23 couple of evidence-based models which I referenced in  
24 my testimony, "Attachment Biobehavioral Catch-up" and  
25 Partnering for Success which was focused around

1  
2 essentially improving mental health services and  
3 access and coordination, and improving trauma and  
4 attachment for young children. And as I mentioned,  
5 those-- that initiative was highly successful in  
6 reducing length of stay and improving certain child  
7 wellbeing outcomes. So, the 4E waiver ended and then  
8 there has been federal transition money that is  
9 currently funding the work. And so I'll turn to my  
10 colleague, Michael Moiseyev who can add a little bit  
11 to that.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: Thank you  
13 so much, Deputy Farber, and thank you, Chair, for  
14 your question. Yes, the waiver was in law. It was  
15 statutory. We did get some transition money to  
16 bridge over since the waiver ended. That just takes  
17 us through the end of this year. We are very much  
18 looking forward to working with the incoming Biden  
19 Administration and the incoming Congress. Look  
20 forward to your support.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, and has-- I  
22 mean, have there been discussions in Washington about  
23 re-establishing the wavier moving forward, or is that  
24 something that happens on a set schedule?

25

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: It's part  
3 of congressional budget negotiations. There isn't a-  
4 - yeah, there isn't like a precise time for it. It's  
5 just part of the overall budget.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: and how much could  
7 you-- can you quantify how much the City has  
8 received-- was over those five years through the  
9 waiver funds?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: I don't  
11 have a number off top of my head. We could certainly  
12 get that to you. I can tell you that in terms of some  
13 of the improvements Deputy Farber referenced with  
14 reducing caseloads there was about 30 million dollars  
15 a year flowing to that.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So,  
17 substantial amounts of funding.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: Yes,  
19 absolutely.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That can't  
21 necessarily be made up by DTL, you know, very easily  
22 at least.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: Certainly  
24 not very easily. Speaking frankly, this is one of  
25 the budget difficulties that we all collectively face

1  
2 going into next year. So, we are definitely very  
3 much looking to the next federal budget for some kind  
4 of resolution on this.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I might jump around a  
6 little bit but I'd like to start with housing issues.  
7 Just as it pertains to the bill, how has-- first off,  
8 how many referrals has ACS made to de-assess for  
9 CITYFEPS, the CITYFEPS program? The reason I ask is  
10 that in-- you know, in this-- we initially introduced  
11 this bill in 2018, and held off from passing the bill  
12 because the CITYFEPS rules process was underway, and  
13 the rules allowed for these referrals through other  
14 agencies. So hat would also include RHY, referrals  
15 from DYCD as well, and we want to make sure that  
16 young people are having access to the program. So,  
17 if you could speak, to that a little bit. How many  
18 have been referred? How many referrals actually  
19 ended up with somebody getting an apartment, that  
20 kind of thing?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Thank you  
22 for that question, Council Member. As you know,  
23 helping youth secure safe and stable housing when  
24 they leave foster care is a critical priority for  
25 ACS, critical priority for the taskforce. I do want

1  
2 to reiterate that ACS does not discharge any youth to  
3 homelessness. We keep young people in care with us  
4 until they have stable housing. We had young people  
5 that are going to NYCHA. We have young people that  
6 are going to supportive housing. We have young  
7 people that are going to FUP vouchers, and I'm very  
8 pleased to share that even during the pandemic that  
9 has not slowed down as all. In fact, I think we had  
10 more young people going to NYCHA in this period this  
11 year than compared to last year. So, that is good  
12 news that those things are still moving forward, and  
13 that young people even when they turn 21, they still-  
14 - where they are not kicked out of foster care. They  
15 still with us until they have a safe and stable place  
16 to go, and of course you know, Council Member, that  
17 state and federal funding end for children in foster  
18 care at age 21, but the City continues to fund the  
19 full board of those costs. And so ACS is continuing  
20 to work with, you know, other city agencies,  
21 including NYCHA and HPD as well as DSS to explore all  
22 possible options for young people. And so I will  
23 turn to my colleague Erin for more detail about  
24 CityFHEPS, specifically.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: Sure.

Thank you, Julie, and thank you for the question.

Council Member, you referenced, you know, some of the

work that was going on a couple of years ago in

respect to the CityFHEPS rule and the work that the

agency was doing in respect to that. And we continue

those conversations with ACS in terms of the referral

pathways and look forward to continuing those

conversations, really making sure that we are

targeting this resource to these vulnerable

populations.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, had there been

any referrals made from ACS to DSS for CITYFEPS for

youth aging out? Since the rule went into effect?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER:

Apologies, I muted myself. So, since the rule went

into effect the referral process, we have continued

to work with ACS in terms of determining how best to

target that resource for these young people getting

at the population that would be entering into

shelter.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I mean, but have

there been any-- have there been any actual

1  
2 referrals, or has any youth aging out of care  
3 received a CITYFEPS voucher?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: So, the  
5 referral process continues to be under way in terms  
6 of the discussions between the two agencies. There  
7 are youth who have aged out of foster care who have  
8 received the CityFHEPS voucher by virtue of meeting  
9 the other criteria under the rule. I'd have to get  
10 back to you--

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Which  
12 other criteria would that be?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: So, the  
14 200 percent of poverty, the 90-day requirement--

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] 90-day  
16 requirement of being in shelter?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
18 correct.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Just to be  
20 clear, so if a youth aging out of care has received a  
21 CityFHEPS voucher, which we can't necessarily confirm  
22 whether any youth that's aging out of care has  
23 received a CityFHEPS voucher, they would have had to  
24 have been in shelter for 90 days?  
25

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: That's  
3 correct.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. I mean,  
5 obviously, the purpose of this proposed legislation  
6 is to make sure that youth don't ever go into shelter  
7 in the first place, and we-- you know, we have as I  
8 said in my opening statement, 2018 twenty-three youth  
9 who aged out of foster care ended up in a DHS shelter  
10 within one year of aging out. That's in calendar  
11 year 2018, and then obviously there are others that  
12 are not ending up in DHS shelter, but are-- that are  
13 couch surfing or other types of unstable housing.  
14 You know, we all know, you know, different types of  
15 unsafe living arrangements. You know, the-- sex for  
16 shelter and you know, really unacceptable and  
17 terribly, terribly unfair to these youth living  
18 arrangements that they should never be placed in, and  
19 we know that that's happening. And so, you know,  
20 when I see 23 youth who have aged out ending up in a  
21 DHS shelter within a year, to me that's the tip of  
22 the iceberg. There's a lot that I'm not seeing  
23 there. I am seeing what we're catching in reportable  
24 data, but we're not seeing the rest of that iceberg  
25 that's under water. So, you know, I'm-- just to be

1 clear, I mean, I'm-- we went through a process. I  
2 testified at the rule making hearing on this issue.  
3 I did not proceed with this legislation because the  
4 City said that they would be addressing this through  
5 the rule. If we're seeing that, you know, A, there  
6 are still youth that are ending up in shelter within  
7 a year of aging out, and B, not a single youth aging  
8 out has been able to obtain a CITYFEPS voucher  
9 without first going into shelter for 90 days, you  
10 know, I just don't see any other option but to  
11 legislate this, because again, we talked about this a  
12 couple years ago, and you know, I feel like I  
13 received some assurance that this would happen, that  
14 agency referrals would happen. And you know, I  
15 appreciate that the City keeps youth-- paying for  
16 youth in care beyond age 21. It's not discharging  
17 anybody into the shelter, obviously that's good, but  
18 you know, within a year that's not, you know,--  
19 that's not okay, and we have some responsibility  
20 there. Again, not even really factoring in the  
21 unstably housed situation. Commissioner Farber, do  
22 we have a sense of how many young people are  
23 discharged from care in-- and within a year end up in  
24  
25

1  
2 one of those unstable living arrangements? Couch  
3 surfing, things like that, are we able to track it?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I don't  
5 think we have the data that way. We have the Local  
6 Law 145 data that we produce for you, which  
7 indicates, you know, a good number of young people  
8 going to NYCHA, a good number of young people going  
9 to supportive housing, a portion of young people who  
10 are turning 21, but staying in care, staying with us.  
11 We have a proportion of young people who are in  
12 college room and board, which is a good thing, and  
13 then a proportion of young people who are with family  
14 and friends when they exit.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, right. I  
16 mean, family and friends is such a vague category. I  
17 guess, you know, I'm extremely concerned about, you  
18 know, who are these friends, you know? I think that  
19 that would be a question of, you know, what does that  
20 mean, friend? Because as we know, youth that are  
21 aging out don't have the types of support systems  
22 that other young people with, you know, with a family  
23 structure have, and it seems like an invitation for,  
24 you know, not great living-- not great living  
25 arrangement incentives. If you don't have stable

1 housing and you're going to-- you know, you need  
2 stable housing, you'll live with people or engage in  
3 behavior that might not necessarily be in your best  
4 interest because, you know, you can get a roof over  
5 your head.

6  
7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, I think  
8 a couple things I would add also is we have a  
9 supervision to 21 unit, which is for young people who  
10 have elected to sign themselves out of care at age 18  
11 or 19 or 20, and that unit exists to provide support  
12 to those young people in case they, you know, end up  
13 being a situation that is unstable. We then work  
14 with those young people and provide support. we also  
15 have an alert system with DSS that when there is a  
16 young person who enters the shelter system, which  
17 fortunately is quite rare, that we then coordinate  
18 with DSS and just contextually-- you know, obviously,  
19 the experience of every single young person is  
20 critically important to us, and the 23 young people,  
21 you know, are showing up in a shelter within a year  
22 is a concern, but what we have seen over the last  
23 five years is that number has been drastically  
24 reduced. I think it was 36 the prior year. I think a  
25 couple of years ago it was 77, and so we are making

1 progress in this area, and clearly, we want to reduce  
2 that to zero.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And it's possible, I  
6 mean you know, we think about what we've done for  
7 veteran's homelessness. You know, that was a much  
8 higher number. It was about 1,000. It went from  
9 about over a thousand down to single or low double  
10 digits within a couple of years through a coordinated  
11 action between the City and federal resources. I  
12 mean, 23, just to put into some kind of context-- I  
13 don't have the MMR in front of me, but the number of  
14 youth that aged out in 2018 was probably in the 600  
15 or 700 range.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Six hundred,  
17 I think, yeah.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Six hundred, so 23  
19 out of 600 is like, you know,-- what is that about  
20 three percent? That's actually pretty high I would  
21 think, you know, the number of percentage of youth  
22 aging out ending up in a shelter within a year.  
23 That's not a negligible number. And again, this is--  
24 I'm not really pinning it on a single agency.  
25

1  
2 There's the kind of coordination here. Frankly, you  
3 know, I-- I mean, to me it doesn't make any sense  
4 that-- they should-- I don't understand why they're  
5 not having a voucher in hand upon discharge. If  
6 they're not being discharged into a NYCHA apartment,  
7 you know, in any even they should be discharged with  
8 a voucher. It-- you know, they'll be able to afford  
9 an apartment, maintain an apartment, with a voucher  
10 if they get one. And we know vouchers are used for  
11 roommate situation. Certainly, I mean, all of the--  
12 I mean, I've worked with DSS on constituent cases  
13 where, you know, that's been part of it. There's not  
14 a lot of single adult opportunities out there because  
15 of the cost of housing, and there's this other issue  
16 of the rate of the voucher, but you know, they can be  
17 in a roommate situation. I just-- it's, you know,  
18 kind of beyond me why we can't at this point at the  
19 end of 2020 have a voucher for the 600 young people,  
20 minus those that are moving into NYCHA. How many  
21 move into NYCHA a year? How many are discharged  
22 directly to NYCHA?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Like about  
24 120.

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, 600 minus 120,  
3 480. Those 480 young people that are aging out  
4 should have a voucher, even if they have an apartment  
5 line up. They should have a voucher, because with a  
6 voucher they pay 30 percent of their income towards  
7 the rent. Well, if their income, if they're working  
8 as a-- you know, in retail and they can only get 26  
9 hours a week, and they're pulling in 600 dollars a  
10 week or something like that, you know, they should  
11 only be paying 30 percent of that to their rent  
12 anyway, but that shouldn't preclude them from getting  
13 their own apartment. So, you know, I'm just-- I am,  
14 you know, I'm dis-- I'm very disappointed that we  
15 aren't-- the answer to my question wasn't, "Yeah, we  
16 have 400 kids or 350 kids leaving the foster care  
17 system with a voucher every year." You know, that's  
18 what I would have hoped the response would have been.  
19 And then just really quickly, how many-- just as we  
20 were kind of talking about, how many young people out  
21 of the RHY system have received a CITYFEPS voucher,  
22 or how many are receiving a CITYFEPS voucher a year?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DRINKWATER: I will  
24 have to get back to you on that. I don't have that

1 data with me today. That's something we can  
2 certainly follow up with after the hearing.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Because I-- I  
5 mean, if I can. I'll have to look at the, you know,  
6 just kind of jurisdictionally within our committees,  
7 but like I'm looking to add in-- I don't want to pit  
8 RHY youth from, you know, against foster youth. So,  
9 you know, I'm just going to combine-- I mean, if I  
10 can, I'm just going to combine them into one bill and  
11 make sure that, you know, every young person in their  
12 DOICD [sic] system automatically has a right to a  
13 voucher. Okay, with that, I'm going to turn it over  
14 to my colleagues if they have questions. Bob, Barry,  
15 Vanessa? Seeing none? Anyone for questions? Okay.  
16 Maybe they will in a little bit. Brad? Bob, you got  
17 a question? Hey, Bob's got a baby, too. Look at  
18 Council Member Holden. Is this a grandkid, Bob? Are  
19 you babysitting?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You're like me.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I'm babysitting  
23 like you. Yes, I'm taking your lead.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Very cute. Who is  
25 this, by the way?

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I'm sorry?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Who is this young person that we're seeing on the screen?

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Granddaughter Caroline, 15 months.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, boy, there you go. Okay. So, I'll get back-- thank you. Welcome, Caroline. Thank you for joining us.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You're welcome. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, I want to ask about the dorm project. Maybe a year ago or a year and change ago we heard some concerns about the dorm project discontinuing in Staten Island. Is that-- has that been resumed, or can you speak a little bit about what's happened in Staten Island?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, yeah, the dorm project did discontinue in Staten Island, and we focused on the program at Queens College and City College and John Jay. Now, of course, that has changed since COVID. Those dorms were closed, and so now the actual dorms that are operating are still the Queens College dorm, as well as the Hunter College dorm that I just mentioned. But what I'd also like

1  
2 to point out is that we have made, I think, a  
3 positive adjustment to the program in that students  
4 at CUNY are eligible now to receive support from New  
5 York Foundling in terms of tutoring and college  
6 success coaching. All of those supports are  
7 available whether you're living in a dorm room or  
8 not, and so the living in the dorm is not sort of the  
9 central requirement. Now, those support services are  
10 being provided both to young people who are in dorms  
11 and are not. That's a positive, you know, positive  
12 development.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm just going to go  
14 through some. I mean, I will be kind of jumping  
15 around a little bit, but focusing on some of the  
16 permanency issues. ACS created in 2018 the 10 new  
17 kinship specialists within the Division of Child  
18 Protection. Are they all currently filled right now?  
19 And are they--

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER:  
21 [interposing] Yeah, they are.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, wonderful.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah, and  
24 they're active--

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And  
3 those--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: and highly  
5 effective.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. And they're  
7 obviously borne out by the data. And those are not--  
8 those are not at risk in terms of, you know, we're  
9 looking ahead at having some belt tightening in the  
10 next few months through the November plan and  
11 Preliminary Budget. Are we looking to make sure  
12 that those are maintained and not at risk?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Not to my  
14 knowledge; they're not at risk.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Has anything within  
16 your division been targeted for cuts in the November  
17 plan?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, I will  
19 defer that question to my colleague Michael Moiseyev  
20 who I know is prepared to address that.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: So,  
22 nothing specific o the division. There is a citywide  
23 initiative in the November plan that recognizes the  
24 hiring freeze that all agencies have been under, and  
25 that applies across the board. But basically, it's

1  
2 the hiring freeze for everyone and then for foster  
3 care, that's it [sic].

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then for the rest  
5 of ACS, are there any programmatic cuts?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: No, not in  
7 November.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's not in November,  
9 okay. How much has-- how much out of ACS' spend  
10 realized in savings from the hiring freeze?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: It was 75  
12 positions. I'm still working with OMB--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: because  
15 the budget just came out yesterday, but yeah, 75  
16 positions.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so that's it  
18 for ACS, the 75 [inaudible] positions, basically.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, great. Not  
21 great, but good to know.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MOISEYEV: Could be  
23 worse. Could be better, could be worse.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. Do we feel  
25 like the 10 kinship specialists are sufficient for

1  
2 the number of young people entering foster care right  
3 now? So about 3,000 children entered foster care in  
4 2020, is that-- is that-- are 10 enough or do we need  
5 more to be effective?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, the 10  
7 kinship specialists, you know, they work in a couple  
8 of way. I mean, they're supporting work on  
9 individual cases, but they're also supporting, you  
10 know, groups of CPS staff and supervisors in their  
11 work through training and technical assistance and  
12 consultation. And so--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: You know,  
15 their own caseload. And so that, I think, has  
16 contributed significantly to just a culture within  
17 DCP of total attention and focus on kin by all staff,  
18 and the kinship specialists are essentially the, you  
19 know, sort of the cheerleaders and the champions of  
20 that work, but it's not them alone that implement the  
21 kinship work.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you think that 10  
23 is sufficient at least at the moment? I'm sure you  
24 could use more, but 10 is getting the job done.

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I mean, I  
3 think it's been incredibly effective. As you've  
4 seen, we've increased from 31 to 41 percent. I mean,  
5 we're always assessing, you know, and thinking about,  
6 you know, opportunities, when and where it makes  
7 sense to shift, you know, responsibilities.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Where was the target  
9 percentage laid out in the-- I'm forgetting at the  
10 moment, but that's up around the target percentage  
11 that laid out in the taskforce report, right?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: We had set a  
13 target of 46 percent and we're not quite there, but  
14 we're determined to get there, and--

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] It's  
16 moving in that direction.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: And it's  
18 definitely moving in that direction, and you know,  
19 we're sort of-- we're doubling down and doing  
20 additional analysis and looking at sort of what are  
21 the targeted strategies both across the DCP offices  
22 as well as across the foster care agencies to  
23 continue that trajectory.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you speak a little  
25 more about the Parent Advisory Council and how often

1  
2 you're meeting? Have any recommendations or  
3 initiatives come out of that engagement? Do you  
4 feel-- I mean, you mentioned that it's sometimes  
5 tough conversations. Are the conversations tough  
6 enough? Do we feel like there's a, you know, enough  
7 of a-- you know, of a voice for parents throughout  
8 that setting?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah, thank  
10 you for that question. It's really-- it's incredibly  
11 important work that we're diving in very deeply,  
12 which I think is a really good thing. And Saber  
13 Jackson [sic] leads a group of about 20 parent  
14 advocates who are strong, thoughtful, strategic,  
15 fierce, informed advocates, and they are focusing on  
16 things, you know, sort of large and small, and  
17 sometimes even small is not really small. They have  
18 worked. One of the concrete accomplishments is they  
19 worked to adjust a form that gets submitted to court  
20 that describes, you know, parents participation and I  
21 think it's a summary form from family team  
22 conferences that needed an expanded section on family  
23 strengths, and they advocated to DCP and FCLS to  
24 update the form and reflect that, and that change was  
25 made, and the form was changed, and it was rolled out

1 in August. So that's one example. Members of the  
2 Parent Advisory Council have been involved in  
3 training parent advocates. Recently, under the new  
4 prevention contracts, you know, that were issued on  
5 either the RFP under my colleague, Deputy  
6 Commissioner Jackie Martin. They've been involved in  
7 that. They have a number of subcommittees that are  
8 focused on conferencing, on the role of parent  
9 advocates, on the Children's Center, on education,  
10 the test-- the PAC meets at least monthly as a full  
11 PAC, and then there's many other committees. In  
12 addition, ACS has really invested significant  
13 resources in the PAC to support the PAC to really,  
14 you know, be able to be staffed and supported. You  
15 know, when you have a council it needs staff  
16 resources, and so we put staff resources to it, and  
17 we have also engaged in-- and I'm speaking of your  
18 question about tough conversations. We are doing  
19 race, diversity, intersectionality facilitated  
20 conversations with Candida Brooks Harrison [sp?] who  
21 is an expert on facilitating conversations that are  
22 really around looking at racism, race, power  
23 dynamics, and ACS and the PAC have had a session  
24 together. The PAC is having sessions on this, and it  
25

1  
2 really speaks to our commitment to have these  
3 difficult and challenging conversations about the  
4 power dynamics that underlie the relationship and  
5 then the substantive issues about which we're  
6 concerned and which PAC members are concerned and  
7 want to move forward. We've also brought in another  
8 resource to support the PAC. There's an entity  
9 called the Children's Trust Fund Alliance and they're  
10 a national group, and they run the Birth Parent  
11 National Network, and so they work with parent  
12 advisory councils around the country to, you know,  
13 support them to be strong and effective and, you  
14 know, strong advocates. And so we've brought them in  
15 as well to support the PAC, and so we're excited  
16 about that.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many members are--  
18 - how many members are on the PAC, and how are they--

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: [interposing]  
20 About 20.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And how are  
22 they-- how do they get on the PAC?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, when the  
24 Commissioner first announced the PAC there was an

25

1 application process and people applied to be part of  
2 it, and--

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And it's  
5 open to-- it's open to parents who currently have  
6 kids in care and those who at some point had kids in  
7 care--

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: It's parents  
9 with lived experience.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: but no longer do?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I think that  
12 most of the parents, it's previous lived experience.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Previous, yeah, okay.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: But they're  
15 wonderful, powerful group that is, you know, pushing  
16 up appropriately to have conversations about all  
17 manner of things.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's great, great.  
19 In the initiative there's a family time pilot that  
20 ACS launched from fall of 2018 to fall of 2019 to  
21 implement strategies to improve the quality of family  
22 time practices. You mentioned this in your  
23 testimony. What did ACS learn through that process?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, thank  
25 you for that question, and you know, as I mentioned

1 in my testimony, family time is absolutely critical  
2 to successful reunification outcomes. And so in this  
3 pilot, four agencies received grants to implement  
4 strategies to try and improve both the quantity and  
5 the quality of family time. You know, they were  
6 doing things like working out processes to hold more  
7 visits, you know, sort of-- in creative locations,  
8 using kin to supervise visits, dedicating staff to  
9 help coordinate those visits, being creative about  
10 food and other activities as a way to have high  
11 quality visits. Using technology, you know, and I  
12 think this is-- there's a few things that I think  
13 we've learned through COVID, you know, sort of  
14 necessity is the mother of invention, but which their  
15 strategies that will be helpful to continue using  
16 moving forward, and one of those-- you know, there  
17 are these apps that were originally designed for  
18 grandparents so that grandparents who are far away  
19 could read bedtime stories to their kids, but they're  
20 great, right? They're great for this purpose as  
21 well. And so the work that we've done with the  
22 pilots has been shared with all of the agencies, you  
23 know, with the idea for them to work to incorporate  
24 and implement these strategies, and we're providing

1  
2 regular data to the agencies on their, you know,  
3 frequency and utilization of family time, and so this  
4 will be a, you know, a continued major priority for  
5 us.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Have you seen any  
7 issues around recruitment of foster parents as part  
8 of COVID?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah, yes.  
10 Thank you for that question. As I mentioned in my  
11 testimony, we really-- we were knocking it out of the  
12 park from FY17 to FY19. We increased foster parent  
13 recruitment by 50 percent. We're so proud of that,  
14 and yes, COVID has had an impact, you know, as you  
15 might guess. However, we have implemented a number  
16 of strategies to try and mitigate that, and I'd like  
17 to refer, if it's okay with you Council Member, to my  
18 colleague Associate Commissioner Ina Mendez who leads  
19 that Home Away from Home work and she can speak to  
20 the strategies that we've implemented during COVID  
21 pertaining to foster parent recruitment and support.

22 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER MENDEZ: Thank  
23 you, Deputy Commissioner Farber and Council Member.  
24 As Julie mentioned, we did pivot when COVID hit, and  
25 so we worked with the providers on how they can

1  
2 continue their recruitment efforts given social  
3 distancing requirements and working remotely. So, a  
4 lot of the recruitment efforts did move to a virtual  
5 platform, and we provided support and guidance to the  
6 provider, and they used various virtual platforms,  
7 Zoom, facetime, WebX to host orientation. We worked  
8 very closely with the State so that all of the  
9 training materials could be offered virtually because  
10 customarily training foster parent training is done  
11 in a group format. So, we had to take the  
12 curriculum, you know, adapt it to a virtual  
13 environment, provide support on how they can lead the  
14 trainings, and then they had trainings for a  
15 prospective foster parents virtually, and then  
16 provided guidance to foster parents, because all of  
17 the certification requirements remained in place. So  
18 how can you get a medical? You can use telehealth or  
19 accessing various clinics that were actually seeing  
20 people in person so they could get their medicals.  
21 So we continue to do all of that. One of the lessons  
22 learned we have been implementing for a few years  
23 through Home Away from Home is using foster parents  
24 as the champions and the cheerleaders and engaging  
25 their family, social circles, peers in the benefits

1  
2 of foster parenting as a recruitment tool. So we  
3 supported the agencies who supported their foster  
4 parents to have those kind of conversations either  
5 through facetime or on Zoom. So those were efforts  
6 that we continue to put in place during the pandemic.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is there-- have-- one  
8 concern that's come up for us was-- with challenges  
9 due to COVID and the challenges over on recruitment  
10 that are associated with that, are we seeing the  
11 length of stay at the Children's Center keep up  
12 during COVID? Are we tracking that, you know, month  
13 to month to see if there's an impact on the average  
14 length of time that young people are staying at the  
15 Children's Center? Because I know that there's-- you  
16 know, obviously, ACS has done a lot of work in the  
17 last 18 months to two years around the children's  
18 Center and brining that length of stay down.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah, thank  
20 you for that question. We do regularly track,  
21 obviously, the census and length of stay there. I  
22 don't have the length of stay data in front of me,  
23 but what I do know is that the census has remained  
24 relatively low over the last several months. It's  
25 been, you know, somewhere between the 30s and the

1  
2 60s. And so we have been able to, you know, maintain  
3 social distancing, and you know, a range of sort of  
4 programs and strategies at the Children's Center to  
5 ensure the wellbeing of young people there.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. If we could  
7 follow up, and-- I'd be interested to see the month  
8 by month just to keep track on length of stay and the  
9 number of children there.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: We will do  
11 that.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. With the  
13 parent's guide to child protective services and the  
14 handbook for parents and children in foster care, do  
15 these-- have they been released yet publicly, the  
16 updated versions?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: They have  
18 not. They've been drafted and have received tons and  
19 tons of feedback, and they were delayed in part to  
20 the SCR legislation and then in the context of COVID,  
21 and so we have drafts that we want to circulate back  
22 through the Parent Advisory Council and some other  
23 folks, but we are excited to get those documents out  
24 which we think will be very helpful to parents.

1                   CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, and  
2  
3 incorporating in the SCR legislation, which is good.

4                   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: As relevant,  
5 yes, since it doesn't go into effect for a little  
6 bit, but yeah.

7                   CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, ok. When does  
8 that go into effect?

9                   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I believe  
10 2022, January 2022.

11                  CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I didn't realize it  
12 was so long. And it's-- that includes parents, you  
13 know, an extensive list of parent's rights and how to  
14 exercise those rights?

15                  DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yes, yep.  
16 And resources and information and tips and-- you  
17 know, it's intended to be written, you know, in a  
18 user-friendly way so it's accessible for parents,  
19 which is you know, a key piece that'-- that's an  
20 example of how work with parent advocates in the PAC  
21 is critical, because they help us with-- to ensure  
22 that that language is understood by the audience.

23                  CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And is it in a range  
24 of languages available?  
25

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, we will be having it translated, yes. We will be having it translated into a range of languages.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And obviously, you're open to working with elected officials if they're hearing that there are language issues in their districts. You're open to receiving those issues and trying to work through them?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Absolutely, yeah. Please share those with us.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Moving onto just some education questions. The-- in 2019, DOE hired approximately 100 school-based community coordinators to connect highly-mobile youth including students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care. Are-- do you know if these positions are currently filled and funded? I'm assuming they're in the DOE budget, but--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I believe they are, and I believe they are operating, and I will turn to my colleague Yuriy Pawluk who might be able to provide a little bit more detail.

1  
2 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PAWLUK: Yes,  
3 thank you, Deputy Commissioner Farber, and thank you  
4 for that question, Council Member. My understanding  
5 is that the coordinators have been hired and we have  
6 provided, you know, training on foster care issues  
7 for them.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. What does that  
9 training-- do you know what that training consists  
10 of?

11 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PAWLUK: It was  
12 conducted by the lead education person on my team.  
13 Just, you know, generally talks about the status of  
14 foster parents and students in foster care, kind of  
15 what needs our students have in terms of school  
16 stability, kind of talking about really, you know,  
17 trauma-informed practice and the special needs that  
18 our students have, making sure that there's really  
19 great communication between schools and the  
20 coordinators, and you know, foster students and  
21 foster parents. So, it's-- you know, really making  
22 sure, because as you know, as you might be aware, you  
23 know, there's a great focus at the DOE around  
24 students in temporary housing. We want to make sure  
25 to work with the DOE, that there's strong recognition

1  
2 of students in foster care as a special population as  
3 well. So, just making sure that those community  
4 coordinators really have knowledge around what the  
5 needs of our foster care students are.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The taskforce had  
7 recommended that-- thank you very much, Yurij. The  
8 taskforce recommended that ACS and DOE explore ways  
9 to connect sixth graders in foster care as well as  
10 any seventh and eighth graders who are over age for  
11 their grades, which is approximately 400 students.  
12 The taskforce recommended that they explore-- that  
13 the agencies explore ways to connect these students  
14 to tutoring services. Is there any advancement made  
15 on that recommendation?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I think what  
17 you're referring to, Council Member is the Middle  
18 School for All initiative, is that what you're  
19 referring to?

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm not sure. I can  
21 try to match those up.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Well, so  
23 there's a Middle School for All initiative which  
24 supports sort of, you know, helping young people,  
25 seventh graders, you know, planning for their

1 educational futures, but perhaps you're referring to  
2 just the tutoring that is now available through Fair  
3 Futures to all young people ages 11 through 21, and  
4 we have hundreds, if not thousands. I don't have  
5 that number in front of me of young people who are  
6 now receiving tutoring.  
7

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so that's Fair  
9 Futures that is--

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: [interposing]  
11 Yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: kind of-- but that's--  
13 - but Fair Futures is not available to every-- is it  
14 available to every youth who wants--

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: [interposing]  
16 Every youth ages 11 to 21, every single youth, yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, that-- I think  
18 that that meets that question. I'm trying to find it  
19 in the report itself, but I'll move along on that.

20 Bear with me for a moment. The taskforce also  
21 recommended creating an office similar to the DOE  
22 Office of Students in temporary housing for students  
23 in foster care. We know that DOE's begun to  
24 incorporate foster care information in training for  
25 borough office staff and school-based designated

1 liaisons. Do we see that as enough to meet the needs  
2 of foster care students, or do we still believe that  
3 a dedicated office would be beneficial within the  
4 DOE?  
5

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: I'll ask  
7 Yurij to say a few more words in detail. You know,  
8 our experience is that, you know, we have a set group  
9 of folks at the DOE that we work with around foster  
10 care issues and they've put together the guidance and  
11 the website, and there's sort of a range of resources  
12 and supports for youth in foster care that we're  
13 regularly coordinating with the DOE team on these  
14 issues. I don't know if, Yurij, you can speak in  
15 addition to the structures that DOE has put in place.

16 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER PAWLUK: Sure. I  
17 would say thank you, thank you very much, Deputy  
18 Commissioner Farber, and thank you, Council Member  
19 Levin for that question. We do work very closely  
20 with the DOE. We have a strong relationship with  
21 them. You know, the Division of Youth and Community  
22 Development or School and Community Development, we  
23 work very, very closely with them. You know, in  
24 addition to doing, you know, trainings with the  
25 community coordinators, you know, we've done

1 trainings with school attendance officers, other DOE  
2 staff. you know, for example, recently around school  
3 transportation issues we worked very closely with the  
4 DOE to put together a very strong plan to make sure  
5 that all youth in care receive transportation this  
6 past fall. We-- there's a, you know, citywide--  
7 there's a citywide coordinator on child of abuse  
8 maltreatment, or on child abuse and maltreatment  
9 prevention, sorry. We work very closely with him and  
10 his team around educational neglect issues around  
11 coordination issues, and work very closely with the  
12 Office of Students in Temporary Housing, as well.  
13 They actually recently issued policy guidance around  
14 remote learning for, you know, that population in the  
15 midst of the pandemic and a best practices that  
16 school officials should be undertaking. So,  
17 certainly, I think we always want our youth in care  
18 to be at the forefront of what DOE does, and I would  
19 say we have a strong relationship with them and we  
20 hope to continue that going forward.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
23 Yuriy. I just have a couple of more questions.  
24 Moving onto health and mental health. ACS is working  
25 with its provider agencies to maximize the use of

1 Medicaid redesign services to support youth in care.  
2 Can you speak about what mental health services are  
3 available to youth who do not meet Medicaid's  
4 requirement for medical necessity? And I mean, I'm  
5 not totally familiar with what meets the needs of  
6 medical necessity or meets that standard, but if you  
7 could speak a little bit more around that, you know,  
8 what services are then available for youth that are  
9 not at that level.  
10

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, all  
12 children in foster care are eligible for Medicaid. I  
13 think you're talking-- are you talking about sort of  
14 when, you know, young people have an issue that  
15 doesn't rise to the level--

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Correct.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: of being a  
18 Medicaid reimbursable service, right?

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yep, yep.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: So, I mean,  
21 in that zone, you know, we are training foster  
22 parents around, you know, providing trauma-sensitive  
23 support for young people, training for foster care  
24 agency staff, focuses on how to provide supports for  
25 young people, and how to identify when they might

1  
2 need something more, when they might need, you know,  
3 a more formal mental health evaluation and support.  
4 The, you know, coaches through Fair Futures, you  
5 know, a major role for them is sort of constantly  
6 checking in and assessing--

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]

8 Identifying--

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Assessing  
10 wellbeing and so forth. And so I really think of  
11 that as the, you know, really the major role of  
12 foster care agency case planning staff and foster  
13 parents and the, you know, sort of the regular  
14 infrastructure is to identify and provide support for  
15 young people, and then when it traverses over into  
16 something more clinical where there really are mental  
17 health services needed, the new set of services  
18 available under Medicaid through CFTSS are actually  
19 quite exciting, and there are six or seven new  
20 services. The state has gradually been rolling out  
21 these services over the last two years, and these  
22 separation can pay for youth peer support. They can  
23 cover family peer support. They cover psycho/social  
24 rehabilitation. They cover community psychiatric  
25 supports and treatment, and what's also interesting

1  
2 about these services is they can be out of the  
3 office. They can be sort of in non-traditional  
4 locations. And so--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And all  
6 staff at the agencies are, you know, trained on kind  
7 of what's available under Medicaid redesign and the  
8 services and kind of how to go through that process  
9 so that they're not beating their heads against the  
10 wall trying to get these services reimbursed or  
11 given.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah. So,  
13 there are folks at each of the foster care agencies  
14 who, you know, have expertise, you know, in how to  
15 identify the needs for these services, make referrals  
16 for these services. Many of the foster care agencies  
17 themselves are licensed to deliver these services,  
18 and if they're not, you know, they're accessing them  
19 from other providers that are providing them. but it  
20 is- there is also significant opportunity, you know,  
21 as like I said, these have just been coming online  
22 gradually over the last couple of years, including  
23 some new ones that just came online I think this past  
24 year. We are working to build the foster care  
25 agencies' capacity to help them fully leverage these

1 services, and again, they're paid for by Medicaid, so  
2 it's in addition to the support that foster care  
3 agencies receive, you know, through their ACS  
4 contracts.  
5

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Fully reimbursed?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, okay. I know  
9 that Council Member Holden has a question, so I'll  
10 turn it over to Council Member Holden. And Council  
11 Member, I just want to say that your granddaughter is  
12 very well behaved compared to my son who is not in  
13 the house at the moment, but whenever he comes he's,  
14 you know, batting me in the face, tugging on my ear,  
15 pulling out my headphones, you know, running away  
16 with my iPad, so I was very impressed.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, she does  
18 all of that, too, so I just have to put a nursery  
19 rhyme on for her to keep her occupied. My daughter  
20 doesn't allow that many nursery rhymes to be played,  
21 but when I'm watching her I have to do. I have to do  
22 it. But anyway--

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing]  
24 Grandpa.  
25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair  
3 Levin, for this terrific hearing and very informative  
4 information, obviously on the testimony by Deputy  
5 Commissioner Farber. I thank you for that, and  
6 please give my regards to Commissioner Hansell. He's  
7 done a terrific job, all of you with the taskforce,  
8 by the way. It sounds amazing. I just want to-- I  
9 just have a question. Maybe I asked it at the last  
10 hearing, but when you're identifying family of  
11 children, do you include out of state, if they're out  
12 of state, that you might send the child there?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: We do.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [inaudible]

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: And thank  
16 you for asking that question, because it's all part  
17 of being creative, and sometimes it turns out that  
18 there's an aunt in, you know, Rhode Island who is  
19 interested and has been connected to the child, and  
20 so that's a really important part of the work that  
21 our Division of Child Protection staff do, as well as  
22 our foster care agencies to really do research and  
23 talking with the family and talking with children and  
24 talking with teachers and coaches, and you know, to  
25 identify all possibilities. And the other thing I

1 want to take advantage of since you provided an  
2 opening to mention, that we actually just negotiated  
3 and signed an agreement with New Jersey. It's called  
4 a Border Agreement, and the purpose of that agreement  
5 is essentially to make the clearance process a little  
6 less cumbersome, as you can imagine. It's called  
7 ICPC, Interstate Compact on the Placement of  
8 Children, and it's complicated, and so we've now  
9 signed a border agreement with New Jersey to expedite  
10 and facilitate kinship placements going both ways for  
11 New Jersey and New York City kids in foster care.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great. Just  
14 shifting to the mentoring and internships that you  
15 mentioned. Do you include city agencies and let's  
16 say community boards or even council offices for  
17 internships? Because I think it would be beneficial  
18 if the child stayed, you know, and I'm talking about  
19 a teenager probably here, 16 to 18 or so, could work  
20 in a community board office in their community, or--  
21 and get also some mentoring in the process. Do you  
22 consider that? I mean, I would love to mentor a  
23 child, certainly somebody in the community that would  
24 benefit.

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Well, thank  
3 you for that, and I think we'd love to take you up on  
4 that suggestions both, you know, for you and your  
5 office, but also just community boards in general.  
6 And if I can, I'd love to refer to my colleague,  
7 Assistant Commissioner Raymond Singleton, who has  
8 done unbelievable work, I mean, before the pandemic,  
9 but since the pandemic he's going eight million miles  
10 an hour providing internship opportunities for young  
11 people, and so I'd love for him to share a little bit  
12 about that, but I do think that the opportunities for  
13 placements, you know, at community boards and in your  
14 office and other offices would absolutely be on the  
15 table. I'd like to refer to Ray Singleton.

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER SINGLETON: Thank  
17 you, Deputy Commissioner Farber, and thank you  
18 Council Member Holden for asking that question. I  
19 think it's an incredible opportunity that you're  
20 giving us to partner up with you and offer a  
21 worksite. One thing I'd like to emphasize is that at  
22 ACS the Commissioner's internship program has been  
23 going on for several years, and the model that we use  
24 is to make sure that there's a one-to-one supervisory  
25 model so that when youth are enrolled they're both

1 getting coached and supervised at the same time so  
2 that they're developing a professional network with  
3 the supervisors that are offering them the virtual  
4 work. So through the summertime and through the fall  
5 we've been able to offer, both in the summer and in  
6 the fall, 100 internship sites that are a mix of both  
7 community-based organizations that provide  
8 internships where when the youth come on board they  
9 work with executive staff and program staff and the  
10 administrative office and the tech department and the  
11 finance office learning the particular work that gets  
12 done and those offices, but then also being able to  
13 make recommendations about how they can either do it  
14 better or what they've learned and they think the  
15 process works really, really well. So, we hope that  
16 at the end of the internship experience when youth  
17 walk out they're able to look at the career and the  
18 profession that they've worked in and look and see if  
19 this is what they want to do as a career pathway and  
20 they can understand what the skills are that they  
21 need to develop, and where they're at, and then, you  
22 know, draw a career map and career and education plan  
23 to close that gap so they could develop the skills  
24 and so on and become competitive in the labor market,  
25

1  
2 or to excel in their own business. So we welcome  
3 that opportunity. We've had a lot of opportunities to  
4 improve, our model and our process, and so if we can  
5 incorporate the City Council as a work site, we  
6 welcome them. We would love to do it.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, that'd be  
8 great. Thank you much for your work on this. Thank  
9 you all.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council  
11 Member Holden. We've also been joined by Council  
12 Member Rafael Salamanca, as well, and let's see. I  
13 think I just have one more question-- two more  
14 questions for the Administration here. Since  
15 September 2018, DOHMH has partnered with city and  
16 state stakeholders to implement a high-fidelity wrap-  
17 around demonstration project in the Bronx and  
18 Brooklyn for New York City children or youth with  
19 serious socio-emotional and behavioral concerns who  
20 are involved in multiple child service systems. So,  
21 child welfare, Juvenile Justice, behavioral health,  
22 special education. The taskforce recommended that  
23 the wrap-around demonstration project be expanded to  
24 include additional slots exclusively for youth with  
25 serious emotional disturbances in foster care. Do we

1  
2 know if that'-- is that underway or has that been  
3 done?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah, so  
5 thank you for that question. And so that pilot, which  
6 was the high-fidelity wrap-around pilot that DOHMH  
7 was running. They ran that pilot, and that pilot has  
8 since ended, and so I would have to defer to my  
9 colleagues there at DOHMH about plans moving forward.  
10 however, we have several other things that are  
11 happening in that zone, you know, right in that zone  
12 that are very important, and one of those is that ACS  
13 and DOHMH and OCFS and OMH have come together to  
14 create a new initiative called Canopy, which is a  
15 collaborative approach for providing enhanced  
16 services and improved outcomes for young people in  
17 foster care and crossing over into the juvenile  
18 justice system who have sort of the most complex  
19 trauma histories and challenges. We're talking about  
20 young people who have been in, you know, many  
21 different placements. They may have substance abuse  
22 challenges. They may have mental health challenges.  
23 They may have been arrested and involved in the  
24 juvenile and criminal justice systems, and this is a  
25 relatively small group of young people, but a group

1 of young people for whom it's really important that  
2 all of us, ACS, DOHMH, OCFS, OMH, and others, you  
3 know, are wrapping around these young people. And so  
4 we've formed what we call a "cross agency team" that  
5 is looking at these cases, looking at individual  
6 cases and coming together to--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Sorry.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Is that your  
10 house, Council Member? Bring them in, let's see  
11 them. Here they go. Are they coming?

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You want to come over  
13 and say hi? No, they're-- they're doing their own  
14 thing.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Okay. They  
16 don't want to hear about Canopy. So, the purpose of  
17 Canopy is really to make sure that we're fully  
18 leveraging the resources of the four agencies and  
19 bringing those resources to bear for young people who  
20 are really facing the toughest challenges. And so  
21 we're excited about this new approach. It's sort of  
22 a system of care approach, and really focused, you  
23 know, sort of wrapping resources around young people  
24 who are struggling. The other thing that I would  
25 mention that we've already discussed is sort of the,

1  
2 you know, increased focus on the CFTSS services,  
3 because that really presents significant opportunity  
4 to expand services both for young people who are in  
5 community-based settings who are in foster homes, as  
6 well as for young people who are, you know,  
7 temporarily in residential programs for treatment.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
9 Commissioner. Just so you know, because of some  
10 reorganization here at the Council-- I mentioned this  
11 to Stephanie the other day that the General Welfare  
12 Committee will now be overseeing the juvenile justice  
13 system within-- division within ACS, which is the  
14 first, you know, their first time, at least since  
15 I've been at the council, that that's the case. You  
16 know, before going over into the-- where it has been  
17 most recently with Council Member Lancman's committee  
18 was a Juvenile Justice Committee before that--

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: [interposing]  
20 Right.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I'm happy to sit  
22 down with ACS's staff in the coming weeks to start to  
23 go over what's happening there, but obviously,  
24 programs like Canopy and you know, making sure that  
25 we're getting wrap around services is very important.

1  
2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Great, and I  
3 know our colleagues will be very pleased to discuss  
4 all of that with you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. And then,  
6 okay, last question here. One on-- a housing task--  
7 the taskforce housing recommendation around expanding  
8 transitional housing for youth exiting foster care  
9 such as the Chelsea Foyer [sic] operated by Good  
10 Shepherd with combined housing and targeted services,  
11 obviously not a supportive housing, but a kind of  
12 different model. Is there-- are there any plans to  
13 expand transitional housing that would specifically  
14 target youth leaving foster care, and what's the--  
15 I'm not familiar with the kind of funding operating  
16 structure of that program. Do you know-- can you  
17 speak a little bit to that? I know Good Shepherd is  
18 testifying, so maybe they'll be able to do that as  
19 well.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yeah, and  
21 Good Shepherd is well-positioned to talk about that,  
22 and I think what they'll share is that those  
23 transitional housing programs tend to be a patchwork  
24 of funding, and it takes quite a bit of work to put  
25 together the different, you know, patchwork of

1 funding for that purpose. We're very interested in  
2 continuing to explore this with you and to continue  
3 to explore, you know, opportunities to develop  
4 additional housing programs like, you know, Jeremy  
5 Cahomben [sp?] has one at Children's Village in  
6 Harlem.  
7

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Right?

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Visited there, yeah.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: And so we  
12 think that there's, you know, that there's  
13 opportunity to think, you know, more about whether  
14 additional programs like that could be differentiated  
15 [sic], and we'd be pleased to have those discussions.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, I would be  
17 interested to pursue with HPD and speaking with  
18 Jeremy at Good Shepherd, kind of, how to maybe codify  
19 some kind of structural plans around that so that  
20 there can be, you know, can be a dedicated funding  
21 stream program, capital funds that can kind of have  
22 its own so that it's not having to be cobbled  
23 together ad-hock, but instead having some kind of,  
24 you know, clear guidelines on that front. So that'd  
25 be interesting to talk about.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Okay, well that's it for me. Do any of my colleagues have any other questions? Okay. Seeing none, I want to thank you all for being here. Just to reiterate, I am, you know, disappointed about the CITYFEPS referrals and I am, you know-- we're going to have to move forward with legislation around this issue and so we're hearing 148 today. You know, we may be expanding that to include, if possible, young people in the DYCD system. Frankly, if that's not possible to add this to the-- add that to this bill, we'll be working with our colleagues in the-- my colleague Debbie Rose in the Youth Committee to pursue legislation, several legislation, but we're going to be moving forward on these issues, and we want to make sure that young people-- no young person is being discharged. You know, with 23 kids a year, you know again, that's the tip of the iceberg, but you know, we should be able to do this. This is not outside of our ability to ensure that no young person is unstably housed leaving the system, and so that's real work to do, but we should be really focused on that in our remaining time here.

1                   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Thank you,  
2  
3 Council Member, we appreciate it.

4                   CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks Commissioner.  
5 Thank you everybody for your testimony and for  
6 answering the questions, and we look forward to  
7 continue to work further.

8                   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FARBER: Thank you  
9 everyone. Bye bye. Thank you, Council Member.

10                  CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thanks.  
11 I'll turn it back over to our Committee Counsel.

12                  COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again to the  
13 members of the Administration for your testimony.  
14 We're now going to turn to public testimony. I'll be  
15 calling on individuals one-by-one. Panelists are  
16 going to have three minutes to testify. We ask that  
17 you limit your testimony to three minutes, and as  
18 always, you can submit longer written testimony for  
19 the record. Council Members, if you have questions  
20 for a particular [inaudible] raise hand function on  
21 Zoom, and I'll call on you after that panelist has  
22 complied their testimony. For panelists, once your  
23 name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you  
24 and the Sergeant at Arms will give you the go-ahead  
25 to begin upon setting the timer. Please wait for the

1 Sergeant to announce that you may be before  
2 delivering your testimony as there is a slight delay  
3 with the unmuting function. So, the first-- our  
4 first public panel will be comprised of Chelsea  
5 Velez, Chawani Sing [sp?], Tamisha Simon, and Ericka  
6 Francois, and we are going to begin with Chelsea  
7 Valez, and again, Chelsea Velez will be followed by  
8 Chawani Sing [sp?]. Over to Chelsea Velez.

10 CHELSEA VELEZ: Hello. Thank you, Chair  
11 Levin and the General Welfare Committee for holding  
12 this hearing and providing us with the opportunity to  
13 testify. I am Chelsea Velez. I am Youth Advocate at  
14 Lawyers for Children. Lawyers for Children directly  
15 represents individual children in foster care. Youth  
16 advocates such as my position in Lawyers for Children  
17 are staff members who have lived experience in foster  
18 care and work with the attorneys and social workers  
19 in our Adolescent [inaudible] Transition Project to  
20 help older youth prepare to live on their own. I  
21 hope the City Council will read the full written  
22 testimony that LFC submitted today because it  
23 addresses both Intro. 148, the Foster Care Task  
24 Force, because I have not-- because I have limited  
25 time to speak, I am only going to testify to support

1 the Intro. 148. Intro. 148 will provide much needed  
2 housing options for youth transitioning out of foster  
3 care. Last year, approximately 620 young children  
4 left foster care between the ages of 18 to 21 to  
5 independent living, and we desperately need more  
6 options to help them obtain safe, stable, permanent  
7 housing. Many children leaving foster care can't  
8 afford market rate apartments and have only two  
9 options for permanent housing, which is NYCHA or  
10 supportive housing. The problem is that these spots  
11 are limited. The wait list are long and not all  
12 youth qualify for these apartments. I was one of  
13 those youth. When I was aging out of foster care I  
14 did not qualify for supportive housing, because at  
15 the time I had a child, and my foster care agency did  
16 not follow through and helping me apply for NYCHA.  
17 When my plan to live with a family member fell  
18 through, I had no choice but to enter into the  
19 shelter system. Entering the shelter system is  
20 disruptive and scary. A young person leaving foster  
21 care can be placed anywhere in the City, can be moved  
22 around far from their work, school, and away from  
23 their community supports. No young person should be  
24 forced to enter the system. But some youth in care  
25

1 know that there are city subsidy programs that are  
2 only available for people who are homeless, and some  
3 of our clients have entered the shelter system just  
4 so that they can obtain those subsidies. Sierra is a  
5 client of those typical [inaudible] people. By the  
6 time she turned 21 she had been waiting for NYCHA  
7 housing with the ACS priority for two years. She was  
8 pregnant, frustrated, scared, and without resources.  
9 She had heard from a friend that if she entered into  
10 the shelter system she would get housing much more  
11 quicker than waiting in foster care. So, that's what  
12 she did. Sierra entered the shelter care system in  
13 July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Less than two months later-- less  
14 than two months later with the help of a rent subsidy  
15 voucher only available to her because she was  
16 homeless, she was living in her own apartment. No  
17 one should have to enter the homelessness system to  
18 get housing, especially when it can and should be  
19 preventable. Youth in foster care who are waiting  
20 for their own housing, especially those who are over  
21 21 are just as vulnerable as homeless people who are  
22 in the shelter system. Youth who are 21, they have  
23 no-- youth who are over 21 are in the mercy of ACS.  
24 They have no right to placement and can be turned out  
25

1  
2 into the street at any time. Having suffered so much  
3 trauma and instability, youth in foster care deserve  
4 better. Intro. 148 will give them more housing, and  
5 most importantly avoid further trauma and instability  
6 of not knowing where they will live without having to  
7 enter the shelter system. Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Chelsea,  
9 and thank you for putting these issues so clearly in  
10 front of us, and you know, calling us to action and  
11 making it clear that there are things that we could  
12 do right now and today that make the system better. I  
13 really appreciate you taking the time to testify and  
14 your testimony.

15 CHELSEA VELEZ: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again,  
17 Chelsea. I'll now call on Chawani Sing, and Chawani  
18 will be followed by Tamisha Simon. Over to Chawani  
19 Sing.

20 UNIDENTIFIED: You may start now.

21 CHAWANI SING: Hello, Council Members.  
22 My name is Chawani Sing, and I've been in foster care  
23 for a little over a year and a half. Since I've been  
24 in foster care, I've lived in three different homes.  
25 The first one was a French family which was a

1  
2 temporary placement, and therefore, I only stayed  
3 there for a short period of time. The second one was  
4 [inaudible] and turned out bad after a while. I  
5 continuously felt uncomfortable and sometimes  
6 disrespected. I left there after eight months and  
7 went back to stay with my birth mom for a couple of  
8 months, and that was very much not a difference. I  
9 then moved in with my current foster mom and I've  
10 been there since. It doesn't feel like a hostile  
11 environment. I feel stable, at peace, and relaxed.  
12 I'm also able to share my feelings with her, both  
13 good and bad, and pardon me for saying this, but she  
14 feels more like roommate than a mother figure. She  
15 never oversteps her boundaries, nor does she overstep  
16 mine. She respects my faith and my privacy and I do  
17 the same for her. She respects me as I respect her.  
18 I am content with my placement, but I do still feel  
19 stigmatized due to being in foster care. Despite  
20 COVID-19 and the pandemic we face, I turned 18 and  
21 managed to successfully graduate high school in June  
22 2020 with an advanced diploma. I now attend online  
23 classes at Queensboro Community College where I major  
24 in psychology. I concluded that grit and  
25 determination helped me to overcome all of these

1  
2 adversities that I've had to face. Not to forget, I  
3 did have some help from the people at the Children's  
4 Village, and that's a big reason why I feel like  
5 foster care needs to be well-funded so that it can  
6 keep thriving and providing for youth like me with  
7 resources. We need to succeed. I take part in ILS  
8 workshops and they prepare me for adulthood. I have a  
9 Fair Futures Education Specialist who has helped me  
10 to be able to attend college with extra resources  
11 debt free. My agency [sic] of Fair Futures  
12 Employment Specialists has helped me to get my first  
13 job through the internship program, which I had  
14 became part of early March as an office assistant. I  
15 am now an IT assistant where I get an abundant amount  
16 of information and knowledge on technology. Last  
17 month, my caseworker had helped me to apply for NYCHA  
18 housing, but I'm unsure of my status. I also plan to  
19 apply for an apartment in our own Stevie [sic] Harlem  
20 residence. Having an apartment there is a great  
21 first step into an independent living [inaudible].  
22 Since May, I have been part of CBs [sic] Fast [sic]  
23 program which has been a big help in keeping the  
24 relationship between me and my foster parent healthy.  
25 As for now, we order take-out or delivery meals, but

1  
2 hopefully as the pandemic eases, we will be able to  
3 use the Family Bonding money [sic] to actually go out  
4 and do fun things. In my perspective, I am the  
5 living embodiment of what the value of foster care  
6 and the Children's Village stand for. They are there  
7 to help kids like me succeed and realize [inaudible]  
8 despite our unfortunate circumstances. My internship  
9 here has helped me to be around influential people--

10 UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Time's up.

11 CHAWANI SING: who help me boost my self-  
12 confidence. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No, you can go ahead  
14 and finish. No problem.

15 CHAWANI SING: Okay, yeah, I just got  
16 nervous. Sorry.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's okay.

18 CHAWANI SING: My internship here has  
19 helped me to be around influential people who help me  
20 to boost my self-confidence and self-esteem while  
21 helping me to realize my true capabilities. They  
22 have also taught me that I'm worthy of respect and  
23 that they respect me as well as value me. Thank you  
24 for giving me your time. This means the world,  
25 especially as a foster child.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Chawani,  
3 that's-- congratulations on all of these  
4 achievements, on attending college, on the  
5 internship. That sounds very exciting. I don't know  
6 anything about IT, so that's exciting. That's great  
7 that you're learning that, great skills to have. And  
8 also, just thank you for your testimony, because you  
9 kind of said all of what we were trying to get at in  
10 the last two hours of this hearing. You said it all  
11 in like two minutes, so thank you for that, and I  
12 really look forward to seeing your success, and I  
13 think that, you know, the sky is truly the limit for  
14 you. So, good luck with everything.

15 CHAWANI SING: Thank you, I appreciate  
16 it.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Chawani.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again,  
19 Chawani. I'm now going to call on Tamisha Simon  
20 followed by Erica Francois.

21 UNIDENTIFIED: Time starts now.

22 TAMISHA SIMON: Good afternoon. My name  
23 is Tamisha Simon and I am the Program Director of  
24 Special Services and Model Fidelity at Good Shepherd  
25 Services Foster Care Division. Thank you, Chair

1  
2 Levin and the Council Members of the Committee on  
3 General Welfare, for the opportunity to submit my  
4 testimony. My testimony will emphasize how Fair  
5 Futures corresponds with taskforce recommendations 5  
6 and 16. I have been employed with Good Shepherd  
7 Services for the past eight and a half years, and  
8 each of those years were spent in foster care. I have  
9 played an integral role with the implementation of  
10 the Fair Future model within program. Good Shepherd  
11 Services implemented the Fair Futures Model within  
12 our Family and Therapeutic Foster Care program and  
13 our Residential Foster Care Program. There are four  
14 coaches assigned to Family and Therapeutic and there  
15 are two coaches assigned to residential. Fair  
16 Futures allows providers like Good Shepherd Services  
17 to support more young people who are in care. Prior  
18 to Fair Futures and Family foster care we had two  
19 education specialists which were responsible for  
20 almost 300 young people, ranging from birth to 21  
21 years of age. The team of specialists and coaches we  
22 have now allow for more individualized attention to  
23 cater to the academic needs of children and youth in  
24 care. Fair Futures allows Good Shepherd to improve  
25 education, career development, permanency, and

1 housing outcomes for young people over time. Each of  
2 us have experienced uncertainty with COVID. In  
3 additional COVID has exacerbated conditions for youth  
4 in care. Children and youth in care are struggling  
5 with remote learning, and our staff are helping  
6 foster care and youth navigate academic issues,  
7 equipment needs, connectivity issues, trauma, poverty  
8 and the stresses and anxiety as a result of the  
9 pandemic. Fair Future coaches help youth create  
10 opportunities to recognize their potential and  
11 allowing youth to feel comfortable within their  
12 individual progression. As a member of the Fair  
13 Future Community in New York City, youth have an  
14 opportunity to share and celebrate their  
15 accomplishments and achievements with young people in  
16 care across the City. Fair Futures is a component of  
17 supports which are available and we look forward to  
18 continuing to work with the City to identify funding  
19 streams which can support young people once they have  
20 aged out of foster care at age 21. At the core of  
21 these supports are committed individuals, individuals  
22 who are employed by nonprofits by Good Shepherd  
23 Services. At Good Shepherds, we continue to advocate  
24 for a full restoration of the cuts which impacted the  
25

1 indirect cost rate initiative and the reinstatement  
2 of a cost of living increase for staff. Good  
3 Shepherd stands ready to support the Council in  
4 ensuring all residential staff receive fair  
5 compensation for the essential work they provide  
6 youth in care across the City, particularly during  
7 the pandemic. Thank you for the opportunity to  
8 submit our testimony. I am happy to answer any  
9 questions.  
10

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Tamisha.  
12 I wanted to ask about Chelsea Foyer. Do you know  
13 kind of how it's structured at all, or is that  
14 [inaudible] your area?

15 TAMISHA SIMON: That is not my area. Ms.  
16 Elizabeth Garcia is present and she will speak to  
17 that.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, wonderful,  
19 wonderful. Well, thank you for all the great work  
20 that you do at Good Shepherd, and working with the  
21 programs that the taskforce laid out, and helping all  
22 of these young people, you know, achieve their  
23 potential. It's-- we're very much reliant on the  
24 City on the good work of the agencies to actually do  
25

1  
2 the work every single day. So we greatly appreciate  
3 all that you do. Thank you.

4 TAMISHA SIMON: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again,  
6 Tamisha. I'll now call on Ericka Francois.

7 UNIDENTIFIED: Time starts now.

8 ERICKA FRANCOIS: hi everyone. Thank  
9 you, Levin, and the General Welfare Committee, for  
10 allowing me to testify on the behalf of Fair Futures.  
11 My name is Ericka Francois. I'm the Fair Futures  
12 Youth Board coordinator. I've been a Fair Futures  
13 advocated before it was solidified, and a foster care  
14 youth advocate overall. I've had a coach for about  
15 three years now and diversity tutoring services.  
16 Fair Futures has been an asset to not only my life  
17 but to many others. The resources provided were more  
18 than enough to give me the stability I needed in all  
19 areas of my life. The Youth Advisory Board is  
20 dedicated to advocating for New York City foster care  
21 youth and providing them with the necessary support  
22 that they deserve. Since the creation of the Board,  
23 we've been pretty successful. We've had our first  
24 meeting where we came up with our mission statement  
25 and what is expected of them. And our mission

1 statement is that we believe that all youth can  
2 learn, attain greater independence and shape their  
3 own futures. The Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board  
4 believes that each youth should lead with purpose and  
5 integrity, and the board wants to ensure that youth  
6 reach their full potential, exercising their right to  
7 advocate and to reach an audience on their behalf. We  
8 had a town hall with the Commissioner of ACS. We've  
9 had a town hall recap on IG live where we picked up a  
10 lot of youth feedback, because they were genuinely  
11 interested and engaged, discussed how they felt about  
12 their issues during pandemic. I followed up with many  
13 as possible [sic] via email to send out COVID relief  
14 resources, and then we had our virtual rally with  
15 Borough President Eric Adams. In the midst of all  
16 this we created advocacy videos. We spammed Speaker  
17 Corey Johnson on Instagram to get awareness about  
18 Fair Futures and why we need to fight for it to  
19 remain alive. We created our Facebook page and had  
20 our social media and political advocacy training, and  
21 then following into July we had another Instagram  
22 live which was supposed to introduce the board  
23 members, but turned into expressing ourselves and  
24 leading to a protest outside that following week  
25

1 because we only received 2.7 million. However, that  
2 protest did not happen. We went right into action.  
3 The ACS Commissioner wanted to meet with us, and we  
4 got the good news. That was the pinnacle for us as a  
5 board, and we realized how important our voices were  
6 and still are. For 12 million we went on a crowded  
7 video tour taking everyone, and with all the  
8 engagement we had another meeting with new members  
9 and another Instagram Live, and before we know it,  
10 we're having regular meetings with the Commissioner  
11 and his senior team again for his updates on the  
12 implementation of the progress of Fair Futures. We  
13 continue to have trainings, workshops, and creative  
14 social media content to express the necessity for a  
15 coach and all of the Fair Futures resources during a  
16 pandemic. The funding that we vigorously advocate  
17 for is to advance education, employment, affordable  
18 housing, or permanency outcomes, and preparation for  
19 all the schooling of all grades, graduation,  
20 vocational training, and gaining career development  
21 experience. Fair Futures has let other agencies to  
22 restructure their organizations, leadership and staff  
23 within three vital areas: Education, housing and  
24 employment. They're all grouped. Some of the City  
25

1 budget funding is baselined, which means there's an  
2 expectation, but not any certainty about what happens  
3 in the next year. However, we have proven that this  
4 program is producing the necessary impact--

5 UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Time is up.

6 ERICKA FRANCOIS: Ninety-eight percent of  
7 youth based on their [inaudible] pandemic and nearly  
8 90 percent of program participants have a high school  
9 diploma or equivalency by age 21, which is higher  
10 than that of a population who cannot access these  
11 supports. Imagine if these supports were continued.  
12 We would be able to reach every single foster care  
13 youth, and it'll be a game changer. Thank you for  
14 allowing me to testify.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Ericka.  
16 Thank you for your advocacy, and it's very impressive  
17 that the young people have adapted their advocacy  
18 strategy through COVID and being able to do a lot of  
19 it online and through Instagram Live and, you know,  
20 things that I'm not as savvy as you are about, but  
21 it's impressive, and it's certainly held our feet to  
22 the fire and ACS' feet to the fire. Thank you for  
23 doing it. Keep it up. It's going to be a bad-- it's  
24 going to be another bad year this year, so please, by  
25

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

all means, advocate, advocate, advocate. Rally, organize, do whatever you have to do to make sure your voice is heard. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again, Ericka.

I'm now going to call up our next panel, and the next panel will be in this order: Samantha Guyadine [sp?], Elizabeth Garcia, Erica Palmer, and Joyce McMillan [sp?], and we are going to begin with Samantha Guyadine followed by Elizabeth Garcia. Over to Samantha.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

SAMANTHA GUYADINE: Hi, everyone. I've

been working the capacity of a Fair Futures coach since September 2019. Prior I worked as a case manager from February 2018 to September 2019. Working with youth in foster care has been one of the most rewarding and heart-filling experiences of my life. Daily I utilize the coaching culture collaborating with many provides who assist our youth in numerous aspects of their lives. My youths are always appreciative of my support and guidance. Many are grateful for my weekly and holiday check-ins, as I do not have an abundance of consistent individuals in their lives. Being there to support them in their

1  
2 everyday struggles and on their road to success has  
3 been one of the highlights of my life. The  
4 relationship between youth and their coach versus a  
5 youth and their case planner is incredibly different.  
6 A coach main focus is the youth. They work with  
7 youth specifically, dedicated to support them with  
8 their career, education, house, and personal goals.  
9 On the other hand, case planners partner with  
10 families to create service plans for parents and  
11 children to address their needs. They monitor and  
12 document safety, well-being, and progress of case.  
13 Case planners also collaborate with service providers  
14 to monitor service, progress and needs, participate  
15 in family team conferences, and Family Court  
16 hearings. Due to their hectic daily responsibilities  
17 of case planners, youth do not get that individual  
18 attention that they need. This results in youth  
19 being overlooked and not cared for. I believe  
20 consistency is key. Being a youth in foster care,  
21 consistency is not something most are familiar with.  
22 If you ask a youth how many case planners they've  
23 had, the number will baffle you. Myself being a  
24 youth in foster care from the age of 16 years old to  
25 21 years old, I did not have consistent support.

1  
2 While I graduated from Hunter College and have  
3 accomplished a lot given where I started, I believe  
4 if I had a coach, I would have felt more secure in  
5 decisions I've made. I would have dared myself to do  
6 more. The pressure of feeling like no one has your  
7 back is horrendous. You do less. You're terrified  
8 to do more, terrified to fail. You end up not living  
9 up to your full potential. With consistent  
10 motivation and support that a coach provide, many  
11 youths will not only realize how resilient they are,  
12 but how much potential and power they have. Our  
13 youth having a coach, having that consistent support  
14 and guidance is essential. The Fair Futures program  
15 is essential. I stand by it 100 percent. Thank you  
16 for having me testify. I really appreciate it.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
18 Samantha, and thanks for the amazing work that you're  
19 doing and the real impact that you're making on young  
20 people's lives, and to hear, you know, from your  
21 perspective how Fair Futures is working is very  
22 important to us so that we know that it's-- you know,  
23 this isn't-- that this is tax dollars well spent, and  
24 it's an important program for us to prioritize in  
25 this coming up budget. Thank you very much.

1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much  
3 again, Samantha. Now I will call on Elizabeth Garcia  
4 followed by Erica Palmer. Over to Elizabeth.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Thank you. Good  
7 afternoon. My name is Elizabeth Garcia and I am a  
8 Division Director at Good Shepherd Services,  
9 supervising our supportive housing program, the  
10 Chelsea Foyer and McLaughlin East Harlem Residence.  
11 Thank you Chair Levin and the Council Members of the  
12 Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to  
13 submit testimony on Intro. 0148, a bill requiring  
14 that the Department of Homeless Services recognizes  
15 time spent in foster care as homelessness for the  
16 purposes of meeting rental voucher eligibility  
17 requirement. Good Shepherd Services is both a foster  
18 care and runaway and homeless youth provider. Our  
19 testimony today will focus on how recommended  
20 amendment to this legislation is an opportunity to  
21 disrupt the cycle of inequity, where for years these  
22 two populations have not been equally prioritized for  
23 the scarce housing resources in New York City. A  
24 recommended amendment will help meet the needs of all  
25 youth needing shelter and housing in our city. We

1 recognize that the statistics of youth aging out of  
2 foster care and becoming homeless are of great  
3 concern. At the Chelsea Foyer a transitional,  
4 independent living program for youth who are  
5 experiencing homelessness, 42 percent of our youth  
6 have foster care lived experience, and 100 percent  
7 are in need of stable, long-term housing. The  
8 Council can help address this concern by including  
9 both youth and foster care and runaway and homeless  
10 youth under the at-risk and vulnerable population for  
11 purposes of assessing the City's rental voucher  
12 program. As an example, the New York 1515 Agreement  
13 Housing Initiative did exactly this, by treating both  
14 populations as vulnerable and allowing 16 to 24-year-  
15 olds in foster care and HRY to access this resource  
16 based on a vulnerability index and not based on  
17 systems experience. As written, the following  
18 sections of the legislation are of concern. The  
19 legislation excludes runaway and homeless youth who  
20 are currently experiencing homelessness and who  
21 currently do not have access to the voucher. The  
22 Coalition for Homeless Youth has been advocating with  
23 the City to give RHY access to this program for  
24 years, but to date, RHY youth still do not have  
25

1 access. The legislation creates a precedent to  
2 continue to exclude RHY from other programs.  
3 Homeless designation for youth in foster care will be  
4 incongruent across other state and federal agencies,  
5 and specifically the US Department of Housing and  
6 Urban Development which does not recognize youth in  
7 foster care as homeless. The legislation will create  
8 an undue burden for the City to provide resources to  
9 youth in care over the runaway and homeless youth  
10 population and unfairly have the population compete  
11 for limited resources that will give youth in care  
12 priority over RHY.  
13

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Thank you so much for-

16 -

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] You can  
18 go ahead-- you can go ahead and finish your  
19 testimony.

20 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Thank you. Thank you  
21 very much, Council Member. For the record, in my  
22 written testimony, which I will not go through  
23 completely, I have included the housing options that  
24 are currently available to youth who are being  
25 discharged from foster care. The list includes HRA



1 counting youth's time in foster care as homelessness,  
2 the unintended consequence is as follows; if a young  
3 person has been in foster care since birth, they  
4 could accumulate 21 years of homelessness under this  
5 bill. Conversely, if a young person has maxed out  
6 their time in a RHY residential program because of  
7 set length of stay in these programs, they could only  
8 accumulate a total of 2.5 years of homelessness. As  
9 many of our current housing resources prioritize  
10 length of homelessness and chronic homelessness  
11 status in determining who gets the scarce housing  
12 resource available, young people actually  
13 experiencing homelessness will never be able to  
14 compete with the foster care whose time in care have  
15 been designated as homeless. As a provider of both  
16 foster care and runaway homeless youth services, Good  
17 Shepherd Services stands with the recommended  
18 amendment that will be set forth by the Coalition of  
19 Homeless Youth and are prepared to support the  
20 Council in amending this legislation to combat youth  
21 homelessness in New York City. Thank you again for  
22 the opportunity to testify. I can answer any  
23 questions you may have at this time.  
24

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
3 Elizabeth, and I look forward to looking at those  
4 recommendations and incorporating as many of them as  
5 possible into this legislation. And I agree with you  
6 that we don't want youth in care to competing against  
7 youth in RHY shelter. My position on that is that  
8 both youth in care and youth in RHY shelters should  
9 be prioritized, that frankly they should be getting  
10 access to a housing voucher, you know, regard-- you  
11 know, regardless of length of stay and that it should  
12 be essentially automatic. Frankly, to hear DSS say  
13 that they've essentially received no referrals from  
14 either agency-- I mean, they said they didn't come  
15 back with a DYCD, but basically they have not  
16 received a single-- they haven't gotten any referrals  
17 from ACS means that the current status quo is not  
18 working and young-- if, you know, frankly young  
19 people more than anyone else deserve the right to  
20 have, you know, priority, or certainly just as much  
21 as anyone else to have a priority for a place to call  
22 home. So I look forward to working with the  
23 Coalition and making that-- making this legislation,  
24 you know, a consensus legislation and passing it as  
25 quickly as possible. Can I just ask really quickly

1  
2 if you're able to speak to the Chelsea Foyer kind of  
3 structure of how you cobble that together, and  
4 whether it's replicatable [sic] for other agencies?

5 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Absolutely, Council  
6 Member Levin. Thank you so much for your support of  
7 RHY and foster care youth. I definitely think we can  
8 put together to create a very strong bill. The  
9 Chelsea Foyer is a transitional independent living  
10 program. It is a program where we house 40 young  
11 people, both young people who have aged out of the  
12 foster care and young people who are experiencing  
13 homelessness. Good Shepherd Services has been very  
14 creative in cobbling up different forms of funding to  
15 make this one cohesive program. We actually receive  
16 funding from both DYCD for runaway and homeless youth  
17 for 16 of the units in our program. We receive  
18 funding through DOHMH through the New York Three  
19 [sic] Agreement for 14 young people who have aged out  
20 of the foster care system, and then we have an  
21 additional 10 units--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Sorry,  
23 that's New York, New York Three Supportive Housing?  
24 Is that right?

25 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Yes, yeah.

1                   CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, okay.

2                   ELIZABETH GARCIA: New York, New York  
3 [inaudible] housing for youth aging out of foster  
4 care. And then--

5                   CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay.

6                   ELIZABETH GARCIA: at the City level we  
7 have that, and then at the State level we also  
8 receive money through NYCHA for New York State  
9 Supportive Housing Program, and at the Federal level  
10 we also get funding through HUD for homeless  
11 programming. So, altogether, we basically put  
12 together four very different funding streams to run  
13 one cohesive program, and the goal really is to help  
14 young people between the ages of 18 through 25 who  
15 are in need of housing, either because they're  
16 experiencing [sic] at-risk, and it doesn't really  
17 matter what system they're coming to us from. So,  
18 basically, we have young people coming from the RHY  
19 system. We have young people coming from the foster  
20 care system, and we have young people who are coming  
21 just from organization that have told us that these  
22 young people are either unstably housed or couch  
23 surfing or for whatever reason have not been able to  
24 get into a system, and we work cohesively with these  
25

1 young people to help them figure out a plan for  
2 longer term housing, because our program is only a  
3 three-year program as designated by the transitional  
4 living code of regulation. So, in two years we have  
5 to help a young person, regardless of how they came  
6 to us, figure out what their next step in independent  
7 living is, and what we find often time is that there  
8 are very few housing options for them long-term.  
9 Young people who have come to us from foster care  
10 have a little bit of an opportunity to get access  
11 [inaudible] supportive housing or NYCHA as I've  
12 already explained, but our young people who are not  
13 in that system, their resources are limited, a very,  
14 very limited, and this is where--

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Can I  
17 ask-- How long has it been in existence?

18 ELIZABETH GARCIA: The Chelsea Foyer has  
19 been in existence since 2004, so our 16<sup>th</sup> year.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And aside from  
21 Children's Village, do you know of any other programs  
22 that are, you know, doing a similar thing?

23 ELIZABETH GARCIA: So, most programs-- so  
24 most agencies for a long time have either done foster  
25 care or have done runaway and homeless youth. We

1  
2 were probably one of the first agencies that kind of  
3 took on both populations, and in the last several  
4 years more and more agencies have started to really  
5 service both populations. I don't know if there's  
6 any other singular program that houses both  
7 populations in one program. That--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] In a  
9 transitional mod-- in a transitional model, instead  
10 of as a shelter model, this is a more permanent, not  
11 fully permanent, but more permanent.

12 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Right. It's more  
13 longer term, really, yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. It would be  
15 interesting. I'd be interested to sit down with you  
16 guys and try to kind of map that out, see if that is  
17 something that maybe I can work with soon to be  
18 Congressman Ritchie Torres who is still on here to  
19 see if we can kind of codify that city and federal  
20 relationship on the program like this.

21 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Absolutely. We would  
22 be happy to visit with you and soon to be Congressman  
23 Torres to think of how we can creatively expand the  
24 work that we do through other agencies and really to  
25

1 work with agencies who really kind of see this  
2 population as one in the same and no longer divided.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah. Thank you,  
5 Elizabeth. Thank you so much for the testimony.

6 ELIZABETH GARCIA: Thank you so much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again,  
8 Elizabeth. I'm now going to call on Erica Palmer  
9 followed by Joyce McMillan. Over to Erica Palmer.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 ERICA PALMER: Good afternoon. Thank you  
12 for the opportunity to testify about the City's  
13 progress toward advancing the recommendations of the  
14 interagency foster care taskforce. My name is Erica  
15 Palmer. I'm a Supervising Attorney at Advocates for  
16 Children of New York, and I direct our foster care  
17 project. Back in March 2018, the taskforce made  
18 three recommendations focused on education for  
19 students in foster care. As Deputy Commissioner  
20 Farber testified, many of the needs and issues raised  
21 in two of those recommendations are being targeted by  
22 Fair Futures. I'd like to recognize and thank the  
23 Council and ACS for investment in Fair Futures, and  
24 urge the City to baseline funding to help ensure this  
25 program's long-term stability and success. The

1 taskforce's third education recommendation concerned  
2 improving service, coordination, and oversight at DOE  
3 to support students in foster care. The taskforce  
4 called for the DOE to establish infrastructure  
5 similar to its Office of Students in Temporary  
6 Housing to oversee and advise a team of borough-based  
7 foster care content experts. To date, as you noted  
8 Council Member Levin, the DOE still did not have a  
9 single staff member focus full time on students in  
10 foster care. As a result, the DOE has not  
11 implemented many necessary policies to assist these  
12 students, and schools, families, and child welfare  
13 professionals have no point person to contact with  
14 questions about students in care. The pandemic has  
15 further demonstrated the need for DOE's staff focus  
16 on the unique needs of this population, but staff  
17 could have coordinated with ACS and foster care  
18 agencies to more actively resolve barriers related to  
19 devices or Wi-Fi service for remote learning, enable  
20 parents and foster care agencies to access crucial  
21 education information available in online portals  
22 like New York City Schools account or develop  
23 sensible protocols for students in care regarding,  
24 for example, consenting to special education services  
25

1  
2 by a tele-therapy during remote learning, or opting  
3 into blended learning. While the taskforce's initial  
4 recommendations conceived of a team of DOE staff, we  
5 strongly believe there must be at least one senior  
6 staff member dedicated to students in foster care.  
7 This point person would have the expertise and  
8 capacity to work across city agencies in DOE  
9 divisions to develop and carry out policies, provide  
10 training, respond to questions, and execute plans to  
11 better support students in care. We'd like to work  
12 with the Council in the coming year to ensure that at  
13 a minimum the DOE designates one senior staff member  
14 to focus fulltime on this population that too often  
15 has been overlooked. Thank you. I'm happy to answer  
16 any questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
18 Erica. We'll look forward to working with you in  
19 the-- over the next year on making that happen. I'm  
20 here for one more year, so let's put that on the list  
21 of things we need to get done, because I think it's--  
22 you're right, it's very important and we could do  
23 that. We could have a whole division for students in  
24 temporary housing, we could have somebody focus-- in  
25 an agency that is-- has a, you know, 25 or 30 billion

1  
2 dollar budget, they can dedicate somebody to make  
3 sure that youth in care are getting the services and  
4 resources they need. Thank you.

5 ERICA PALMER: Absolutely, thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you again,  
7 Erica. I'll now turn it over to Joyce McMillan.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 JOYCE MCMILLAN: Good evening everyone,  
10 afternoon, Steve Levin and the rest of the Council  
11 and everyone who put this hearing together. My name  
12 is Joyce McMillan. I am a parent impacted by the  
13 family regulation system. I was appointed to the  
14 Foster Care Taskforce by Melissa Mark-Viverito, who  
15 was City Council Speaker at the time. While the  
16 taskforce was born of good intentions, it failed to  
17 articulate, in fact, make the structural changes  
18 necessary to remove the harms that family and  
19 children entangled in the family regulation system  
20 experience. Directed and facilitated by ACS, most of  
21 the work done by the taskforce was characterized by  
22 problem-solving that called for tweaks and small  
23 shifts to the system that requires seismic change and  
24 indeed scrapping in its entirety. ACS, the system  
25 that oppresses us, will never give us the key to set

1  
2 ourselves free. The audience today is listening to  
3 what ACS says. Parents and families experience what  
4 they do, which is why at the end of the last hearing,  
5 when one of the parents from the PAC committee  
6 testified at the end of her testimony, she said, "We  
7 must abolish ACS." This is a parent working with PAC  
8 on the inside who said this. In large part, the  
9 taskforce was comprised disproportionately of system  
10 folk, top brass at that. Top brass system folk are  
11 removed from the day-to-day struggles of workers who  
12 seek to support families with limited choices to do  
13 so. As systems are systemically and structurally  
14 racist and do not allow for anything other than  
15 dictatorship to families in certain communities,  
16 comprised mostly of people who live below the poverty  
17 line with little resources. It then boils down to  
18 communities being under surveillance and not  
19 supporting. While the goal of improving outcomes for  
20 children aging out of foster care is a noble one, the  
21 answer to the issue is simple. Instead of investing  
22 billions of dollars in building up ACS'  
23 infrastructure, utilize these funds to provide direct  
24 material resources needed to these youth: permanent  
25 housing, food, internet, tablets, computers, and

1  
2 stipends to provide the basic things people need on a  
3 day-to-day basis. In other words, the city must  
4 invest its time, money, and attention into shifting  
5 the conditions that enmesh families in the family  
6 regulation system: poverty, systemic and sustained  
7 divestment in black and Latin-x communities,  
8 neighborhoods, while white supremacy ableism and  
9 alike. We give foster agents who take children into  
10 their home a generous monthly stipend to provide for  
11 children--

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [inaudible]

13 JOYCE MCMILLAN: even though many never  
14 spent any of the money on that child. Yet, we  
15 provide no such support to parents desperately trying  
16 to keep their families intact. Indeed, the  
17 suggestion that we should provide the same type of  
18 financial assistance with parents is often viewed as  
19 preposterous. Based on the outcomes, there are no  
20 investments in the children placed in these out of  
21 home environments. How is this okay? Most families  
22 would never come under the surveillance of the family  
23 regulation system if they were given a stipend to  
24 assist with their needs. The system seems to show  
25 clear bias in who we support, how and why. This same

1 lack of trust that prevents making providing stipends  
2 to families seem preposterous or impossible also  
3 strongly influences and encourages partnerships  
4 between ACS and the community-based organizations.  
5

6 Lacking trust in community visions of support and the  
7 will to fund such visions has led us to rely on ACS  
8 partnerships, but partnerships with ACS necessarily  
9 limits our ability to imagine and create a world in  
10 which ACS does not exist and puts a hold on changes  
11 other than surface changes that appear to be a good  
12 idea, but has the devil hidden in the detail.

13 Example, parent advocates and agencies. Communities  
14 can and should be trusted to care for and support  
15 themselves, yet still communities have not been  
16 provided with the opportunity and financial support  
17 to do so. Commissioner Hansell said, ACS did a  
18 survey to ask the community if they wanted  
19 preventative services and the survey showed a  
20 positive support for preventive services. I would  
21 like to go a step further and ask how that question  
22 was asked or framed, specifically what options  
23 outside of ACS services, preventive services or  
24 otherwise, were provided to those being surveyed. I  
25 can assure you, if asked would you prefer an ACS

1 investigation or preventive worker, everyone would  
2 choose the latter, but if ACS asked would you prefer  
3 preventive services or community supports that have  
4 no relationship whatsoever to ACS, I strongly believe  
5 most if not all would choose community supports.  
6 Over the decades, ACS puts a lot of time in changing  
7 their image without stepping back and changing their  
8 practices. ACS may have changed policies, but their  
9 practices on the ground look much and yet the same.  
10 A change in practice is not far-track [sic] recently  
11 reintroduced as CARES. What CARES will do is subject  
12 families to interrogation ongoing and ACS  
13 intervention for months, force them into voluntary  
14 services they do not want, in many cases need, all  
15 with the threat of switching the case to the  
16 investigation track if they don't comply. So people  
17 will take the lesser of the two evils. They will  
18 choose CARES. There will be no data collected to  
19 show how many people are being stopped and frisked by  
20 the Child Welfare System, as they like to call it,  
21 even though there's no welfare for the children.  
22 There is another component of data-driven decision  
23 making that provide accountability that lacks  
24 accountability and is based on pre-existing  
25

1 contaminated prior interactions and outcomes. We  
2 must divest in ACS as well as other systems as their  
3 track records show they cause more harm than good.  
4 Advocates should be separate from the policing system  
5 like ACS, and the power dynamic will never allow them  
6 to authentically create better outcomes for families.  
7 I recently had a situation at an agency where the  
8 agency was very upset about my being present to  
9 support a parent at a visit. The parent asked me to  
10 attend the visit because she experienced many  
11 negative things during her visit that prevented her  
12 from bonding with her child. The agency pushed back  
13 very hard, but I prevailed, and they knew the  
14 nonsense was going to stop. How can we expect the  
15 parent advocate working for that same agency to  
16 address these types of issues when the agency they  
17 are working for is causing [inaudible] of the harm  
18 [sic]. Overall, I think the minuscule improvements  
19 reported are not what we would have achieved had this  
20 taskforce been comprised of those who have been  
21 impacted by the family regulation system and true  
22 community-based grassroots organizations, not those  
23 on the ACS payroll that are in no way aligned with or  
24 working in partnership without ACS. Thank you for  
25

1  
2 the opportunity to present today, and if you have any  
3 questions, I'd be more than happy to answer.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
5 Joyce, and thank you for all of the advocacy that you  
6 have done and continue to do, and calling attention  
7 to the issues that need to be addressed and need to  
8 be examined over and over and over again, and your  
9 commitment is second to none. So, I want to thank  
10 you for everything that you continue to do. I look  
11 forward to working with you. Thanks, Joyce.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're now going to  
13 call up our next panel. Our next panel will be in  
14 this order, John Sentigar, Sarah Kroon Chiles, Jimmy  
15 Meagher, and Jamel Robinson. We will begin with John  
16 Sentigar followed by Sarah Kroon Chiles. Over to  
17 John.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 JOHN SENTIGAR: Good afternoon. My name  
20 is John Sentigar, and I am the Director of  
21 Development and Communications at Covenant House New  
22 York. I would like to thank the Committee on General  
23 Welfare and Chairperson Stephen Levin for the  
24 opportunity to submit testimony regarding Intro. 148.  
25 Covenant House New York is the City's largest

1 nonprofit adolescent care agency serving youth  
2 experiencing homelessness ages 16 to 24. During this  
3 past year, CHNY served over 1,500 young people in our  
4 residential programs and through our drop-in center  
5 and street outreach efforts. On a nightly basis we  
6 provide shelter to approximately 200 young people,  
7 including pregnant women and mothers with children,  
8 LGBTQ youth and commercially sexually exploited youth  
9 and trafficking survivors. During COVID-19 our doors  
10 continued to remain open 24/7 and we continued to  
11 ensure that youth in our care remain safe and  
12 healthy. Over four years ago, Mayor de Blasio  
13 recommended that "eligibility criteria for the City's  
14 rental assistance program will be expanded to include  
15 youth living in RHY shelters at risk of entering DHS  
16 shelters." Since the Mayor made this statement in  
17 April of 2016, youth in RHY shelters still do not  
18 have access to any city rental assistance programs.  
19 Time and again, our dedicated and experienced  
20 aftercare housing managers struggle to find housing  
21 options for young people who are about to leave our  
22 transitional housing programs even when the client  
23 has met all of their individual program goals.  
24 Ultimately, youth who have successfully completed our  
25

1 program need access to affordable housing. A  
2 CITYFEPS voucher would be an essential tool to making  
3 that happen. However, since our clients are  
4 receiving services from RHY shelter instead of an HRA  
5 shelter, they're currently denied any opportunity to  
6 receive this voucher. It simply does not make sense  
7 that because a person is accessing services through a  
8 different agency, one that specializes and developed  
9 many other appropriate services for their age group,  
10 they should be denied a major pathway to housing  
11 stability. While youth in foster care remain an  
12 extremely vulnerable population, it is generally  
13 concerning that youth who are staying in our shelters  
14 are not given the same consideration. Advocates have  
15 been requesting that youth experiencing homelessness  
16 have access to these vouchers for over 10 years, and  
17 this has not come to fruition. The current bill  
18 presented today continues to exclude runaway and  
19 homeless youth populations. We're concerned this  
20 distinction will pin foster care youth and those in  
21 the RHY population against each other, competing for  
22 limited resources and giving youth in foster care  
23 priority over youth who are staying in shelter  
24 system. Ultimately, we believe this bill creates a  
25

1 precedent continues to exclude RHY from other  
2 programs. We believe that both foster care youth and  
3 youth experiencing homelessness should be included in  
4 the at-risk and vulnerable population list. This  
5 agreement would allow both youth in foster care and  
6 those designated as RHY who are between 16 and 24  
7 years old to access this vital resource without  
8 prioritizing one population over the other. We are  
9 aligned with the recommendations set forth earlier by  
10 Good Shepherd Services as well as the Coalition for  
11 Homeless Youth in amending Intro. 148. Mr. Levin, I  
12 want to thank you specifically, also for mentioning  
13 this earlier, and I hope you'll keep that under  
14 consideration.  
15

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 JOHN SENTIGAR: I thank you for the  
18 opportunity to testify today.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
20 John. So, I'm literally-- I'm writing a text right  
21 now to the Committee Counsel saying let's incorporate  
22 RHY, reconcile the bill with the CHY recs and pass it  
23 as quickly as possible. So, I've run out-- totally  
24 run out of patience on this issue, and you know, when  
25 they did the CITYFEPS rules a couple years ago, maybe

1  
2 a year and a half, two years ago, I think I said I'm  
3 giving you guys a year to make this work with  
4 referrals from DYCD and ACS and if that doesn't  
5 happen we're moving forward on the bill. So I gave  
6 them a year. I kept my word, and you know, I'm done  
7 with that and we have to move forward on the  
8 legislation. So I appreciate it. Look forward to  
9 seeing the recommendations and incorporating as many  
10 as we possibly can, and moving forward with the  
11 legislation as quickly as possible. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.  
13 Thank you, John. Now going to move on to Sara Kroon  
14 Chiles, followed by Jimmy Meager. Over to Sarah.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 SARAH KROON CHILES: Good afternoon. My  
17 name is Sarah Chiles. I'm the Executive Director of  
18 the Redlich Horwitz Foundation and we are under the  
19 public private partnership administered by the Foster  
20 Car Excellence Fund which has supported two taskforce  
21 priorities over the years, improving placements with  
22 kinship families through Home Away from Home, and  
23 expanding education and career services for youth in  
24 care through Fair Futures. I'd like to take this  
25 opportunity to thank my colleagues from the Conrad

1 and Hilton Foundation, the New York Community Trust,  
2 Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Tiger Foundation,  
3 Stabrose Narcos [sp?] Foundation, the Ira DeKamp  
4 [sp?] Foundation, and the Warner Fund for their  
5 commitment to supporting these child welfare  
6 initiatives over the years. I also want to express  
7 our gratitude to Chair Levin and Commissioner Hansell  
8 for their leadership and commitment to this important  
9 taskforce and follow on implementation. During the  
10 first ever New York City Foster Youth Shadow Day back  
11 in 2016, young people in and aged out of foster care  
12 called on the Council and this Administration to  
13 address the multitude of challenges facing children  
14 and families in child welfare. You and your  
15 colleagues answered that call. The result has been  
16 real change and improvements across the system,  
17 rather than a taskforce report collecting dust on a  
18 shelf, and the Foster Care Excellence Fund commends  
19 you for the hard work it took to get here, but there  
20 still is much work to be done. Our city still has  
21 close to 700 young people aging out of foster care  
22 each year without supportive adults and the critical  
23 supports they need to have a fair shot at success.  
24 These young people aging out are 98 percent people of  
25

1  
2 color, and 34 percent LGBTQIA+. Reducing the harm  
3 this system has done to them is clearly a racial and  
4 social justice imperative for the City. We urge you  
5 to fulfill the promise of taskforce recommendation  
6 number 16 that sets an objective to provide  
7 comprehensive services to these young people to  
8 achieve educational, career and housing goals. The  
9 City chose to remove these children from their  
10 families and never achieve permanency for them. It's  
11 our responsibility and duty to support them by  
12 expanding the proven Fair Futures model of coaching  
13 and other supports so that young people aging out of  
14 care between ages 21 and 26 can thrive. Thank you so  
15 much.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Sarah, and  
17 thank you for all that you've done in partnership  
18 with us at the Council and, you know, putting forward  
19 recommendations and legislative-- you know,  
20 collaborating on legislative ideas, and it's just  
21 been a great experience working with you and Redlich  
22 Horwitz. I just want to thank you for all this you've  
23 been doing.

24 SARAH KROON CHILES: Thank you so much.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks, Sarah.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thanks again, Sarah.

I'll now call on Jimmy Meagher, followed by Jamel Robinson. Over to Jimmy Meager.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

JIMMY MEAGHER: Hi. Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before the Committee on General Welfare today. My name is Jimmy Meagher. My pronouns are he/him/his, and I am Policy Director at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest nonprofit victim services organizations. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. We are increasingly using a lens of racial equity to guide our work with clients with each other and the developing of positions we hold. Safe Horizon has programs across New York City's five boroughs where we provide critical support and services to victims and survivors of all forms of violence and abuse. One program that is especially relevant to this conversation about housing justice for young people is our Street Work Project. Street Work works with homeless and street-involved young people up to age 25 to help them find safety and stability. Many

1  
2 homeless young people face a day-to-day struggle to  
3 survive, which can lead to physical and emotional  
4 harm. Homeless youth may have experienced family  
5 abuse, violence, rejection, and instability that's  
6 led to their homelessness. We welcome these young  
7 folks, help them navigate complex systems, and  
8 provide essential resources at our drop-in centers,  
9 at our overnight shelter and through our Street Work  
10 outreach teams. This work can be incredibly  
11 challenging, but also rewarding. Our work at Street  
12 Work did not pause during this pandemic, rather our  
13 dedicated team continued to respond to homeless and  
14 at-risk young people in need of shelter, services,  
15 and understanding. Safe Horizon Street Work Project  
16 has been doing this community-based work for decades.  
17 Young people experiencing homelessness need and  
18 deserve housing and economic justice. That is why we  
19 support the spirit of Intro. 148, while also  
20 challenging the City to go even further. It is a  
21 noble and common sense idea to count time in foster  
22 care as homelessness when determining such youth's  
23 eligibility for rental assistance programs. We  
24 support his and additional efforts to make permanent,  
25 safe, and affordable housing accessible to young

1 people experiencing homelessness and unstable  
2 housing. However, this particular bill will affect a  
3 relatively small percentage of Street Work's clients.  
4 Intro. 148 will have no effect on runaway and  
5 homeless youth, DYCD clients and young people in DYCD  
6 shelters who have had no contact with child welfare  
7 or with the foster care system. Our clients are not  
8 eligible for vouchers and time spent in homeless  
9 youth programs such as shelters does not count. We  
10 therefore encourage the City Council to build on this  
11 legislation, think bigger, and go further. We  
12 encourage the City to also count time in youth  
13 shelters as homeless time, and we ask that the City  
14 give homeless youth programs like Street Work and  
15 others the ability to distribute vouchers. Young  
16 people currently or formerly in foster care face many  
17 of the same obstacles as RHY, but there's actually  
18 small overlap between these two populations.  
19 Frequently, when we advocate for housing resources  
20 for RHY, the policy solutions we hear from our  
21 government leaders are resources only for former  
22 foster youth, which again is important, but not  
23 expansive enough. Most RHY are not eligible for  
24 those resources. Many of our clients have never had  
25

1 any prior contact with child welfare and subsequently  
2 the foster care system. Even among our clients who  
3 have had contact with the child welfare system,  
4 almost none of them are eligible for housing  
5 resources because of it. While people are advocating  
6 for increased value of vouchers, we're just asking  
7 for equal access.  
8

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

10 JIMMY MEAGHER: Thank you so much for the  
11 opportunity to testify today. Happy to take any  
12 questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Jimmy, you could-- if  
14 you had any further comments, you can finish your  
15 testimony.

16 JIMMY MEAGHER: we'll submit written  
17 testimony, but thank you so much.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And of course, thank  
19 you for all the great work that Safe Horizon does,  
20 and you know, as I said to John before we're-- we're  
21 eager to incorporate the youth in RHY shelters and  
22 make sure that this bill is not servicing one group  
23 of kids, young people, at the expense of the other.

24 JIMMY MEAGHER: Exactly. We eager whole  
25 heartedly with Elizabeth and with John. We don't

1 want anybody falling between the cracks. We just  
2 hate any time that people who are vulnerable,  
3 experiencing homelessness, are being pit against one  
4 another for--

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah.

7 JIMMY MEAGHER: scant [sic] resources.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Agreed, agreed. So,  
9 thank you. Thanks, Jimmy.

10 JIMMY MEAGHER: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Jimmy, and  
12 I apologize for not pronouncing your name correctly.  
13 I'll do better next time. Next up will be Jamel  
14 Robinson as the last panelist for this panel.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Jamel, before you  
16 begin, you know, I don't think I recognized you last  
17 time because your full beard makes you look so much  
18 older than you-- you know, before with the mustache.  
19 So, I didn't recognize you at the your last  
20 testimony, but nice to see you.

21 JAMEL ROBINSON: Always great to see you.  
22 Thank you so much Chair Levin. I want to take a  
23 moment of personal privilege if I could. I want to  
24 thank the Committee for this assembly. I want to take  
25 this opportunity, if I could. I want to-- I have a

1 little bias, okay? It's not racial bias, but it's  
2 bias, none the less. Erica Palmer is on this line.  
3 Erica was my staff attorney some years ago, some ten  
4 some odd years ago when I was in the foster care  
5 system, you know. Taking a moment of personal  
6 privilege. I cannot be more grateful to see her still  
7 engrafted in this work. Oh, God, I didn't even have  
8 a GED at that time. I was, you know, six months shy  
9 of my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday when I launched the Jamel  
10 Robinson Child Welfare Reform Initiative which was a  
11 list of several recommendations, Chair Levin, as you  
12 know, which identifying challenges that youth in  
13 foster care, and I took the GED twice at that time  
14 and failed. After a short stint of homelessness and  
15 Erica Palmer was there every step of the way. I  
16 cannot begin to tell you, Chair Levin, how  
17 instrumental she has been in my life both personally  
18 and professionally. Today, I can be honest to say  
19 that I didn't know years ago that I would be quite  
20 where I am, but it is that sort of mentorship, that  
21 love and that affinity that sees young people and the  
22 investments in them as potential. Today, I'm proud  
23 to say that I went back to college because of Erica  
24 in addition to other mentors like Jess and Jeremy,  
25

1  
2 and I went back to college-- I mean, I went back to  
3 acquire a GED. I got a Bachelor's in Community Human  
4 Services, went on and pursued a Master's in Nonprofit  
5 Leadership. I returned back to school and this  
6 coming semester I will complete with a Master of  
7 Science and Social and Public Policy, and a graduate  
8 certificate in Social Entrepreneurship, and I want to  
9 say, Erica, it is that type of mentorship, it is that  
10 type of courage, it is that type of conviction when  
11 it was not popular that helped me get to where I am,  
12 and I want to thank you. So, in the context of that,  
13 Chair Levin, when you talk about Fair Futures, when  
14 you talk about access to opportunity, when you talk  
15 about reconciling this chain of racial-- this racial  
16 bias that we see, racial disproportionality that we  
17 see in the child welfare system, when you talk about  
18 [inaudible], when you hear people talk about  
19 reparations, and it seems so far off. You say, well,  
20 how could we talk about reparations? How could we--  
21 how do we repay people for taking them away from the  
22 families? How could we-- what can I tell you-- can I  
23 tell you one area? Fair Futures. Before we ask  
24 individuals like Sarah to provide and develop  
25 foundations that provide assistance for youth in

1  
2 foster care, before we ask other foundations to come  
3 up and fit the bill, we have to make sure that ACS  
4 puts in their share first. They should be the first  
5 partakers. These are their children, and an  
6 extension of that work goes down to the foundations  
7 and the corporate sector. Chair Levin, we have to--  
8 I could appreciate Julie Farber's comments earlier,  
9 but I got to-- I got to push back. Chair Levin, I  
10 got to challenge you to see this a different way.  
11 Hear me. We talking about emotional wellness  
12 outcomes for youth in foster care. Chair Levin, hear  
13 me, hear me. This is over 30 some odd years, from  
14 policy report to policy report all across this  
15 country that says that we have been at epidemic  
16 proportions with regard to mental health and  
17 emotional wellbeing. One recommendation after  
18 recommendation, Chair Levin, that we have not  
19 revisited, and to say what have we not done? And  
20 Chair, I'm stopping here, but I got to tell you, and  
21 this is why I'm convicted, because I allowed, last  
22 hearing, I allowed them to get away and I should have  
23 said, Chair, for brevity let me stop referring to my  
24 notes, but I should have said to you Chair, "That no,  
25 no, no, no, no, no, no, no, this is long overdue."

1  
2 When we talk about racial-- [inaudible] Sir, can I  
3 tell you, mental health disparities is the number one  
4 across nationally. We have young people up to 80  
5 percent suffer from a significant mental health  
6 issue. It doesn't mean that they're crazy. It just  
7 means that they need additional support. It doesn't  
8 mean that they-- it doesn't mean that we-- and we  
9 don't need-- hear me-- I conclude here. We don't  
10 need the state to tell us that we're in a crisis,  
11 Chair Levin. We don't need to tell-- we don't need  
12 the state to give us the data to look at the numbers  
13 across the nation to realize that we're in peril.  
14 What we could do is we could take incremental steps,  
15 but we need to start now. There is no policies in  
16 regard to older youth transition with respect to  
17 emotional wellness outcomes. There is none. I  
18 submitted, and I-- I really conclude here. I  
19 submitted-- I requested from ACS a set of questions  
20 for a policy report that I will release in the coming  
21 weeks with regard to mental health and emotional  
22 wellbeing, and they responded back to me, and I can  
23 tell you with assuredly [sic] that there is no-- there  
24 is no policies with regard to older young people  
25 experiencing mental health challenges. I'm going to

1 ask you to do three things, Commissioner Chair. I'm  
2 going to-- Chair Levin. And this is not just  
3 particularly for here, for here and now. I'm asking  
4 you please, convene a hearing on the mental health  
5 and emotional wellbeing outcomes of youth in foster  
6 care. We could do it early. We could do it. We  
7 need to figure out where they are. We need to figure  
8 out how we could best support-- get support around  
9 them. That's one. I also want to ask that you also  
10 make it mandate that ACS go ahead and do an emotional  
11 wellness survey specifically to emotional wellness  
12 needs of youth in foster care. I know it's a part of  
13 the other survey, but it needs to be specific, and I  
14 think if-- and they should be-- report, have an  
15 annual report, policy report. They should submit  
16 with regard to [inaudible] and emotional wellness  
17 outcome for youth in foster care. I'm going to stop  
18 there, because I do realize that my time has been far  
19 expended and I have gone all over the place, but I  
20 will be remiss if I did not say to you, Chair Levin,  
21 we have to be very deliberate about this, because the  
22 new-- and the challenge that we're going to face  
23 after this pandemic is going to be around emotional  
24 wellness. Can I tell you, Chair? I, 10 years after

1 leaving foster care, 10 to 12 years after leaving  
2 foster care. I'm 32 now, I mean, 33 now. Let me  
3 tell you, you told me to go to school. I went to  
4 school. You told me to get housing. I got housing.  
5 You told me to do all this, and it still doesn't-- it  
6 still doesn't-- I still get sad. I still deal with  
7 depression. I still deal with anxiety and all the  
8 trauma that I have gone through, you know,  
9 experiencing homelessness and all those other  
10 experiences, they're still there, after you told me  
11 to do all of the things that you asked me to do. So  
12 I am asking you if not for nothing else, if not for  
13 nothing for nothing else-- you have done a great job,  
14 Chair Levin, and I'm really directing it toward you  
15 because you can move the needle on this. I'm asking  
16 you to think very, very strategically about where we  
17 go from here with regard to emotional wellbeing.  
18 When we talk about Fair Futures, I want you to be  
19 very deliberate about making sure that we understand  
20 it's mentorship like Erica Palmer that made that  
21 accessible when it was not popular. In the sense  
22 that there was no program, but it was that type of  
23 fidelity to the issues that matter to us most, and  
24

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

that is our wellbeing. Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to stop. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much, Jamel. I think Chair Levin--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yeah, thank you Jamel. Thank you for-- congratulations, first off, on you're working towards your Master's. That's very exciting, and thank you for your testimony. Thank you for centering this conversation in a way that it wasn't before, and so nice to be able to-- on my Zoom screen you're right next to Erica, and so that was very heartening to hear that. I didn't know that story, but it was nice to-- it was nice for you to express that for all of us to know. And again, it's nice to see you and thank you for your--

JAMEL ROBINSON: [interposing] But are you going to address my--

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yes, yes, yes, yes.

JAMEL ROBINSON: Okay. Okay. I want to be very clear.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I will.

1  
2 JAMEL ROBINSON: Because I think that  
3 that's happened before, we didn't get to kind of-- I  
4 really want to make sure that--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Yes.

6 JAMEL ROBINSON: Okay.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes, yes. And let's  
8 keep talking after the hearing.

9 JAMEL ROBINSON: Gotcha.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Jamel.  
11 Thank you.

12 JAMEL ROBINSON: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see I think Joyce  
14 wanted to add something as well. Is that correct,  
15 Joyce, you have your hand raised?

16 JOYCE MCMILLAN: I do. I just want to say  
17 thank you for your moving and compelling testimony,  
18 Mr. Robinson, and I would love to be in touch with  
19 you. And Mr. Levin, I just want to say, this is what  
20 I speak about when I say we sit here today listening  
21 to what ACS is telling us, but we have to hear from  
22 the people who have experience in this, because I'm  
23 sure Mr. Robinson didn't come into care with these  
24 many issues. I believe many of them happened in  
25 care, and he's nodding his head yes. And with that

1  
2 being said, we got to stop removing children under  
3 the guise of protecting them and causing these types  
4 of outcomes, receiving more monies at the foster care  
5 home because the child is deemed now to have a mental  
6 health issue that they caused. Then we sit here  
7 today and talk about all of the things that they're  
8 correcting without ever speaking about the fact that  
9 they caused it. Thank you, Mr. Robinson. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Joyce.

11 Okay, does anyone else wish to testify?

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Is anyone else does,  
13 if we'd inadvertently missed anyone who wishes to  
14 testify at this time, you can use the Zoom raise hand  
15 function, and we'll call on you at this time if we've  
16 missed you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, seeing none. I  
18 want to thank everybody for your testimony today. We  
19 all have a lot of work left to do, and you know,  
20 certainly you have my commitment that I will be here  
21 with you all until, you know, my last day as Chair to  
22 try to get as much done as possible. I want to thank  
23 again everybody for your amazing dedication. With  
24 that at 1:43 p.m., this hearing is adjourned.

25 [gavel]

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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 December 30, 2020