

Public Hearing of the
Commission on Government Efficiency

Moderated by Patrick Gaspard, Chair
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Brooklyn Law School
250 Joralemon Street, 7th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Reported by: Will Wallop

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A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

Emma Wolfe, Vice Chair, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Susan Kang, Secretary, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Marco Carrion, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Kapil Logani, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Ruth Messinger, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Dawn Pinnock, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Esther Rosario, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Marc Shaw, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Barika Williams, Commissioner, Commission on
Government Efficiency

Kathy Wylde, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Anna Oliviera, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency (by videoconference)

A P P E A R A N C E S (Cont'd)

Henry Garrido, Commissioner, Commission on Government
Efficiency

Jessica Ariel-Wamala, Owner, Future Fluent

Margaret Brown

Carl Hammersburg, SAS

Andrew Ryan, President, Citizens Budget Commission

Leah Bannon

Jessie Fields

Brian Chen, Policy Director, Data & Society

Robert Gordon, Vice President, Recoding America Fund

Louisa Chaffee, Director, New York City Independent
Budget Office

Julie Swoope

Julie Samuels, President and CEO, Tech:NYC (by
videoconference)

John Manning (by videoconference)

Spencer Williams, Director, Land Use and Topography,
Office of Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Ranuso

Jordan Shapiro, Associate Board Program Manager,
BetaNYC

Andrew Rasiej, Founder, Civic Hall @ Union Square

Robert Joyce, Director of Policy, Abundance New York

Julia Stoyanovich, Professor, New York University

Cherie Chung, Founder, Holly

1 A P P E A R A N C E S (Cont'd)

2 Hugh Francis, heymamdani.nyc

3 David Lee

4 Charlotte Munn-Wood

5 Stacey Vogue (by videoconference)

6 Robin Graham (by videoconference)

7 Rebecca Heywood

8 David Sheldon, Community Board 1, Manhattan

9 Yvonne Lee

10 Ralph Yozzo

11 Sergio Marrero, Founder, Rebel One

12 Lola Star

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Welcome to
3 this public hearing of the Commission on Government
4 Efficiency. My name is Patrick Gaspard, and I am
5 honored to chair this commission.

6 We're here today because New Yorkers
7 deserve and need a government of the possible -- one
8 that can urgently build infrastructure, promote small
9 business growth and development, and make the city
10 more livable for all, particularly those who need
11 access to affordable childcare, affordable housing,
12 affordable groceries, and all of the essential
13 services that this city provides.

14 The task that we're going to undertake
15 as a commission is a top to bottom review of the
16 entire New York City Charter to build a 21st century
17 government that New Yorkers need. Only if voters
18 agree with the recommendations that surface from this
19 commission and from your best ideas, only if they
20 agree to ballot referendums in November, can those
21 changes go into the Charter and into effect with full
22 force of the law.

23 I know that I speak for my fellow
24 commissioners when I say that we're committed to
25 hearing from a broad cross section of New Yorkers and

1 to pursue the best ideas we can find. This hearing is
2 one of many public hearings which will be held across
3 every borough to hear ideas from experts, community
4 leaders, public servants, and any member of the public
5 who wishes to testify.

6 Importantly, this is an independent
7 commission. In making our recommendations to city
8 voters, we are bound by our judgments and our shared
9 and collective values. We'll pursue ideas
10 irrespective of who proposed them and regardless of
11 who supports them.

12 Joining me in this task are 14
13 outstanding commissioners who care a great deal about
14 this city: vice chair Emma Wolfe; secretary Susan
15 Kang; Marco Carrion, Kapil Logani, Ruth Messinger,
16 Dawn Pinnock, Esther Rosario, Marc Shaw, Barika
17 Williams, Kathy Wylde. Joining us virtually this
18 evening is Anna Oliviera. Joining us in person, Henry
19 Garrido. And absent this evening are Theodore Moore
20 and Carlina Rivera.

21 Although, as I said, we'll be
22 considering the entire Charter, the commission is
23 looking in particular at the processes and procedures
24 built into the Charter that could be updated to
25 deliver a more efficient government that serves New

1 Yorkers with excellence.

2 Today we're focusing on modernizing
3 government and streamlining government technology.
4 New Yorkers need a 21st century government that can
5 truly keep pace with the needs and the technological
6 changes that are occurring. We must be thoughtful
7 about how we use that technology to deliver the best
8 services, which in turn increases trust in governance.

9 Our tech infrastructure can support or
10 impede our ability to provide equitable access to
11 government, and it's important that we harness that
12 potential for its good. Ultimately, we would be
13 hard-pressed to find a government that isn't impacted
14 by technology, and so we're really looking forward to
15 the inputs that we receive from all of you tonight.

16 All of that said, we welcome testimony
17 on all topics. But we're focused on this theme of
18 modernization and on government technology, and we
19 will generally front load speakers focused on that
20 theme while still working to ensure that we cover the
21 diversity of ideas and hear from as many New Yorkers
22 as possible.

23 I will tell you that my fellow
24 commissioners and I have really been having a blast
25 the last few days and not just because of the Knicks.

1 Two -- two days ago, we had the first commission
2 hearing in Manhattan. Last night it was followed by a
3 meeting in the Bronx.

4 Thus far, over 350 New Yorkers, not
5 counting all of you this evening, have joined us for
6 these hearings. 140 of them have submitted testimony
7 to that commission. We have all of you who are here
8 in person this evening, and we have many other fellow
9 New Yorkers that are joining us online.

10 I want to give you some sense of how we
11 want to organize the dialogue. For members of the
12 public, tonight we'll hear first from those of you who
13 are in this room. And then as -- as we can, we are
14 also going to cycle in those who are joining us
15 virtually.

16 We -- we will call to testify from two
17 attendees in the room at a time, followed by any
18 questions from the commission. I intend to call on
19 five pairings from the room, and then I'll turn to get
20 input from two online participants. And we'll
21 continue in that fashion until we reach 8 p.m.
22 tonight.

23 Should you be here still at eight, and
24 if you haven't had a chance to testify, but you'd like
25 to testify, you'll have the ability to submit your

1 testimony to the record. I -- I will ask all of you,
2 if you're in the room or online, to -- to heed the
3 clock. You have three minutes to make your
4 presentation. I will not allow you to go over that
5 three minutes.

6 I'm going to encourage all of you to do
7 the thing that our teachers taught us to do when we're
8 in school.

9 If somebody has already made a point or
10 already asked a question that -- that is part of your
11 testimony, I'll ask you to take the opportunity to
12 self-edit and to go through your testimony again,
13 decide whether you feel as if the point's already been
14 made and if you want to address other aspects that you
15 want to bring to the commission, or if you want to
16 expound on something that's already surfaced in the
17 room.

18 So it's going to be three minutes, and
19 we'll keep to that. If you wish to testify virtually,
20 please raise your hands in Zoom, and we'll call on you
21 in order. When your name is called, your name on Zoom
22 must be your full name, and you must have your camera
23 on. Otherwise, we will skip to the next person.

24 We'll do our best as to hear from
25 everyone if we can, but we will conclude at 8 p.m.

1 You can also, as I said, submit your -- your written
2 testimony on our website. With that, I'd like to get
3 to the testimony. And I would love to call on the
4 very first participants this evening, if you give me
5 one second.

6 Okay. So, again, I will call on five
7 pairs in the room. That's ten altogether to testify
8 two at a time. And then I'll move to those who are
9 online. Our first two participants are Margaret Brown
10 and Jessica Ariel.

11 Jessica, forgive me, but your name is
12 hyphenated, so I know that there's some part of your
13 name that's been --

14 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Wamala.

15 MR. GASPARD: -- eliminated on my
16 screen.

17 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Wamala. Wamala.

18 MR. GASPARD: Ah. Please join us,
19 Jessica.

20 MS. MESSINGER: Mr. Chair, before Jess
21 Wamala speaks, I just would like the panel -- the
22 audience to know that she is my granddaughter.

23 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you,
24 Commissioner. So I suppose this means that you'll not
25 have a chance to ask any questions of her, but

1 you're --

2 MS. MESSINGER: Not a word.

3 MR. GASPARD: -- you're beaming with --
4 you're beaming with a -- with a pride that's evident
5 to all.

6 MS. BROWN: Do we go, or what are we --
7 okay.

8 MR. GASPARD: You have the mic.

9 MS. BROWN: Okay. So -- and I have
10 three minutes?

11 MR. GASPARD: Yes.

12 MS. BROWN: Okay.

13 So one of my favorite professors in
14 grad school, Uwe Reinhardt, he said that efficiency's
15 not an end in itself; it's important to define our
16 goals and values first. So I would like to say that
17 the values that I'd like to espouse are transparency,
18 civic engagement, democratization of information, and
19 sustainability, and also economic opportunity for all
20 New Yorkers.

21 So I -- I should say I am a City
22 employee at a mayoral agency. And sometimes it seems
23 like AI is the elephant in the room, and we haven't
24 really embraced it as a -- a tool.

25 But City government I think has very

1 good reasons not to embrace AI without asking serious
2 questions first in our operations. There's major
3 issues with data security. Teaching these models for
4 free, do we want to do that? And if AI is used to
5 replace people in our workforce, that's a serious
6 problem.

7 But there's other possibilities I think
8 that AI offers beyond just replacing human labor. And
9 there's some really exciting things that are going on,
10 like in the City of Boston, that I think will be
11 really worthwhile to look into. I see nods. That's
12 great.

13 So they've developed -- it's called a
14 model context protocol, or an MCP server. So it's
15 basically a software layer that allows an AI model to
16 securely interact with data sources. And they're
17 using the City's open data first, because it's public
18 anyway, just to -- as a, like, beta testing kind of
19 sandbox way to start out with it.

20 So there are problems with when people
21 try to access City data. There's mistakes and
22 hallucinations that the AI does. And it's really
23 important that we -- people get accurate information.

24 So in addition to this MCP server,
25 there's also open source agents that -- that the City

1 of Boston has made available that can basically be
2 used by -- by residents to ask questions in plain
3 language of the City's open data. And they get
4 formatted tables and results that they don't have to
5 have major software skills to -- to be able to
6 understand and have access to this information.

7 And I think this is exciting. It opens
8 the door to much broader access to open data, and it
9 helps us attain a new level of civic engagement and
10 participation hopefully. So I had other things to
11 say, but I'm going to stop with that.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much,
13 Jordan, both for modeling --

14 MS. BROWN: Margaret.

15 MR. GASPARD: -- and, you know,
16 testing --

17 MS. BROWN: Uh-huh.

18 MR. GASPARD: -- oh, did I --

19 MS. BROWN: Margaret. Margaret. Yeah.

20 MR. GASPARD: I'm sorry. Apologies.

21 MS. BROWN: No problem.

22 MR. GASPARD: But thank you --

23 MS. BROWN: No problem.

24 MR. GASPARD: -- for -- for modeling
25 that behavior. And thank you for giving us specific

1 examples for a city that we can now go and conduct
2 some research on.

3 Please --

4 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Thank you.

5 Good evening, Commission on Government
6 Efficiency and to the people of New York City. My
7 name is Jessica Ariel-Wamala. And while I myself have
8 roots from outside the city, New York is where my wife
9 and I call home. Her mother called home, and her
10 mother's mother still calls home. I gave birth to a
11 daughter whose birth certificate reads, "Location of
12 birth, northbound on 10th Avenue between 39th and
13 40th."

14 And so as a proud homeowner in Crown
15 Heights, and a small business owner here in the city
16 called the Future Fluent, and a systems architect who
17 actually spent the last six years from 2020 to 2026
18 building this very infrastructure that proves
19 government can indeed work as hard and with as much
20 love as the people it serves.

21 I have a very long explanation -- and I
22 already handed it to your staff. So I'm trying to
23 take the summary points, but you do have the full
24 explanation already with your staff.

25 Every morning I drive my daughter to

1 3K, and I look out the window at the corner of
2 Atlantic and Vanderbilt, and I see the visceral
3 reality to New York's administrative friction.
4 There's a line there every single morning of about a
5 hundred of my neighbors wrapped around the corner
6 clutching weather-worn paper files because it's the
7 only proof of their existence to the state.

8 And they're waiting for the HRA office
9 to open. But as they wait, there becomes a long line.
10 And so I end up sitting in traffic. And so the
11 sitting in traffic becomes a monument to this
12 inefficiency every single day.

13 And these tiny -- the tiny things that
14 ensure people get into that line are like my neighbor
15 Tasha, where she has to take a lunch rush at 2 p.m.,
16 which is the same time as her SNAP appointment. So
17 she now has to miss her SNAP interview and gets a cold
18 mail that you all spend as a city to tell her she no
19 longer has SNAP EBT for that month.

20 That cascades a tiny little
21 administrative friction -- because she wanted to work
22 and pick up an extra shift, cascades into a month-long
23 of physical hunger, watering down her own baby
24 formula, and skipping dinner.

25 And so when I say that line is not an

1 accident, I mean it's a physical monument to when we
2 believe government has scarce resources. Hundreds
3 of -- sorry. Last year I went on Open Source.
4 Hundreds of thousands of these cases, 300,000 to be
5 exact, pinball between closed and reopened for HRA due
6 to preventable codes called "error work" or "missed
7 phone calls." And those folks did not have their
8 eligibility change. They're still eligible for SNAP.

9 So I think that experience just
10 shows -- shines a really specific light on what it
11 looks like when we don't embrace a lot of the -- the
12 new technology.

13 My dear friend here did a lot of that
14 explanation, so I'm going to skip over all the fun --
15 fun bits. But I think what's important is we have to
16 listen to folks like Ezra Klein, our hometown
17 favorite.

18 We must stop defining AI solely by the
19 risks and fear. And we need to start defining AI, but
20 what we hope these technologies can achieve for public
21 good. And I can demystify the machine.

22 When I worked for Promise, this
23 organization, I applied basic principles of design --
24 be a coach, tell someone if their date is -- is not
25 due, if it's out of -- out of bounds. If it needs to

1 be within 30 days, tell them before they submit it.
2 Things like that.

3 This approach is battle-tested. We
4 were able to distribute energy credits here in New
5 York. This whole room should go to nyeeap.com to get
6 your energy credit off of your Con-Ed or National Grid
7 bill. And you'll see that AI in action.

8 In Detroit we worked with water bill
9 assistance. And in Baltimore we've done property tax
10 payment plans. And in Mississippi we run the entire
11 SNAP program. So I just do believe we can think more
12 positively and more hopeful about what's possible when
13 you use technology.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank you both for that
15 testimony.

16 Jessica, I'm going to -- I'm going to
17 jump in and say I know that you've already submitted
18 comprehensive testimony which demonstrates that you
19 have the same rigorous commitment to details as your
20 grandmother.

21 I'm going to ask you if you might want
22 to list out any specific examples of areas in the work
23 that has led to transformation in -- in the lives of
24 average folk and -- and some real savings for
25 municipalities.

1 You just mentioned the work you're
2 doing in Mississippi. I just came back from spending
3 some time in Mississippi. And it's been interesting
4 to see how, despite their reputation, there are many
5 ways that they were leapfrogging as a consequence of
6 how they're using the technology. So I wonder if you
7 might share any of that.

8 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Absolutely. I'll
9 give two examples really quickly.

10 In the state of Mississippi, where the
11 SNAP infrastructure takes a proactive approach, folks
12 need to remain compliant. 57 percent of the people we
13 texted last month did not even know what they had to
14 do to remain compliant. So that means when they're
15 re-upped for their benefits, they have already been
16 out of compliance for four months. So they get
17 sanctioned.

18 So the technology is a proactive text
19 message that says, "Hey, you fall in this status in
20 the code. Based on that status, you need to show this
21 type of proof, and you need to do it every month."
22 Maybe it's 80 hours working. Maybe it's a proof
23 around you -- you claimed to be on some sort of a
24 student program, so you have to show now proof of
25 student.

1 And AI can read those forms. It can
2 say, "Hey, it actually looks like you fat-fingered.
3 That's a picture of a cat. I'm so -- so sorry. You
4 don't want to submit that." Or, "Oh, my gosh, we
5 actually need John Smith. We don't need Jill Smith.
6 You -- you accidentally uploaded your wife's W-2. We
7 actually need the homeowner -- the person whose name
8 is on the utility bill."

9 That level of precision, that level of
10 document completeness is what really good AI looks
11 like. And it's something that takes all of that off
12 of the resident. The resident doesn't have to fumble
13 through off a policy. The system can be smart enough.

14 And it can be adjudicated in a way that
15 says, "That is a simple yes, no," "That is math," or
16 "No, that needs to go to a caseworker." And so
17 the -- the other statistic in Mississippi is 75
18 percent of cases got processed faster because people
19 submitted their documents better right away.

20 So caseworkers took three days to do an
21 average case in SNAP rather than 12 days. So imagine
22 the amount of savings for that department.

23 MR. GASPARD: Fantastic examples.

24 Questions for both of our witnesses
25 from commissioners?

1 Henry, I see your hand up.

2 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you.

3 Thank you for your testimony.

4 Obviously, some of the cases that you mentioned in
5 Mississippi don't compare in volume and -- and scale
6 to something like New York, where we're processing
7 almost 20 times the amount of people in SNAP.

8 So part of the problem we have is we
9 have to contend with things that are under the control
10 of the City Charter. Some of the stuff that you're
11 mentioning are federal and state regulations on SNAP.

12 But I'm wondering about something you
13 said -- I think your name was Margaret?

14 MS. BROWN: Yes. Yeah, it's Margaret.
15 Yeah. Yeah.

16 MR. GARRIDO: Yes. I'm sorry. About
17 the city of Boston utilizing a methodology to make
18 sure that AI doesn't sort of control or takes over the
19 data.

20 MS. BROWN: Yeah.

21 MR. GARRIDO: And that's kind of the
22 big challenge. And I think it's a question for the
23 two of you. Understanding that AI could be used as a
24 tool, what are sort of the boundaries that you think
25 ought to be done in an area that is completely

1 unregulated to some extent and is scary to many people
2 because of the taking of personal information?

3 Where is the -- like, the line? Where
4 is that discernible line in your view?

5 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: I have a very
6 discernible line. I -- I fundamentally believe humans
7 are not great at repetitive arithmetic, and machines
8 are excellent at arithmetic. Generally, AI is
9 horrible at strategic decision making. And that
10 should be left to the caseworkers who are
11 compassionate and have been trained to do this and are
12 skilled at this.

13 And so it's a matter of being able to
14 be specific. An if/else statement is a beautiful
15 thing. In traditional machine learning, the models
16 are tuned to say all errors are symmetric. And I
17 think the most important thing is to really understand
18 machine learning. An area under the precision-recall
19 curve weights all errors, false positives or false
20 negatives, equally.

21 But if the system makes a false
22 negative mistake, which means you wrongly reject
23 something because the software wasn't recognizing it,
24 it could always go to a secondary queue, right, if --
25 if you say, "Hey, like, the secondary queue could be a

1 human." But if you say, "Hey, actually, AI thinks
2 this is a bad document. I'm rejecting you," that --
3 that person will literally not get SNAP.

4 So in my mind the type of -- the type
5 of bureaucracy I want -- the type of inefficiency I
6 want is those amazing caseworkers that have been there
7 for 14 years and have seen every case under the sun,
8 we don't need to train our AI on that.

9 We need to actually say if AI can
10 confidently say "Yes," because AI can say, "I've
11 collected all the documents I need. I triaged. I
12 know exactly what I need from this family. I have the
13 head of household. I have the number of households.
14 I have all of their identity documents. I have all
15 their utility documents. Now I need to do basic
16 math." That is not tech -- that's not generative AI.

17 That is COBOL. We still have that.
18 That is the main frame. That is still the same thing.
19 So it's a matter of using the right technology for the
20 right problem. We don't need a Ferrari for some of
21 this stuff. We really don't.

22 MS. PINNOCK: I have a question.

23 MS. BROWN: Okay. So is that --

24 MR. GASPARD: After --

25 MS. BROWN: -- should I go?

1 MR. GASPARD: Yes, please. Please.

2 MS. BROWN: Thanks.

3 So the -- the model context protocol
4 that's called MCP, that Boston developed, that's --
5 that keeps -- that basically keeps AI from
6 misinforming people. And it also allows -- like, AI
7 is kind of a month -- it takes, like, a month for them
8 to get a lot of information.

9 And so another thing that it does is it
10 allows people to use live data. And it's -- it's,
11 like, a intermediary kind of tool that's plugged in to
12 their open data, their city open data, and makes it
13 easier for -- first of all, makes the data live, makes
14 it more accurate.

15 And then they have additional open
16 source, which they're trying to encourage other cities
17 to use, agents that make it easier. So people don't
18 have to know how to, like, download data sets into
19 Excel, open them, and analyze them. They don't need
20 data analysts. Anybody who is -- has civic concerns,
21 and is concerned about issues, and wants to know
22 information can -- can use this information.

23 But I would say with -- there's a --
24 I -- I would encourage New York -- I think that New
25 York is capable of a lot of things that entire

1 countries would like to be capable of. And I often
2 think that we just don't think big enough in this
3 country anymore. Like, we don't have, like, a
4 moonshot.

5 And one thing -- I heard a council
6 member, July Juan, talking about this recently, that
7 it's -- it's not out of the question for New York to
8 have its own AI. Like, it's -- we don't use corporate
9 AI. We're not using these data centers that are so
10 harmful to the environment. And we -- we don't teach
11 their models. We have our own thing.

12 Like, I think that's -- that is --
13 like, I would love to see that. There needs to be --
14 I mean, I'm talking big here -- big dreams. But,
15 like, if -- if everybody in the city had access to
16 cheap or free high-speed internet, if everybody --
17 all -- all the kids who go into New York City public
18 schools had access to low-cost devices that they could
19 learn on, and we have workforce development.

20 And, you know, we have already City
21 agencies that -- well, within DCAS we have energy
22 management. And they're creating these sustainable
23 energy solutions everywhere. And -- and I just see
24 the potential for, like, really a non-dystopian
25 version of the AI future.

1 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

2 MS. BROWN: We're harnessing it, you
3 know, for our needs.

4 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

5 I want to move to -- to Dawn and Kapil.

6 MS. BROWN: Okay.

7 MS. PINNOCK: I have very quick
8 questions for you, Jessica. So with the savings that
9 you quoted -- I know you talked about 75,000 for the
10 Mississippi SNAP program. Was a portion of those
11 savings attributed to displacement of staff? Or are
12 you suggesting that, "Okay, 75 percent quicker -- you
13 know, the completion rate was higher. But it allowed
14 us to better utilize the talents of staff so that we
15 are having them do what they were hired to do"?

16 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Exactly.

17 MS. PINNOCK: Okay.

18 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Job satisfaction
19 went up. And, in fact, Mississippi reported two hours
20 were saved per caseworker per week, which meant those
21 two hours went to do the things that they could
22 actually do.

23 I was in Mississippi many times during
24 these projects. And one of these caseworkers told me
25 that she had two stamps left. So she had to

1 adjudicate in the room. So a room full of people that
2 were on her caseload, she had to decide who was going
3 to get mailed their notification.

4 So it's -- that's the type of thing
5 that if you lower kind of all of the things that she
6 shouldn't be doing, then she can actually spend time
7 now on the things that are harder. And I -- I will
8 say to -- to what -- what all of the things she said,
9 those are battle-tested ideas. Those aren't crazy,
10 "they're out there" ideas. Those are things that
11 already exist.

12 This state right now has used -- over
13 25,000 people have received benefits, a discount off
14 of their energy bill, through the New York Enhanced
15 Energy Assistance program. The public commission in
16 July, they -- they made a regulation that said the
17 utilities of New York, the state of New York, need to
18 come together to make it easier to be -- just to
19 survive the rising increase of bills.

20 And they hired Promise. They went --
21 Promise went through an RFP process. And my
22 company -- and I don't work for them anymore -- they
23 won. But they won because we were able to stand up
24 the program in 30 days. We -- we -- from -- the
25 contract was signed in October. It went live in

1 January.

2 And already I think Staten Island
3 has -- Staten Island and, like, central Brooklyn has
4 received the most, which just shows you they're the
5 people who are kind of that missed middle. They're a
6 dollar above in income over regular EAP, which is --
7 means low income. If you're on SNAP you -- you do
8 qualify automatically for EAP.

9 But this group right above, if you make
10 one dollar, but the cost of living is still Staten
11 Island -- it's still here in New York City. It's
12 still expensive. And so 60 percent of the people in
13 that first month qualified and within five business
14 days. Which means within five business days you got
15 all your information in, and all of it was
16 adjudicated. The caseworkers were able to go through
17 all of the information.

18 So that's why I encourage everyone in
19 here, if you're eligible, you'll find out right
20 away -- nyeeap.com.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

22 I want to get Kapil.

23 MR. LOGANI: Just really quick.

24 Equity is a theme -- equity is a theme
25 that runs through the Charter. And I'm curious on

1 this -- on this MCP that you've been talking about,
2 how does it deal with AI bias?

3 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: That's a great
4 question. I -- the way I think about navigating AI
5 bias is really going to be thinking about where is the
6 program policy -- like, what is the policy, and what
7 are the jurisdiction's rules. And then making sure
8 AI -- you're training it on metrics that are going to
9 optimize for outcomes, that allow for easy outcomes to
10 be "yes" -- middle -- middle outcomes to be human.

11 So it's, like, we want to be
12 transparent -- all the ones that are going to only AI
13 or if AI is the adjudicator, if it's not going through
14 a human as a human QA, and are you ensuring that the
15 system underneath that's learning. 'Cause generative
16 AI is a model that gets stronger and stronger. Are
17 you ensuring that you built qualitative systems that
18 actually improve that?

19 And in theory your AI should actually
20 get to be able to take over more complex cases that it
21 didn't -- couldn't handle before. Because you had
22 humans do it over and over again, and then humans were
23 like, "Actually, no, this becomes more black and
24 white." The AI can take the black and white cases.

25 And I think we have to really highlight

1 that there's a "yes," and then there's the "need more
2 documents" category. A lot of these -- these things
3 we're talking about -- a lot of these things we're
4 talking about are the human who's interacting with the
5 other human, the caseworker, just needs more
6 information before they can make a decision. So it's
7 that waiting time that we're saving.

8 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

9 Margaret, Jessica --

10 MS. BROWN: Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: -- thank you so much for
12 your testimony.

13 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Thank you.

14 MR. GASPARD: There's obviously a lot
15 of interest in this, and I know that you both
16 submitted additional information for us to consume.
17 So thank you both.

18 MS. ARIEL-WAMALA: Thank you so much,
19 commissioner.

20 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

21 MS. BROWN: If I -- I haven't submitted
22 additional information yet, would I have an
23 opportunity to do so?

24 MR. GASPARD: Absolutely.

25 MS. BROWN: Okay.

1 MR. GASPARD: Staff who are here can
2 direct you.

3 MS. BROWN: Okay. Thank you so much.

4 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

5 MS. BROWN: Thanks so much for -- for
6 allowing us to testify today. It's a wonderful
7 hearing.

8 MR. GASPARD: Thank you for caring
9 enough about your fellow New Yorkers to take this
10 time.

11 Carl Hamesberg and Andrew Ryan are our
12 next -- we invite you up to -- to testify.

13 MR. RYAN: How you doing? Want to go
14 first?

15 MR. HAMMERSBURG: Yeah. Sure. I'm in
16 the chair on the right.

17 MR. RYAN: All right. Or from their
18 perspective on the left.

19 MR. HAMMERSBURG: Okay. Thank you.
20 Well said.

21 Chair Gaspard and members of the
22 commission, I'm Carl Hammersburg with SAS. We're an
23 existing trusted partner of the City. The topic of
24 modernizing government and streamlining government
25 technology is a crucial one for all citizens of New

1 York, which we very much heard from the first round of
2 testimony and questions.

3 Within that broader topic, utilizing
4 data to proactively address citizen needs, gaps, and
5 risks should be considered. Even as systems are
6 modernized over time, breaking down the silos today
7 can reap immediate impact when undertaken with
8 thoughtfulness.

9 Proper oversight and governance, one of
10 the key topics that already came up, must be part of
11 the foundation of this approach. But government is
12 more effective when it does share within itself and
13 keeps the goal of improving citizen outcomes in mind.

14 Coming back to the previous points
15 around, like, starting with open data, starting with
16 lower risk data, and then getting to those greater
17 outcomes so that you're ensuring the right
18 methodology, one opportunity to follow this path in a
19 manner that's lower risk due to the data involved is
20 to look at procurement. And that was a topic that
21 came up at the end of your initial meeting back on
22 June 4th.

23 And I know that ultimately you're
24 looking at the Charter. You're going to take a look
25 at recommendations around procurement processes,

1 potentially general oversight. But there can still be
2 places that are either restrained today or that need
3 to be enabled around the significant opportunity in
4 viewing the full procurement and vendor ecosystem
5 holistically looking for both risks and opportunities.

6 That doesn't mean one central place.
7 It means looking at it holistically. Government, like
8 other organizations of any size, ends up with a broad
9 ecosystem of contractors and suppliers providing goods
10 and services. Vetting processes vary and typically
11 are only performed at onboarding. ERP systems are
12 trusted with the processes around invoices, purchase
13 orders, and payments, while approvals are set in
14 place.

15 But all of that assumes the data's
16 accurate, the controls are airtight, and there aren't
17 either accidental overpayments, intentional
18 overbilling, collusion, or just wasteful duplicate
19 spend.

20 A single view of all vendors,
21 regardless of where the underlying data or processes
22 sit, can uncover duplicate invoices, inflated
23 pricing -- pricing compared to contract terms, and
24 places where there may be vendor to vendor or even
25 employee to vendor collusion. It's an area typically

1 overlooked within broader remits and processes left to
2 periodic spot checks or audits.

3 Setting up a system that aggregates
4 this disparate data to provide continuous monitoring
5 over procurement and vendors can highlight both risks
6 and opportunities quickly.

7 Just knowing that five different
8 departments are doing business with the same company,
9 and potentially you could aggregate that contract and
10 get a lower unit price, can have a huge impact on
11 spending. And uncovering bitter collusion, that on
12 average increases costs by 43 percent in any given
13 bid, could save tens of millions per instance.

14 Governments and private organizations
15 regularly see massive savings by preventing complex
16 duplicate invoicing.

17 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much, Carl.
18 Andrew.

19 MR. RYAN: Good evening, Chair Gaspard
20 and esteemed commissioners. Thank you for the
21 opportunity to testify and for your service to New
22 Yorkers. I'm Andrew Ryan, president of the Citizens
23 Budget Commission.

24 Before presenting specific
25 recommendations, I do want to urge the commissioners

1 to propose only changes appropriate to the Charter --
2 those that define the core powers, structures, and
3 processes of government.

4 Also, given the commission's short
5 time, I urge you to focus on proposals that can be
6 fully developed by the end of July. But please take
7 this great input and set an agenda for future work.

8 So tonight I offer three proposals that
9 would underpin activities to modernize and improve the
10 efficiency of government and one to strengthen the
11 rainy day fund.

12 First, we recommend to modify the
13 Charter to require the City to conduct a statistically
14 valid representative resident feedback survey at least
15 every four years. To respond to New Yorkers needs and
16 improve agency management, the City should use
17 feedback from New Yorkers, the customers of City
18 government.

19 Everyone deserves a voice. And this
20 survey would ensure that that feedback does not depend
21 on having money, having power, or have the time to
22 attend a hearing such as this. The City should
23 conduct and publish the survey with results at the
24 community board level and disaggregated by race,
25 ethnicity, and household income.

1 This would allow residents to rate
2 their quality of life, rate City services, and show
3 where government is performing well and where
4 improvements are needed.

5 Second, require a comprehensive
6 performance management system. While efforts exist in
7 various agencies, New York does not have such a
8 citywide performance management system to improve
9 service quality and efficiency.

10 Such a system would require both robust
11 data and management review and accountability
12 processes where leaders and managers and frontline
13 workers review data, identify success and problems,
14 track improvement, and solve and -- and foster
15 accountability. The Charter should establish a
16 framework.

17 Third, improve the mayor's management
18 report. The MMR has long been a useful mainstay of
19 City government transparency, but it focuses too
20 heavily on measures of what the City is doing rather
21 than measures of how well the City is doing its work.

22 That is, what are the outcomes, how
23 high quality are the services, are they efficient.
24 The Charter should require the MMR to include input,
25 output, outcome, quality, and efficiency indicators

1 for each agency and program.

2 These proposals would not dictate
3 management choices, but would establish the durable
4 structures needed to modernize government and improve
5 efficiency and quality.

6 Finally, create rules to strengthen
7 rainy day fund deposits, withdrawals, and balances.
8 The current laws governing the use of the rainy day
9 fund are inadequate. They don't mandate that deposits
10 are made during the good times to help ensure the fund
11 is -- the fund's balance is substantial enough to
12 protect New Yorkers during a recession or emergency.

13 And the rules also do not restrict
14 withdrawals to such a recession or emergency. The
15 Charter should require that the mayor and the council
16 enact a law that details the -- the City's deposit,
17 withdrawal, and target size policies.

18 So thank you for the opportunity to
19 testify. I'll be happy to answer any questions and
20 provide specific Charter language if you want to
21 pursue this.

22 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Carl and
23 Andrew.

24 Commissioners, please.

25 MS. WYLDE: I'll go first now.

1 Thank you, Andrew. I -- a couple of
2 questions on the survey. So are you talking about a
3 statistical survey or count, just to -- for
4 clarification?

5 MR. RYAN: It is a -- it -- it should
6 be a survey that asks New Yorkers to rate their
7 quality of life in their neighborhood, the City, the
8 City services that they interact with generally,
9 and -- and why they love or don't love living here.

10 MS. WYLDE: I guess I'm looking at, are
11 we doing a poll or survey of what is supposed to be a
12 statistically representative --

13 MR. RYAN: Statistically
14 representative.

15 MS. WYLDE: Representative but not an
16 actual per person individual total count? Okay.

17 MR. RYAN: No, no. But it -- it's a
18 representative sample. But we want -- we would
19 recommend a sample size sufficient enough so that we
20 can go to the community level.

21 MS. WYLDE: Okay. And then my second
22 question is whether or not you've considered at all
23 how to or if there would be a way to roll this into
24 existing surveys and analysis.

25 I know HPD's housing survey gets rolled

1 into as a part of the annual census -- so whether or
2 not this would be a standalone or become a part of
3 some of our existing census and statistic surveys that
4 we already do as a City?

5 MR. RYAN: The most important thing is
6 that it is statistically valid, and representative,
7 and --

8 MS. WYLDE: That's --

9 MR. RYAN: -- covers the right areas.
10 The City did it in 2018. We did it in '27 [sic], '23,
11 and '25. If it could be rolled in, fine. I think
12 sometimes we make things so big they're harder.

13 MR. GASPARD: Please, Henry.

14 MR. GARRIDO: Andrew, can you clarify a
15 little more about the concept of a rainy day fund?
16 Because the City has funds that have been established
17 by state law. There's, like, the regulatory trust
18 fund, which is separate and apart. Some are
19 established by City Council rules. Can you clarify
20 what you mean by that?

21 MR. RYAN: We're specifically talking
22 about what was established because of the Charter
23 Revision Commission in 2019, where the voters
24 established -- then established in state law, then put
25 into the City Charter as well.

1 We do have, and the City's used
2 workarounds, the retiree health benefits trust fund.
3 And that's been used by the Bloomberg administration,
4 De Blasio administration as a de facto rainy day fund.
5 Frankly, we think that should be saved to pay retiree
6 health benefits, of which I am one.

7 And so I think we should start to
8 pay -- have money set aside for that a hundred billion
9 dollar obligation. This rainy day fund right now has
10 2 billion dollars in it -- the -- the statutorily and
11 Charter-mandated fund.

12 What it doesn't have is any rules
13 requiring during the good times us putting money into
14 the fund. Because we know during the bad times,
15 that's when we have to dramatically cut services. And
16 who gets hurt most when we cut services, the most
17 vulnerable New Yorkers. Let's protect them.

18 MR. GARRIDO: Okay. My second
19 question, it relates to your proposal about
20 procurement reform. Specifically, this is something
21 that as commissioners we're looking into and when, in
22 fact, the rules that say the PPP promulgating roles,
23 as opposed to roles that are not supposed to be in the
24 Charter that would affect the role and the -- the
25 functions of that PPP role.

1 So you -- you came up with some
2 recommendations. But I -- I'd like to figure out if
3 there's a way that you can clarify whether you see
4 that as a function that administratively the -- the
5 board can do, the agencies can implement of the
6 Charter co-mandate.

7 MR. HAMMERSBURG: So I think it's
8 honestly a combination of that. So I believe that
9 part of it is stepping all the way back to the Charter
10 and saying, "Here is this centralized piece that at
11 least provides oversight regardless of the role of the
12 board."

13 And I know that was one of the points
14 you got into in the initial meeting, which is what --
15 what takes precedence, this commission and -- and the
16 Charter or the board. And the answer is the
17 commission and the Charter.

18 So I think there's an opportunity there
19 to not only look at the specific role of the board,
20 but this idea of how do we take a look at procurement
21 and/or supply -- just that overall ecosystem at a
22 central point so that we can understand exactly what's
23 going on.

24 You can determine both risk and
25 opportunity there. And that type of thing can then

1 generate huge amounts of savings but then may cascade
2 to other mandates or other changes over time.

3 But until you start to get to that
4 point of saying, "We have to at least pull it
5 together" -- again, I'm not saying one place should
6 rule it all. I -- you know, some -- sometimes
7 organizations go to that. Sometimes cities, states go
8 to that, where they try to look at, "Oh, there's only
9 one place."

10 That can often bog down the ability to
11 actually get the work done and to be able to contract
12 for services. And that just gets in the way of trying
13 to do what's right for citizens. But at least
14 understanding that you can leave the parts in place
15 that -- that should be there in the places where they
16 should be closer to the work but still say, "We need
17 to pull this together at a greater level."

18 That can create the opportunity for
19 where there may actually be bad things going on. Now
20 you suddenly have insights. But also you can truly
21 understand exactly what's happening. Again, back to
22 that point, are we actually getting the services we
23 contracted for?

24 As we work with governments all around
25 the world, that's one of the points -- points -- is to

1 say, "They were only supposed to charge me this amount
2 per hour for this type of stuff. At this point we're
3 getting invoices. We're paying them. Are we even
4 going back to the contract? They were supposed to
5 have performance metrics. Are we measuring those?"

6 You know, how are we looking at this at
7 a greater level? I think that is really a piece -- I
8 know that's one of your areas of interest. And I
9 think that that's a piece that this commission could
10 really look at to say, "Here is something we can put
11 in Charter with the idea being we're setting a
12 framework for this greater level of --

13 MR. GASPARD: Great.

14 MR. HAMMERSBURG: -- understanding and
15 intelligence.

16 MR. GASPARD: Great. Perfect.

17 MR. HAMMERSBURG: Thank you.

18 MR. GASPARD: Ruth?

19 MS. MESSINGER: I think that goes
20 exactly -- you made a quick reference when you were
21 talking -- Andrew, thank you for being exactly on time
22 with three minutes. It was perfect. When you made a
23 point when you were talking about procurement about
24 businesses -- I think we were talking about
25 businesses --

1 MR. RYAN: Yes.

2 MS. MESSINGER: -- that have to deal
3 with six different city agencies, and there's no
4 central -- no way to communicate that and share it.
5 And that is clearly also the case for dramatically --
6 not only for not-for-profits, but for individual
7 clients that we were talking about previously who
8 are -- who have to file with seven different agencies
9 to get benefits to which they're entitled.

10 There has to be ways of simplifying
11 this. And I would just note as an experience that all
12 of us have -- sometimes good, sometimes bad. But if
13 you're in a health program here, all of your data is
14 in the system.

15 And if you get referred from one doctor
16 to another, and they start to ask you what drugs you
17 take, you can just say, "It is in my portal." And
18 it's all there. And I really think that if the
19 biggest health institutions in the city could do it so
20 could we.

21 MR. HAMMERSBURG: Yeah, absolutely. I
22 couldn't agree more. And it was still a limitation on
23 timing. Because ultimately that's where I think you
24 should get to -- is this idea when we really
25 understand citizens, it means, "If you interact with

1 us once, what all do we know about you?" And to say,
2 "You think you're asking for one thing, but you're --

3 MR. GASPARD: Okay.

4 MR. HAMMERSBURG: -- eligible for five
5 services."

6 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

7 Thank you both.

8 MR. RYAN: Thank you.

9 MR. GASPARD: Leah Bannon and Jessie
10 Fields, please join us.

11 I love all the excited side meetings.
12 New partnerships are being formed. It's great.

13 Leah?

14 MS. BANNON: Sure. Hi. Is it on? Can
15 you hear me? Yes?

16 MR. GASPARD: Is the green light on?

17 MS. BANNON: Okay.

18 MR. GASPARD: Yes, we can hear you.

19 MS. BANNON: Hi. My name is Leah
20 Bannon, and I'm speaking only in a personal capacity
21 tonight. I have experience as a federal contractor,
22 as a government employee, and cross-agency advisor at
23 18F and the United States Digital Service, which was
24 established by President Obama to fix big tech
25 problems like healthcare.gov. I then stayed and

1 accepted a position as a career civil servant.

2 I testify tonight to encourage you to
3 prioritize enabling agencies to hire small digital
4 service teams who can coordinate with a centralized IT
5 for shared services and resources. I do not recommend
6 large IT contracts if you hope to deliver efficient
7 quality public services.

8 Even under the best circumstances,
9 there is a pervasive and constant tax on efficiency
10 and quality when contracting tech services due to
11 their constant prioritization on business development.
12 This arises in a myriad of ways. I can speak to it
13 more in Q and A.

14 As an alternative, in order to
15 efficiently build excellent digital services the
16 public wants, we have learned you need to start with
17 small, empowered teams inside agencies. Agencies
18 often ask the U.S. Digital Service to send engineers
19 to help.

20 But instead we sent small
21 multidisciplinary teams of six to eight experts in
22 experience, design, product strategy, legal or policy,
23 as well as engineers who partnered closely with
24 experts, civil servants, and interviewed members of
25 the public to map out the public's end-to-end

1 experience trying to obtain and manage a government
2 service and the underlying processes and systems civil
3 servants use to deliver it.

4 We used this service design approach to
5 quickly identify the public's biggest pain points and
6 the agency's biggest opportunities for efficient
7 improvements often in about a month. This also allows
8 us to obviate whole sections of a process instead of
9 endlessly fine tuning and building on bad ones.

10 The main lessons we've learned from
11 this model are threefold. First, these teams are most
12 successful when they're hired and work directly in the
13 agency building with and for the people who will use
14 the solutions they develop.

15 Second, they need to be able to rely on
16 a centralized IT program that provides efficiencies of
17 scale through shared services, infrastructure,
18 practice area guidance, and quality check-ins. This
19 helps provide consistent experiences for the public
20 and prevents each -- each agency from reinventing the
21 wheel or paying extra for the same tooling over and
22 over. In this case, I would only recommend procuring
23 services that are constantly used by many different
24 buyers, such as email.

25 And third, over time these teams should

1 use what they've learned to reorient agencies around
2 service delivery and the public's needs. You should
3 measure success by asking them to report on the
4 public's top pain points and if they've resolved them.
5 The public shouldn't need to understand how the
6 government is structured in order to get a benefit or
7 service.

8 Finally, I can also speak to hiring
9 programs the U.S. Digital Service highlighted and
10 refined in order to quickly hire large groups of
11 highly-qualified candidates at agencies in accordance
12 with HR and legal requirements, if it's helpful.

13 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so very much,
14 Leah.

15 Jessie.

16 DR. FIELDS: Okay.

17 Good evening, commissioners. I'm
18 Dr. Jessie Fields. I'm a Harlem community doctor.
19 I'm affiliated with Mount Sinai Hospital, and I'm a
20 member of the New York City Maternal Mortality Review
21 Committee, and I'm on the board of a national youth
22 development program, the All Stars Project, which was
23 founded here in New York City. I'm a leader in the
24 citywide effort to protect public housing in New York
25 City.

1 And I am an Independent because I
2 believe that independence is fundamental to prioritize
3 the important matters of health, housing, human
4 rights, community empowerment -- those people issues,
5 important issues in our -- in all of our lives above
6 partisan interests.

7 But because I choose to be politically
8 independent, my right to vote as an American citizen
9 in New York City -- in New York City is taken away. I
10 cannot vote in primary elections -- the major
11 determining elections in our city. And I cannot vote
12 because I choose to be independent of political
13 parties.

14 This issue of the disenfranchisement of
15 independent voters is a civil rights issue.
16 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou
17 Hamer, and so many others fought for equal voting
18 rights. The Black community has led the fight for
19 equal voting rights for all.

20 The disenfranchisement of 1.2 million
21 New Yorkers -- a majority of whom are Black, Hispanic,
22 and Asian must end. And many Independents are young
23 people under the age of 40. The barriers to voting
24 for all New Yorkers must be lifted. And you,
25 commissioners, you have the opportunity to put such an

1 initiative on the ballot to open the primaries, and I
2 urge you to do so. Thank you.

3 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so very much
4 for your testimony.

5 Commissioners?

6 Please.

7 MS. KANG: I'd like to hear more about
8 the streamlined hiring processes you mentioned towards
9 the end of your testimony.

10 MS. BANNON: Sure. We collaborated
11 with HR programs and pooled agency resources to launch
12 large applications for single subject matter
13 expertise. So if we wanted to hire an engineer, we
14 had people apply for -- to be an engineer.

15 And then multiple agencies would send
16 subject matter expert engineers to review the resumes
17 in a large pool. They would then share those resumes
18 with HR to -- for HR to do its vetting and priority
19 assessments. And then from there the -- HR would send
20 along that list. So by the time HR had culled the
21 list, there was a -- a long list of skilled candidates
22 who made it.

23 Traditionally, in a lot of hiring
24 practices, HR does that first culling. And then by
25 the time the expertise gets to review the list of

1 resumes, there are no qualified candidates. And so
2 this is a way to, like, quickly, rapidly hire large
3 pools of candidates.

4 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

5 MS. BANNON: Thank you.

6 MR. GASPARD: Please do --

7 MS. PINNOCK: Are you comfortable
8 disclosing the agency that followed along this hiring
9 process?

10 MS. BANNON: Well, it was run by the
11 U.S. Digital Service --

12 MS. PINNOCK: Okay.

13 MS. BANNON: -- which was out of the
14 Office of Management and Budget. But there were
15 multiple agencies that participated -- like the
16 Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Department
17 of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Health and
18 Human Services. And the Office of Personal Management
19 coordinated it. I can send you more resources about
20 it.

21 MS. PINNOCK: Thank you.

22 MR. GASPARD: Any additional questions?

23 Doctor, I have a question for you. I
24 was -- I was really struck by the point that you made
25 when you were unpacking the data on unaffiliated

1 voters in New York and -- and your definition of
2 disenfranchisement amongst those voters.

3 You noted the disproportionate
4 percentage that are young. I know that to be
5 absolutely true. But I was struck when you described
6 the unaffiliated voters as overwhelmingly Black and
7 Latino. That -- that surprised me.

8 I have a -- I have a sense of the
9 demo -- of the -- the geographic distribution of
10 Independent voters in New York. And I wonder if you
11 can provide any more detail on your sense that the
12 majority who are being, as you say, disenfranchised
13 are Black and Latino.

14 DR. FIELDS: Yes. That's -- that
15 question actually was studied. Common Cause did a
16 study, and it has been documented. And I would be
17 very happy to provide the studies. I didn't bring
18 them this evening, but I will provide them to the
19 committee.

20 It is a fact that the majority of
21 Independents in our city are people of color, Black,
22 Hispanic, and Asian, and also younger, as -- as you
23 mentioned. So that that has been very
24 well-documented. It's a national phenomenon actually,
25 that more and more younger voters and more and more

1 people of color are -- are becoming independent.

2 It's the large -- Independents are the
3 largest --

4 MR. GASPARD: The fastest growing part
5 of the electorate. Certainly --

6 DR. FIELDS: Yes --

7 MR. GASPARD: -- certainly --

8 DR. FIELDS: -- nationally --

9 MR. GASPARD: -- certainly amongst
10 young -- younger voters. In New York I know that the
11 greatest concentration of unaffiliated voters are in
12 Staten Island and southern Brooklyn. And then there's
13 kind of uneven distribution in Manhattan and in the
14 Bronx. So would love when you submit testimony --

15 DR. FIELDS: Yes.

16 MR. GASPARD: -- to have a little bit
17 more detail.

18 DR. FIELDS: Yes.

19 MR. GASPARD: Because it would be -- it
20 would just be useful for --

21 DR. FIELDS: Right. I actually work
22 with Open Primaries, and they --

23 MR. GASPARD: Yeah.

24 DR. FIELDS: -- have done many studies.
25 The other issue, which sort of complicates it, is -- a

1 bit, is that I have spoken to people on election day
2 just encouraging people to support the right of
3 Independents -- "I can't vote today. Ask me why" --
4 and informing people.

5 And many people come up to me and say,
6 "You know, I'm an Independent, but I'm --

7 MR. GASPARD: Yeah.

8 DR. FIELDS: -- registered in a party
9 because I want to vote." So that -- there are many
10 more Independents. And they would like to stay
11 Independent --

12 MR. GASPARD: Yeah.

13 DR. FIELDS: -- but the fact that they
14 can't vote in their primary --

15 MR. GASPARD: They're forced to make a
16 choice.

17 DR. FIELDS: -- some people are forced
18 to -- yes, to register --

19 MR. GASPARD: And thank you, Doctor.

20 DR. FIELDS: -- party. Thank you.

21 MR. GASPARD: Very, very, very helpful.
22 We appreciate it.

23 DR. FIELDS: Thank you.

24 MS. BANNON: Thank you.

25 MR. GASPARD: Our next witnesses are

1 Brian Chen and Robert Gordon. Robert Chen -- I'm
2 sorry. Brian Chen and Robert Gordon.

3 Brian.

4 MR. CHEN: Thank you, Chair Gaspard and
5 members of the commission. My name is Brian Chen.
6 I'm the policy director of Data & Society, an
7 independent research institute that studies the real
8 world impacts of AI and technology.

9 This is -- this administration is right
10 to pursue efficient government services. But with
11 that, there is going to be a lot of pressure being
12 brought to bear by tech vendors to sell the City a
13 vision of AI-enabled deficiency.

14 And if the City wants to modernize
15 government and streamline technology, it should move
16 very cautiously before any adoption of AI. The
17 promised benefits are unproven. The costs are real.
18 And getting it wrong will be very expensive.

19 So I'm going to make three points.
20 First, AI is not the productivity miracle that it's
21 marketed as. Despite what vendors say, there's little
22 hard evidence that plugging AI into government
23 workflows actually makes them more efficient.
24 Although the technical capacities are very impressive
25 when it's integrated into real workflows, these tools

1 remain error prone and unreliable.

2 And the costs of commercial AI systems
3 are enormous and growing. Even corporate America is
4 starting to bulk and get sticker shock when they look
5 at how much this AI token usage is really costing
6 them. Given the City's budget constraints, we cannot
7 afford to buy expensive technology that doesn't work.

8 I'll point to smaller, more sustainable
9 open source models that use less data, less energy,
10 and they actually perform better as alternatives to
11 the kinds of models that are coming out of big tech.

12 Second, efficiency requires engaging
13 the public and workers. Residents should have a say
14 in whether and how AI is used in the services that
15 affect them. And democratic decision making is
16 critical for ensuring that new technologies are more
17 than just speedy or powerful, but that they actually
18 align with public expectations.

19 Further, City workers -- City workers
20 need to be involved in -- in helping to set the goals
21 and set the procedures for that technology adoption.
22 They're the ones that -- who are going to -- actually
23 going to use that tool. They're the ones who can tell
24 you how that might actually interrupt or get in the
25 way of them doing their job.

1 And importantly, all these steps should
2 be done before procurement. That is the most
3 impactful time to draw in key stakeholders in problem
4 formulation and goal setting.

5 And finally, efficiency requires seeing
6 clearly through technology hype. When tech is rushed
7 in without proper vetting, the City ends up locked
8 into expensive systems that don't work. Or they may
9 violate people's rights.

10 The City should formalize updates to
11 its procurement procedures that center independent
12 testing, impact assessments, transparency, data
13 minimization, and clear accountability mechanisms for
14 new -- new technology systems. Thank you very much,
15 and I look forward to your questions.

16 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Brian.

17 MR. GORDON: Good evening. It's an
18 honor to be here. My name's Robert Gordon. I'm the
19 Vice President of the Recoding America Fund, a
20 national nonprofit founded by Jennifer Pahlka to help
21 governments transform for a fast changing world.

22 I've been a White House deputy and a
23 New York City DOE employee. My dad worked at HRA for
24 30 years -- excellent public services and an excellent
25 civil service system for recruiting and retaining

1 great staff.

2 But New York's system is broken. There
3 are now twice as many vacancies as before the pandemic
4 in jobs the City desperately needs, to issue permits
5 for housing, to work contracts for roads, collect --
6 to collect taxes, and deliver benefits.

7 Much of the challenge is at the state
8 level, but much is in the City's hands -- 2,600 job
9 titles, many with obscure names, like administrative
10 staff analysts; an obstacle course for applicants,
11 starting with exams that take months to grade and may
12 not be given for years; 14 to 15 months for exams --
13 from exam to hire.

14 On the manager's side, a forced choice
15 among just three top exam scores. If they say no,
16 rigid requirements to go down a list that may be years
17 old. The objectives here are good. Nobody wants a
18 return to Tammany Hall.

19 But, and I say this coming from an
20 organization that works on these issues nationally,
21 other states and cities determine merit, prevent
22 corruption, and respect organized labor without such
23 labyrinths. Boston, Denver, and Seattle,
24 Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Colorado limit exams to
25 a few departments, like police and fire.

1 A rule of three operates in four
2 states. Most states have half or a third as many job
3 classifications as New York. There is no reason to
4 believe these places are more corrupt or their public
5 employees less committed or qualified. Complexity
6 favors the powerful and the popular. Those who know
7 their way around get access, hiring exceptions,
8 special authorities. Those with less influence lose
9 out.

10 And when the City can't hire the people
11 it needs, as others have spoken to, it hires
12 contractors who it pays much more for. A better way
13 as possible.

14 Create broader job titles that match
15 the labor market and create career pathways. Let
16 managers hire based on skills and experience, not just
17 test scores, fight corrupt -- fight corruption and
18 prevent corruption with targeted oversight, not
19 straight jackets.

20 Here are two ideas that specifically
21 fit your charge. First, even in -- in a world where
22 the state has a great deal of power, consider changing
23 the Charter to take advantage of state-offered
24 flexibilities. The New York HELPS program at the
25 state level temporarily suspended exams for many

1 hard-to-fill titles, resulting in 40 -- more than
2 40,000 hires.

3 New York City opted out while 45
4 counties opted in. The program was just extended. A
5 new mayor, new Charter commission could make a new
6 decision.

7 Second, for the longer term, borrowing
8 from a plan a different candidate for mayor, consider
9 establishing a diverse commission to overhaul the
10 City's civil service system similar to the SPEED
11 commission on housing -- not to nibble around the
12 edges, not to create more authorities or better
13 websites, but to create soup to nuts change.

14 Millions of New Yorkers are all in on
15 this administration's ambitious vision, and fix -- I
16 urge you to fix hiring so the City can deliver. Thank
17 you. And I'm sorry to have gone a little over.

18 MR. GASPARD: No, it's okay. That's
19 all right. I'm going to make you go even a little
20 further over time, if you don't mind repeating the two
21 sentences where you cited examples from other cities.

22 MR. GORDON: Sure. So --

23 MR. GASPARD: I think this was an
24 important passage.

25 MR. GORDON: Yeah. So some -- many --

1 many cities and states with strong civil service
2 systems and with strong unions do not have civil
3 service exams. Some don't have them at all. And many
4 have them just in police and fire. And so examples of
5 those include Boston, Denver, Seattle; at the state
6 level, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Colorado.

7 Likewise, this rule of three concept,
8 which says you only get to choose the three highest
9 scores, that was once very widespread. It is much
10 less so today at the state level. I haven't looked
11 across cities. But at the state level, there's four
12 states that still have a rule of three.

13 The federal government also just --
14 and -- and pre-Trump, under President Obama, President
15 Biden, the federal government long has not used civil
16 service exams, long has not had a rule of three. It
17 was President Obama who got rid of the rule --

18 MR. GASPARD: Yep.

19 MR. GORDON: -- of three at the federal
20 level.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

22 Thank you, both.

23 Commissioners?

24 Henry.

25 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you for your

1 testimony. The cities that used as examples that have
2 done away with civil service system, unfortunately
3 don't have the best example of the demographics of
4 employees taking those exams that reflect the
5 population.

6 For instance, if you consider the city
7 of Boston and Denver as an example of those,
8 proportional to the amount of minorities that they
9 have in the population and those who work for city
10 governments that bypass the civil service system, do
11 not reflect by twice as many the number of employees
12 that are employed.

13 So for us that work in this system, the
14 civil service system, has been a path of upward
15 mobility and an opportunity for minorities especially
16 to have an even playing field to apply for City jobs.

17 So can you explain to me why in New
18 York that would be different since we have already
19 have had experiences, you mentioned Tammany Hall, when
20 nepotism could also run rampant in appointing civil
21 servants?

22 MR. GORDON: First, I -- I appreciate
23 the question. I want to agree with the premise that a
24 diverse civil service is important as a statement of
25 New York's values, and it's important to have a civil

1 service that effectively serves such a diverse
2 population as New York.

3 I think there is good history of both
4 federal and state use of approaches other than exams
5 to get a broader population. As I'm sure you know,
6 like, for a long time, these exams were a barrier to
7 diversity.

8 And federal government dropped civil
9 service exams because they were a barrier, in fact,
10 and adopted other approaches. The federal workforce
11 in a very diverse metro area has historically been
12 extremely diverse, and it has been a pathway of upward
13 mobility for people of all races from all over.

14 MR. GASPARD: Robert, can I ask you to
15 just draw --

16 MR. GORDON: Of course.

17 MR. GASPARD: -- the microphone closer
18 to you?

19 MR. GORDON: Oh, sorry. I'm sorry.

20 MR. GASPARD: I want to make sure that
21 everyone here can --

22 MR. GORDON: Sorry. I think my --
23 my --

24 MR. GASPARD: -- really important to --

25 MR. GORDON: Yeah.

1 MR. GASPARD: -- his question.

2 MR. GORDON: My -- my broad answer is
3 I -- I think that with the goal of having the kind of
4 workforce that can effectively serve this kind of
5 city, there are different pathways that are possible.
6 And if you look, again, at the federal government,
7 pre-Trump, had a very diverse civil service.

8 You do have very meaningful and
9 important pathways to the middle class. They built to
10 middle class at the DMV. And I think it can be done
11 without rigid exams.

12 MR. GASPARD: Commissioners, any other
13 questions for -- please, Dawn.

14 MS. PINNOCK: I think it just -- I
15 think it just adds to what my fellow commissioner was
16 asking. So -- because I'm looking for guidance;
17 right? I used to run the agency that delivered those
18 exams, so I could tell you.

19 You never had enough staff. And even
20 with the efficiencies that we had, and we had some
21 really great wins at the state level, but it does take
22 a long time. Because you are testing thousands of
23 people in some cases for very few jobs; right? And so
24 that has been the historical system.

25 So -- but there is bias in

1 interviewing; right? So when we're talking about, you
2 know, folks making a selection for whomever is the
3 best fit, in many cases, a woman, a person of color is
4 not deemed the best fit when we're looking across, you
5 know, our different career paths.

6 So are you suggesting -- as opposed to
7 a rigid exam that takes a long time to grade, are you
8 recommending some other kind of blind recruitment,
9 blind interview? I mean, because that's really part
10 of the merit and fitness of, you know, or the fairness
11 that's inherent within civil service is that your
12 qualifications or your ability to do the job is
13 determined by the score.

14 And really the only time when you see
15 someone who's selecting you is at the time of
16 interview. But they already know that you're that one
17 of three. So -- so what other mechanisms accompanied
18 their review processes in these other states?

19 MR. GORDON: Yeah. I think it's a
20 great question. And, again, I -- I want to honor the
21 point that both of you and Mr. Garrido made about the
22 role that exams play and -- and values that they
23 advance. I think there are other ways of -- of
24 getting at those values.

25 Like, you can review skills and

1 experience. You can have objective rubrics for
2 reviewing skills and experience. You can have
3 multiple people involved in the process of -- Maryland
4 right now is using a process that's -- they're
5 piloting. But they're using a process where there are
6 someone from HR, and there's the hiring manager. And
7 they are both involved, and they're both looking at
8 individuals from those different perspectives.

9 So it's not -- it's not an anything
10 goes, the manager picks whoever they want. There's a
11 built-in check. But it's also not just turning on the
12 exam. And then I do think it's really important to
13 use -- others have talked about data and to have
14 robust data, so you are tracking what happens.

15 It doesn't have to be a mystery as you
16 evolve and as you change what the demographics of
17 hires look like. The last thing is, the -- the
18 prior -- one of the prior speakers talked about USDS
19 and the federal system. And I do think there are
20 models.

21 Again, that was a model that got to a
22 much faster, more effective tech hiring and jobs. And
23 that's a model, you know, the City should look to
24 adopt. That's -- the key thing is -- and then I will
25 shut up -- the key thing is not just to have it be a

1 pilot, or an exception, or a -- someone gets to
2 someone's boss and says, "I desperately need these 15
3 people."

4 MR. GARRIDO: Understood.

5 MR. GORDON: That's how we usually do
6 it. And you can't do that for structural change.

7 MR. GASPARD: Brian and Robert,
8 grateful for -- for your testimony.

9 We're going -- we're going to move on
10 to the next panel now.

11 MR. CHEN: Thank you.

12 MS. PINNOCK: Thank you.

13 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, both.

14 MR. GORDON: Thank you.

15 MR. GASPARD: Both outstanding.

16 So I'm calling now Louisa Chaffee and
17 Julie Swoope.

18 But as I do that, I'm going to take
19 advantage of the privilege of the chair just to say,
20 Louisa, I see that as you're coming up, that's seated
21 right beside you is one of my absolute favorite public
22 servants, Yvonne Simpson, who I think is just one of
23 the most committed and passionate New Yorkers. So
24 excited just to see her here with you.

25 MS. CHAFFEE: Well, thank you. I

1 agree. Okay. Is it on?

2 MR. GASPARD: Yes.

3 MS. CHAFFEE: All right. Here we go.
4 I'm going to read really fast. Good evening, Chair
5 Gaspard.

6 I'm Louisa Chaffee. I'm the director
7 of the New York City Independent Budget Office. IBO
8 is a nonpartisan independent government agency that
9 owes its existence to the decision by New York City
10 voters to adopt the proposals of the 1989 Charter
11 Revision Commission.

12 And in the case of IBO, that decision
13 was due in no small measure to the vision and tenacity
14 of Commissioner Messinger.

15 So I do need to thank you, Ruth.

16 My testimony today will cover three
17 areas: modernizing procurement, budget transparency,
18 and preservation of -- of adequate reserves -- three
19 super exciting topics.

20 Modernizing procurement: Based on the
21 data today from the top five human service agencies,
22 there are 768 human service contracts, totaling 12.7
23 billion dollars, that expire at the end of this month,
24 and only 199 of them have been registered. That's 26
25 percent, which means the rest of those vendors are

1 going to continue to provide services, and there will
2 be no contract in place.

3 By not registering contracts or
4 contract extensions on time, the City forces such
5 human service vendors to work for weeks or even months
6 without a contract -- a time during which the City is
7 legally barred from paying or making advances.

8 This situation causes enormous
9 financial risk to the city, stresses critical service
10 sector provision, and risks delivery of services,
11 including services that the City is legally required
12 to provide.

13 The data is irrefutable that the city
14 agencies get contract extensions -- that's a different
15 kind of procurement tool -- registered on time far
16 faster than new contracts such as those that come from
17 the RFP.

18 So the IBO argues that agencies should
19 be mandated in the Charter to register extensions for
20 contracts that would otherwise expire and in any case
21 where continued payment is otherwise at risk. These
22 extensions could then easily be canceled once the new
23 award is actually made and registered.

24 The second issue I want to bring up is
25 late payment on invoices. Again, back to those 768

1 contracts -- excuse me -- right, 768 contracts with a
2 total value of 12.7 billion dollars. Those are mostly
3 three-year contracts. As of today, only 69 percent of
4 the value has been spent, which means that enormous
5 amount of money is owed to those vendors -- 31 percent
6 owed to the vendors and not yet paid that.

7 This is a -- like, a real-life example
8 of how New York City makes its human service community
9 provide services for free.

10 So what could be done to address this?
11 IBO would suggest or would support a Charter mandate
12 to require agencies to pay 80 percent of each invoice
13 submitted by a human service vendor or a human service
14 contractor in good standing within a reasonable period
15 of time from receipt.

16 A partial payment process could easily
17 use modern technology to ensure that funds are paid
18 initially and allow the City to continue its vetting
19 process before releasing the remainder of the funds.
20 Risks of overpayment are minimal, and there are ample
21 tools to check after the fact that the system was
22 working correctly.

23 I'd also -- or the IBO would also
24 like --

25 MR. GASPARD: You're at -- you're at

1 time, Louisa.

2 MS. CHAFFEE: Okay.

3 MR. GASPARD: So I hope you can shorten
4 it up.

5 MS. CHAFFEE: We'd like to recommend
6 changes to the procurement policy board -- an
7 extremely exciting entity. And we'd like to suggest
8 it go to ten members, and we suggest you look at how
9 the IBO is set up. It's in the Charter, and it
10 establishes a process. I -- I desperately need to
11 talk to you about units of appropriation, a topic that
12 Marc Shaw thinks is funny. They could be adjusted.

13 MR. GASPARD: I'm sure that we will
14 have an opportunity to do in the Q and A for -- for
15 you to use your considerable skills to --

16 MS. CHAFFEE: I'm sorry for speaking
17 too long.

18 MR. GASPARD: -- no -- no worries.
19 Julie.

20 MS. SWOOPE: Hi. Thank you to the
21 commission for this hearing. My name is Julie Swoope,
22 and I was on the technology transition committee for
23 the Mamdani administration. I'm a member of New York
24 City DSA. And I currently lead a technology team in
25 the public sector for my work.

1 The main thing I want to talk today
2 is -- talk about today is contracting in the
3 private -- the public sector for private technology
4 services. There are past leaders of the city that
5 will say that contracting from the private sector is
6 more efficient. I can tell you that this is false.

7 I worked in the private tech sector for
8 over ten years at several successful New York City
9 companies before working in the public sector. And
10 while the practice of contracting does occasionally
11 exist in the private sector, it is on a much, much
12 smaller scale.

13 There's a reason that contracting is
14 much less common in the private sector, because it is
15 not viewed as an efficient long-term investment.
16 Contracts have a defined endpoint after which they
17 either must be renewed with the same vendor, or all
18 institutional knowledge of the work is lost.

19 Hiring a new vendor to work on a
20 technology project has significant onboarding costs as
21 new workers are onboarded onto a project. The
22 incentives of private contractors are to make money,
23 which involve selling more services to the City.
24 There is an incentive to upsell that is imperative in
25 the private sector.

1 The solution to this issue is hiring
2 full-time employees to do technology work, who
3 maintain institutional knowledge, are treated well as
4 public sector employees, and who can train their
5 eventual replacements as they get promoted, retire, or
6 move on to other work. This is how the private sector
7 operates.

8 Even leaving aside the question of
9 whether private contracting is actually more
10 efficient after private contractors take their tax
11 dollar -- take public tax dollars as profits, if the
12 contracting model were more efficient, the private
13 sector would adopt it. They have not.

14 There are laws on the books, including
15 Local Law 63, that require agencies to justify hiring
16 private contractors instead of hiring full-time City
17 workers. I'm not a lawyer, but it's difficult for me
18 to see how these laws have been enforced over the past
19 several years when contractors are routinely hired to
20 do technology work that could be done by full-time
21 City employees.

22 I understand that for some in
23 leadership, some well-intentioned people in leadership
24 at all levels of government, that it is much easier to
25 get one-time costs approved for private contracting

1 rather than a full-time hire for both budgetary and
2 bureaucratic reasons. I work in the public sector. I
3 know this problem myself.

4 But to not confront this question is
5 doing a disservice to our City workers and doing a
6 disservice to the working class of New York City. We
7 need to break our dependence on private technology
8 contracting while maintaining civil service
9 protections for the workers of New York City because
10 the status quo is broken. Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you both for your
12 muscular testimony.

13 Henry, first.

14 I -- I really appreciated these two
15 interventions.

16 Henry.

17 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you.

18 Louisa, the discussion we had about
19 vendors not getting paid, nonprofits specifically, has
20 been something that continues to bother me. You said
21 in your testimony 31 percent of those in the human
22 service haven't been paid by the City of New York but
23 are still required to continue to do the work.

24 You proposed an idea that, intriguing,
25 about the 80 percent advancement and then, you know,

1 whatever recruitment mechanism is done. Have you
2 proposed -- what specifically would you propose in the
3 Charter be changed to allow for such advancement of
4 payment?

5 And, if such, is this something that
6 would be administratively implemented or something
7 that would change some of the recommendations you made
8 on your PPB amendments?

9 MS. CHAFFEE: I would recommend that
10 the PPB -- that the Charter instruct the PPB to uphold
11 certain standards and that the PPB be held to
12 implement certain rules. And I have, believe it or
13 not, like, five more memos on this. I'd be happy to
14 share them with you.

15 MS. WYLDE: I appreciate the testimony,
16 and maybe a -- a question around the targeting. Is
17 the proposal specifically for human services, or is
18 the total proposal for contract services writ large?

19 MS. CHAFFEE: It should be -- it should
20 be for all. I would -- I would recommend that it be
21 for -- or the IBO would recommend that it be for all
22 procured services. I just focused on the human
23 services because it's easy to pull those out, and the
24 scale is shocking.

25 MS. WYLDE: Okay. And then my other

1 question is around your recommendation of contract
2 extensions -- registering the extensions before the
3 new contract is registered for the next three-year
4 tranche, or for some people it's a one-year tranche.

5 How would you -- do -- have you thought
6 about whether or not that potentially biases towards
7 keeping the same entities in a recurring contract?

8 MS. CHAFFEE: It would only -- the --
9 the extension would be for entities -- it wouldn't --
10 it wouldn't stop the competition from happening. But
11 what's happening now is that a new -- an RFP, a
12 competition, goes out, and it takes so long that
13 there's a gap.

14 So the extension would just be to fill
15 that gap until whoever the new winner is. And -- but
16 it wouldn't impact who's competing or who's awarded.

17 MS. WYLDE: No -- yes. But I -- I
18 guess I'm just wondering whether or not there would be
19 any concern about, from an agency perspective, it
20 feeling easier to just do the extension and
21 register -- re-register them with a new contract.

22 And therefore you keep the same basic
23 set of actors sort of in a revolving role, which
24 thinking about some of the issues around equity and
25 access that have come up, making sure that there are

1 new nonprofits, providers, companies that get to have
2 access to many of these RFPs.

3 MS. CHAFFEE: So thank you for the
4 question. One of my memos has to do with the PPB
5 board composition and that they should be required to
6 meet four times a year and produce an annual report.
7 And part of the report would be to report on issues
8 like this so as to make --

9 MS. WYLDE: Okay.

10 MS. CHAFFEE: -- sure there's
11 transparency.

12 MR. GARRIDO: Can I see copies of
13 those --

14 MR. GASPARD: Absolutely. Absolutely.

15 MS. CHAFFEE: Oh, no, I'm going to
16 withhold the information.

17 MR. GARRIDO: We'll -- we'll get them.

18 MR. GASPARD: So -- so for Julie, as my
19 fellow commissioners gather their questions, I just
20 have -- have one for you. I'm always excited by
21 provocation and certainly your testimony about the
22 popular political narrative around the tension between
23 private sector efficiencies and -- and costs to the
24 public certainly is thought -- thought provoking.

25 I wonder if you have any additional and

1 specific data to share that will give us a sense of
2 what the -- the cost benefit is.

3 MS. SWOOPE: Yeah. I mean, I think
4 there's a lot of examples in City contracting that can
5 serve as data in themselves. Like, you know, the
6 horror stories that come to mind are, like, a CUNY
7 contract with Oracle for, like, a course management
8 system.

9 Susan, I forgot you're a CUNY person.

10 But Susan can probably tell you all
11 about this. But, you know, this is something where
12 tens of millions or possibly even hundreds of millions
13 were invested in Oracle that could be funding, you
14 know, a lot of middle class jobs for tech workers in
15 New York City but were instead shipped off to, you
16 know, Larry Ellison and oligarchs.

17 And the system sucks. Susan can
18 testify about it.

19 MR. GASPARD: Is that -- is that a
20 technical term?

21 MS. SWOOPE: Yeah. Yeah, it's a term
22 that we use.

23 MS. KANG: And we're ending it too.
24 So we're ending it too, so we have to be trained on a
25 new system.

1 MR. GASPARD: Oh.

2 MS. SWOOPE: Yeah. And that was
3 during, I believe, the De Blasio administration. But
4 I -- I would just emphasize, like, contracting is the
5 status quo in -- for technology. And I think maybe
6 that's because it seems, like, some -- somewhat of a
7 mysterious thing to a lot of people that are not
8 familiar with it themselves.

9 And also it sort of has grown a lot as
10 part of City expenses, where, you know, maybe 20 years
11 ago contracting out for some of these technology
12 services was more understandable. But now technology
13 is impacting basically every worker at the City, and
14 we are spending billions and billions of dollars on
15 it.

16 And I don't think we are spending it in
17 a way that benefits the city, benefits the workers, or
18 the working people of New York City.

19 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

20 Kathy.

21 MS. WYLDE: I -- I hear you. We had
22 testimony on Monday night that suggested that there
23 was an -- that part of the problem was that we've
24 got -- every agency has its own procurement system for
25 contracting technology contracts.

1 As suggested, particularly now that,
2 you know, that we have a -- a very strong leadership
3 on -- in technology in this administration, they
4 suggested centralization of that process, which I
5 think reinforces your point in a sense.

6 Because sometimes stuff may have to be
7 contracted out, but to the extent that you have the
8 expertise, and it wasn't kind of agency by agency. Do
9 you agree with that?

10 MS. SWOOPE: Yeah. I -- I think with
11 the description of the problem, I do agree. But I
12 actually think Leah, a previous person that gave
13 testimony here, described the solution pretty well,
14 which was internal digital service organizations.

15 There is -- there was an organization
16 called 18F at the federal level that was essentially a
17 public sector contractor within the federal
18 government. They were public sector employees that
19 were -- actually, like, agencies would pay 18F to use
20 their services.

21 And of course it was destroyed by our
22 counterparts in DOGE immediately after Trump took
23 office. But I agree with the premise of
24 centralization, but it can also be that we're
25 contracting with public sector workers and have a

1 digital services agency within City government.

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

3 MR. LOGANI: Can I --

4 MR. GASPARD: Please.

5 MR. LOGANI: -- ask a couple quick
6 questions?

7 You talked about, or you proposed,
8 paying 80 percent of these invoices within a
9 reasonable amount of time. I assume that's for
10 undisputed invoices. Do you have a separate process
11 or timeline for how you would deal with disputed
12 invoices would make up a significant portion of the
13 invoices that the City gets?

14 MS. CHAFFEE: So many of the
15 disputes -- contracts are set -- the budgets of the
16 contract is set at the beginning of the term. And the
17 bulk of the invoice has to do with personnel services,
18 and rent, and other fixed costs.

19 Often the dispute has to do with a
20 minute amount of the overall invoice. It might be a
21 legitimate -- legitimate dispute, but it's -- it holds
22 up the entire invoice. And remember, every City
23 contract is audited at -- at least at the end of the
24 three-year cycle, if not every year.

25 So that's why we're proposing to stop

1 the financial risk both to the City, that they owe
2 these monies because of the contract, and to the
3 providers, because they're owed the money, but rather
4 pay the invoices and then -- pay 80 percent -- and
5 with the 20 percent go back and -- and hold that money
6 and figure out whether or not the -- if there are
7 areas of dispute, how to resolve those.

8 MR. LOGANI: And how would you
9 change -- you propose changing how the PPB is set up.
10 Can you talk a little bit about that?

11 MS. CHAFFEE: Oh, I'd love to. There
12 are five members of the PPB right now -- three from
13 the comptroller and two from the -- excuse me, three
14 from the mayoral team and two from the comptroller.
15 The IBO has ten members on the advisory committee.

16 And you can read the chapter in the
17 Charter. It's very exciting and very specific as to
18 who -- a leader of government, a leader from the
19 union, Henry Garrido, a --

20 MR. GARRIDO: A former leader.

21 MS. CHAFFEE: -- a former leader.
22 Well, for union it's Henry Garrido right now. But,
23 anyway, it's very specific in the Charter, like,
24 exactly the functions for both. Henry and Kathy are
25 currently on my board. That's what I'm stumbling

1 through.

2 I would recommend that the PPB reflect
3 the diversity of what New York City is trying to
4 procure. Experts, like my colleague here, Julie, who
5 has insight, could serve on the PPB and assist by
6 making them meet four times a year, by reviewing
7 procurements, by requiring public reporting -- both
8 how is procurement standardly working, how are
9 innovative procurements working, how is the system
10 shifting. Because the entire system right now is
11 really opaque.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, both.

13 Louisa, I have to say that -- that I'm
14 inspired that you are as excited about the chapter of
15 the -- of PPB in the Charter as some of us are about
16 the Knicks. And it's a very really cool thing.

17 MS. CHAFFEE: Oh, I can be --

18 MR. GASPARD: And apparently Marc has
19 announced his candidacy against Henry.

20 MS. WYLDE: Yeah, for real.

21 MR. SHAW: I -- I just want -- two
22 things that I will correct the record. Right?

23 MR. GASPARD: The microphone, Marc.

24 MR. SHAW: It -- it -- it's on.

25 MS. WYLDE: You have to get this on the

1 record, Marc.

2 MR. SHAW: One -- one is --

3 MR. GASPARD: He's going to say, "If
4 elected, I will not serve."

5 MR. SHAW: I was not laughing at the
6 UFA issue. I was smiling at it, having been on both
7 sides of the --

8 MS. CHAFFEE: It's a serious issue.

9 MR. SHAW: -- issue over the years.
10 And with regard to Henry, part of the IBO process of
11 the advisory board includes having former members of
12 government who are on --

13 MR. GARRIDO: Yeah.

14 MR. SHAW: -- having been a former OMB
15 director who is formally on the IBO.

16 MS. CHAFFEE: Yes. Yes.

17 MR. GASPARD: Fantastic.

18 MS. CHAFFEE: Exactly. So -- but not
19 current members of government. Thank you.

20 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

21 So I've made a commitment at the very
22 top of -- of this session that we would take five
23 panels from those of you who are gathered in the room.
24 And then after every five panels, I will then turn to
25 two of our friends in our online community.

1 And I will do that now by calling on
2 Julie Samuels and John Furby [ph] Manning, who
3 should --

4 MS. SAMUELS: Hello.

5 MR. GASPARD: -- be on the screen
6 any -- at any moment.

7 MS. SAMUELS: Can you guys hear me?

8 MR. GASPARD: We can hear you.

9 MS. WYLDE: Yep.

10 MR. GASPARD: And we can see you.
11 Thank you so much, Julie.

12 MS. SAMUELS: Okay. Thank you so much.
13 My name is Julie Samuels. I am really sorry I can't
14 be there in person. I am moving tomorrow morning, so
15 I'm surrounded by moving boxes. I appreciate your
16 patience. I'm the president and CEO of Tech:NYC. I
17 have written testimony that has been submitted, but
18 I'm going to say a few things in response to some of
19 what we've been hearing so far tonight.

20 I also should mention I was a
21 commissioner on the, I guess, technically second most
22 previous Charter commission -- the one with the
23 ballots -- the one with the -- the one -- not -- one
24 before with Kathy. I think we're the only two that
25 are here today.

1 And I also have served on the prior two
2 administration's tech transition committees. So I
3 feel very passionately about this issue. I want to
4 thank Mayor Mamdani, Chair Gaspard for convening this
5 commission. I think the fact that you're focusing on
6 tech tonight is incredibly important and meaningful
7 and shows that you all really care.

8 If you haven't read it, I would
9 recommend everyone goes back and reads an article in
10 The Atlantic that I'll share from a few years ago by
11 Annie Lowrey called "The Time Tax." It really, I
12 think, gets to the heart as -- we've heard this
13 tonight from other people who've testified -- as to
14 why this issue matters as to how technology can be a
15 very important tool to make government more fair and
16 work for more New Yorkers.

17 I'm going to talk about a few things
18 that we've already heard about tonight in a little bit
19 more depth, and I'm going to focus on things that I
20 think are ripe for the Charter in particular. At the
21 highest level, like many people have said, the fact
22 that government is siloed and that technology sits in
23 silos is a huge problem.

24 And I think ways to address that
25 include, of course, procurement reform. I pretty much

1 agree with everything Louisa said, particularly
2 ensuring that -- that entities that contract with the
3 City get paid.

4 Civil service reform is crucial. That
5 is obviously something that would need -- we would
6 need to look to the Charter to do well. But I think
7 that -- oh, the other thing I -- I care so much about
8 is to look to the MMR.

9 I think it was Andrew who talked about
10 using more of a dashboard approach, more frequent
11 updating. That's something that the Charter addresses
12 directly. I think we might want to consider moving it
13 out of the mayor's office of operations and having it
14 be real -- fed by real time data and available to more
15 people in a more digestible format.

16 I think more than anything what will
17 drive real change in the City government to ensure
18 that technology is used more appropriately, but also
19 to ensure that it is fair and equitable, is to
20 fundamentally accept that we need a unified technology
21 leadership in the City. I would like to see some kind
22 of deputy mayor for transformation and innovation,
23 real budget line, real agencies reporting up.

24 I think only when we have that kind of
25 political commitment to working across government,

1 across agencies, and across silos will we be able to
2 make the kind of changes that New Yorkers deserve.

3 And I want to just respond to a couple
4 of other things I've heard tonight, and then I'll
5 stop. Job displacement came up in the civil service.
6 At Tech:NYC we run a great program called Decoded
7 Futures, where we train New York City nonprofits on
8 how to build internal AI capacity. We have seen zero
9 job displacement. We have seen, as the previous
10 speaker said, much happier employees who get to do --

11 MR. GASPARD: You -- you're over time,
12 Julie. Sorry --

13 MS. SAMUELS: -- I have no more time.
14 okay -- who get to do the work they want to do. And
15 then the last quick thing I'll say is internet access
16 is key to equity, and we can do a lot more in the city
17 and make sure all New Yorkers have access to
18 broadband.

19 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

20 MS. SAMUELS: And the very last
21 thing -- okay.

22 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

23 MS. SAMUELS: I'm done. Thank you.

24 MR. GASPARD: Julie, you're getting
25 five for -- for the price of one, so we're going to --

1 I'm sure you'll get a -- I'm sure you'll get a
2 question or two.

3 John. Is John Furby [ph] Manning on
4 the line?

5 MR. MANNING: Hi.

6 MR. GASPARD: Hello, John.

7 MR. MANNING: Hello there. Thank you.

8 My name is John Manning. I am a
9 retired city analyst and a resident of Bay Ridge,
10 Brooklyn. I am testifying this evening in support of
11 placing a referendum on the ballot this November for
12 having open political primaries for local New York
13 City offices. Thank you for the opportunity to
14 testify.

15 Open primaries are not a radical or
16 controversial idea. Open and nonpartisan primaries
17 occur in cities and states across the nation. I
18 believe they would be an excellent fit for our local
19 situation here in New York City. The situation that
20 exists today in New York City is that the Democratic
21 Party primary is the final event for all three
22 citywide offices and for many council seats as well.

23 The other parties simply can't compete.
24 Moreover, there are well over 1 million Independent or
25 unaffiliated registered voters in New York who find

1 themselves ignored by the process. The current system
2 of primary is for individual parties in which one must
3 be a registered party member to vote. And then the
4 general election between the primary winners has
5 created an illusion of a fair game here in the city.

6 The reality is that the party machine
7 and its insiders have a closed game where being
8 nominated for comptroller or public advocate is a
9 consolation prize for those who didn't have the juice
10 or pull to be nominated mayor.

11 This phenomenon has compounded on
12 itself with the creation of gerrymandered council and
13 state legislative districts that once had vibrant
14 elections where the residents had real alternatives.
15 I'm old enough to remember liberal Republicans and
16 conservative Democrats, as well as many other choices
17 as well.

18 There used to be bipartisan cooperation
19 on such matters as the city's quality of life and
20 economic health. There used to be 60 percent plus
21 voter turnout. Public cynicism about the political
22 process is responsible for today's miserably low voter
23 turnout rates.

24 Every election cycle there are numerous
25 well-intentioned and talented ordinary citizens --

1 retired cops, retired school principals, small
2 business owners, community block association
3 presidents -- who sincerely care about improving the
4 city. And they try running for office, but they
5 simply haven't got a chance to compete against the
6 machine. We must give them a chance.

7 The political parties will still
8 promote their candidates and will not be made
9 irrelevant. A long time ago, the young Fiorello La
10 Guardia was a left-wing blowhard who had been written
11 off. The Brooklyn Republican party gave him a chance,
12 and we got a -- the best mayor in city history.

13 When we open up this process, and we
14 think outside the box and put our ideological baggage
15 aside, we can get a City Hall of people that really
16 care. I ask the Charter revision commission to really
17 make a difference with its work this year for
18 improving the city by facilitating open primaries.

19 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

20 MR. MANNING: Thank you.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, John. Thank
22 you.

23 Commissioners, questions for these two
24 online witnesses?

25 Please, Dawn.

1 MS. PINNOCK: Hi, Julie. This
2 question's for you. Since the City of New York fills
3 over 80 percent of its positions through civil
4 service -- I know you mentioned civil service
5 reform -- are there specific recommendations that you
6 have?

7 MS. SAMUELS: Thanks. There are
8 specific recommendations, and I can get you more
9 details. I would say that there have been, in the
10 last few years in particular, are a couple of examples
11 of things you can even do with a lighter touch that we
12 might want to look at it, particularly in 2020 during
13 COVID when some emergency powers were used.

14 The state did a great job of moving
15 quickly there in particular -- we can get you all
16 those details -- both in hiring but also in partnering
17 with the private sector, which is something I didn't
18 get to talk about. Private sector volunteerism is
19 something that is also a really important element that
20 I wanted to touch on, which isn't exactly your
21 question. I apologize for that.

22 But I have a lot of ideas too on how we
23 can make that work while there's so much energy in the
24 tech sector right now. There are so many people who
25 want to help. And there are ways -- it's not quite

1 civil service reform. It's a little bit closer to
2 procurement reform, where we can really unlock that.

3 MS. PINNOCK: Thank you.

4 MR. GASPARD: Marc, please.

5 MR. SHAW: Yeah.

6 Julie, you mentioned in your testimony
7 the idea of wanting a deputy mayor for --

8 MS. SAMUELS: Yeah.

9 MR. SHAW: -- the exact words you used,
10 but technology; right?

11 MS. SAMUELS: Yep.

12 MR. SHAW: And I -- I guess my -- my
13 concern is -- I mean, we've -- we've been talking
14 about trying to make sure that, you know -- I mean, we
15 view the New York City Charter as, you know, our --
16 the government's constitution. And -- and, I mean,
17 with regard to deputy mayor, the Charter is -- has a
18 simple sentence that says, "The mayor shall appoint
19 one or more deputy mayors --

20 MS. SAMUELS: Yeah.

21 MR. SHAW: -- at his choosing; right?
22 And, you know, given how issues like technology
23 especially changing pretty dramatically over time,
24 were you recommending a Charter change on -- on that?
25 Or --

1 MS. SAMUELS: No. That's a great
2 question. I don't think -- I am well aware that we
3 don't need a -- to change the Charter to appoint a
4 deputy mayor. The point I was really trying to make
5 is that we need senior unified leadership.

6 I actually believe if we were starting
7 from scratch -- if, you know, we were writing an
8 entire new Charter and reorganizing the city from the
9 barest bones, that a CTO not unlike what we have now
10 makes the most sense -- kind of like OMB that would
11 sit across the agencies.

12 But because there's so much history
13 with how we've -- we've had a CTO. We've had a CDO.
14 We've had all of these various tech offices in the
15 past, you know, 20 years. And what it's done is kind
16 of created this Christmas tree effect of, I would
17 say -- I wouldn't say necessarily ineffective. But I
18 would say underutilized and under-powered technology
19 offices.

20 And in order to effectuate the kind of
21 change that I think you all want to do and should do
22 as part of this Charter commission, you need to really
23 put the kind of political power behind it because it's
24 really, really hard.

25 MR. SHAW: All right. Thank you.

1 MR. GASPARD: Please, Commissioner.

2 MS. WYLDE: Julie, I -- I just want to
3 name that -- one of the things that you brought up,
4 which, to the best of my knowledge, I'm not sure we've
5 heard in testimony so far, is around the digital
6 divide, which considering the conversation --

7 MS. SAMUELS: Yes.

8 MS. WYLDE: -- around technology, AI,
9 data feels like a critical piece. So curious if you
10 have specific Charter-focused recommendations around
11 bridging the data -- digital divide and -- and
12 widespread broadband access for all New Yorkers.

13 MS. SAMUELS: Yeah. I think -- well, I
14 would -- of course, I think this is really important,
15 and I'm glad you kind of went back to that. I
16 think -- I would just say really quickly that there
17 has been significant testimony, and you all will
18 continue to get significant testimony, about a lot of
19 the risks of too much technology in government.

20 But I think if we had more digital
21 equity, we actually also lower some of those risks.
22 As far as what we can put in the Charter about equity,
23 that's something, again, that I think, you know,
24 really empowering -- this is -- this is true of not
25 just with technology, but it's true with technology

1 similar to how it is true with budget.

2 It sits across so many agencies, and it
3 is not a single agency problem to fix. And so it,
4 again, requires, I think, through the Charter ways
5 that you unify and ways that you fund the right
6 offices to do the big audacious work we need to do,
7 whether it is implementing technology in government or
8 ensuring that there's broadband access for every New
9 Yorker.

10 And that's something that I would love
11 to follow up with the team on specific ideas. I think
12 that would be a great thing to put in your
13 recommendations.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much.

15 Commissioners, any other questions for
16 these panelists?

17 You know, Julie, I appreciate that you
18 conjured up the old Ann Lowrey seminal story --

19 MS. SAMUELS: Yes.

20 MR. GASPARD: -- from 2021 -- a really,
21 really important story. That -- that column opens
22 with a -- a number of anecdotes. And one of those
23 anecdotes is about a New York City data analyst who
24 had lost her job, and she then had to spend the next
25 six months chasing down the bureaucracy for her

1 unemployment insurance.

2 And if anyone thinks that government is
3 working well anywhere in America, all you need is one
4 crisis that, you know, puts real downward pressure on
5 that. And we saw a debacle of maladministration in
6 red states, blue states, and purple states on
7 unemployment insurance.

8 It tells us that there's so much that
9 we should and could be taking advantage of with the
10 technology that's been available since the 20th
11 century, let alone 21st century. So I'm really glad
12 that -- that you reminded me of that story.

13 And -- and I appreciate testimony from
14 both you and John. Thank you.

15 MS. SAMUELS: Thank you very much for
16 your service, all of you.

17 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

18 Now we're going to return to the room.

19 I'd like to invite Spencer Williams and
20 Jordan Shapiro to testify.

21 MR. WILLIAMS: All right. Good
22 evening, commissioners, and thank you for holding this
23 hearing this evening in Brooklyn. My name is Spencer
24 Williams. I am the director of land use and
25 topography for Brooklyn borough president Antonio

1 Reynoso, and I'm here to share testimony on his
2 behalf.

3 Two of our offices' main Charter
4 responsibilities involve land use and oversight of the
5 community boards, and I'm here to share some ideas
6 about how both can be improved to strengthen equity,
7 efficiency, and engagement with City government.

8 As stated in the preamble to the City
9 Charter, BP Reynoso affirms that, quote, "We strive to
10 be a city where the value, talents, and contributions
11 of every New Yorker are recognized and embraced and
12 where equity and inclusiveness, community empowerment,
13 accessibility, and opportunity for every New Yorker
14 are the unwavering standards to which we are held
15 accountable in all aspects of government, business,
16 and service delivery."

17 Last year's commission made important
18 changes to support affordable housing and fair
19 housing. We are hopeful that this commission will
20 further those goals by including a mandate for the
21 City to create a comprehensive plan.

22 New York City is one of the only major
23 cities in the world that does not have such a plan to
24 guide how land will be used, where investments will be
25 made, and how communities will accommodate growth and

1 change. This leaves too many decisions open to
2 political whims, increasing rather than addressing
3 disparities across neighborhoods.

4 It shows up in health outcomes, shorter
5 lives, hotter summer days, access to open space, lack
6 thereof, and even the number of available school
7 seats.

8 What we need to do is deliver a whole
9 of government approach that prioritizes working people
10 with a just efficiency, a commitment to eliminating
11 disparities, and advancing equity with limited but
12 targeted resources.

13 As part of that, the comprehensive plan
14 should include, at a minimum, just a simple statement
15 that requires the City to do a comprehensive plan
16 similar to the citywide waterfront plan. So that
17 would be a citywide comprehensive needs assessment, a
18 plan for growth, and a future land use map, meaningful
19 community engagement, and a ten-year capital plan that
20 helps to implement the vision, focusing on
21 historically under-served neighborhoods.

22 In addition to that, our second
23 recommendation to support effective service delivery
24 is to increase support for community boards. The
25 community boards across the city are underfunded and

1 struggle to carry out core mandates. Members do not
2 have professional expertise or assistance and are
3 conflicted by being targeted to be supported by
4 various overlapping agencies in the Charter.

5 And so we are calling to create a
6 community board central office that would support and
7 streamline the services that are in community boards,
8 giving to them planning expertise, communications and
9 technology, space needs, human resources, procurement,
10 intergov support, legal support, and additional
11 training.

12 We have submitted detailed comments to
13 the commission, and we are looking forward to
14 answering any questions that you have.

15 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

16 Jordan.

17 MS. SHAPIRO: Hello. My name's Jordan
18 Shapiro. I am the -- sorry -- gender neutral names,
19 you know.

20 MR. GASPARD: Yes.

21 MS. SHAPIRO: Associate board program
22 manager with BetaNYC. Thank you, Chair Gaspard and
23 esteemed commissioners, for the opportunity to
24 testify.

25 For nearly 17 years, BetaNYC has worked

1 at the intersection of civic technology and democratic
2 participation in New York City. We have digitalized
3 the community board application process. We built the
4 only map that lets New Yorkers identify their
5 political and administrative districts. And we run a
6 help desk to connect residents and government agencies
7 with needed data analysis.

8 This commission is focused on
9 efficiency, and so are we. Here is the contradiction
10 that we keep running into. And I'm going to echo some
11 comments from previous folks. New York City has some
12 of the most progressive open data and digital
13 transparency standards in the country written into our
14 own Charter. And yet the City pays a private company
15 to host the website that serves its own laws.

16 That contradiction is an efficiency
17 problem. And the solution has a name. It's called
18 digital sovereignty, or the City's ability to own and
19 freely control its own digital infrastructure. As
20 long as New York City is paying private vendors and
21 consultants for the foundational infrastructure that
22 enables the government to host its laws and services,
23 we are leaving efficiency on the table.

24 Every licensing fee paid to an external
25 software is a dollar diverted from more critical

1 services. And every vendor dependency is a potential
2 point of failure in security and privacy for New
3 Yorkers.

4 We are here today to ask this
5 commission to dedicate time and resources to digital
6 sovereignty as a core component of this efficiency
7 mandate. New York City is closer to this goal perhaps
8 than we may realize -- Charter Sections 20-f, 20-u,
9 and 1072.

10 So that's the Office of Data Analytics,
11 the DoITT. And the machine-readable laws for public
12 records requests already reflect this principle, but
13 in fragments. And this commission should unify them
14 to change how we run our digital services.

15 This is not a new idea. In the 1840s,
16 New York City built the Croton Aqueduct to create
17 clean water as a civic right. And, you know, as a
18 part of the administrative code talking about that, it
19 says, "No patented hydrant valve or stop-cock shall be
20 used by the Department of Environmental Protection
21 unless the patentee or owner of the patent shall
22 use -- shall allow its use without a royalty."

23 Can you imagine a water system where
24 every time a fire hydrant was opened, the City had to
25 pay a licensing fee? That is the system that we are

1 currently in with our digital infrastructure, our
2 laws, our data, our services.

3 So we have three opportunities here for
4 Charter updates in regards to digital sovereignty.
5 One, establish digital sovereignty as a unified
6 digital governing principle, freeing New York City
7 from dependence on proprietary systems and giving them
8 the freedom to provide digital services fully
9 equitably to all New Yorkers.

10 Extend Charter 20-u's existing
11 machine-readable API requirement for public records
12 requests to all laws.

13 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're out of
14 time.

15 MS. SHAPIRO: And to create a digital
16 services team for all New York agencies. Thank you.

17 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, both, for your
18 testimony. Please forgive me for having mixed up your
19 names.

20 And, Jordan, please know that I really
21 appreciate your Gilded Age articulation when you ran
22 through that old code.

23 Questions from commissioners?

24 Kathy.

25 MS. WYLDE: Mayor Bloomberg had at --

1 toward the end of his tenure, appointed a -- set up a
2 nonprofit organization. And the idea was very much
3 what you're talking about -- to establish some kind of
4 digital sovereignty. Are you familiar with that, and
5 what happened to it, and why it apparently didn't
6 work?

7 MS. SHAPIRO: I am not.

8 MS. WYLDE: Okay.

9 MS. SHAPIRO: Thank you.

10 MR. GASPARD: It's an important
11 question. So it's going to be -- I -- I just turned
12 to the -- the staff of the commission to say I think
13 that this testimony is a really important
14 intervention, and -- and Kathy's question is -- is
15 critical. So I -- I hope staff will help us to get an
16 answer to that question.

17 Please.

18 MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah.

19 Jordan, really appreciate the
20 testimony. And maybe a question that is not entirely
21 fairly to you, but maybe you were raising as a part of
22 this -- so it also speaks to somebody previously that
23 was with Andrew, and I think his name is Carl -- is
24 this question around -- as a self-proclaimed data wonk
25 and nerd and stats person for life, right, one of the

1 things that I don't know that we're entirely
2 contemplating is many of these data systems, public
3 records were not contemplated as being open in a
4 digital format, and therefore importantly being
5 combined. Right?

6 And so I understand the previous --
7 somebody else has testified prior -- previously around
8 health records; right -- these health portals. But
9 health records have a massive amount of protections
10 and infrastructure around them.

11 When we move outside of academia and
12 IRBs, internal review boards, structures and systems
13 that say, "This is how you're allowed to use the
14 data," and we bring them into democratizing data,
15 which I love, there is also this massive risk of now
16 being able to combine data systems in ways that we can
17 actually assess very confidential and very private
18 levels of information about New Yorkers and
19 communities that potentially can be very harmful and
20 sometimes weaponized.

21 And I say this being an ED of a
22 nonprofit who has built one of these off of open data
23 laws. So I think a question for you, but also others,
24 to contemplate, because I think this democratizing
25 data and digital sovereignty is a critical piece -- I

1 love your fire hydrant example -- is also a question
2 of how are we not also building a data warehouse that
3 then can be used to -- used against us.

4 And I -- I think particularly from my
5 vantage point, oftentimes that ends up being
6 weaponized or against our most marginalized New
7 Yorkers.

8 MS. SHAPIRO: This is an essential
9 question, and I would love to follow up with more
10 information for y'all about this. Because this is
11 called a federated data system, whereby these systems
12 do not become linked and -- unless you, you know, have
13 particular two-factor authentication.

14 There are many countries, there are
15 many governments, who have put these things in place
16 that have much greater data security protocols than we
17 do. And I'd be happy to chat with anybody afterward
18 and the future about it.

19 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you, Jordan.
20 'Cause that's -- that's a critical piece that nobody
21 has said yet. And everybody's been talking about,
22 like, "Everything can go in one big gumbo pot." And
23 the answer is, "Please don't put it all in one big
24 gumbo pot."

25 And, Spencer, I -- sorry. My -- I

1 don't know why that was what it was. And, Spencer, I
2 wanted to ask you, around comprehensive planning,
3 oftentimes there's a strong pushback of, like, will we
4 end up in just inevitable, like, constant planning
5 cycles? And what is actually the end goal of having a
6 comprehensive plan as opposed to just planning inertia
7 forever? So I want to understand that part.

8 MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah. The goal of
9 planning is action. It's to make decisions that are
10 complex, that require difficult considerations of --
11 comprehensive planning does not solve problems. It
12 creates a framework to support decision makers to do
13 so.

14 And so a good example is, like, when we
15 have a street that has multiple goals -- we need to
16 move freight; we need to move people; we need to move
17 bikes -- a line on the map doesn't necessarily solve
18 that problem.

19 But policy guidance, real budget
20 investment, coordinated whole of government approach
21 means that at the end of the day, everyone who's using
22 that street has their needs met, is hopefully
23 traveling safely, and that we have a budget that is
24 responsive to that.

25 And so currently we have things like a

1 streets plan, and a housing plan, and block by block,
2 and environmental justice plans. And we're doing a
3 lot of planning work. The challenge is that we're not
4 talking to each other to make sure that we are making
5 real strategic investments that eliminate disparities
6 across communities.

7 And so that is a real waste of both
8 government time, but also government expertise. And
9 so when we have a displacement risk index that we use
10 in one part of government but don't use it somewhere
11 else, we've wasted a lot of that expertise, time, and
12 resource. And comprehensive planning allows us to use
13 that expertise across silos and across departments
14 much more efficiently.

15 MR. GASPARD: I know we have other
16 questions on both sides.

17 Kathy? No.

18 MS. PINNOCK: Yes, one --

19 MR. WILLIAMS: Sure. Go. No, go
20 ahead. You go ahead.

21 MS. PINNOCK: Just very quickly,
22 Spencer. So the concept of having this central office
23 for community boards --

24 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes.

25 MS. PINNOCK: -- I'm trying to figure

1 out -- so where would they sit? Because you know the
2 current structure is that a CB reports to the borough
3 president.

4 MR. WILLIAMS: That's correct.

5 MS. PINNOCK: And you're talking about
6 having a central office. What are they providing --
7 just guidance, technical assistance? Are they laying
8 out policy?

9 MR. WILLIAMS: Everything from HR. So
10 the borough president's office is charged with
11 supporting the community boards. And then so we
12 provide digital support and services, HR, space
13 acquisition. There's a whole range of things that
14 each of the borough presidents' offices are doing.

15 In addition to that, the Community
16 Engagement Commission is charged with providing some
17 training and support, as well as the Department of
18 City Planning, a whole host of other things.

19 MS. PINNOCK: Oh, I know. But I'm
20 saying for this central office. And I'm sorry --

21 MR. WILLIAMS: Yes. No, for -- yes.

22 MS. PINNOCK: -- like -- like, who
23 would they report to; right --

24 MR. WILLIAMS: We are proposing that
25 they would be an independent office, similar to the

1 Independent Budget Office. And so one of the ways
2 that you can think about this, particularly from a
3 land use perspective, is that we have a situation in
4 which in -- in the city -- the City Council has a
5 central office, where they are supported with land use
6 staff. The mayor has the Department of City Planning.
7 The borough president has their Land Use office.

8 Community boards are sort of left with
9 the only people who don't have that sort of roster of
10 professional support. And so when you think about the
11 distribution of power in the Charter, particularly
12 when it comes to something like land use review,
13 community boards are at a disadvantage.

14 And that often shows up in a way that
15 they say, "We don't have the resources. We don't have
16 the contracting. We don't have the support that we
17 really need to be a meaningful participant in these
18 processes that impact our communities." And so, as
19 the chair of the borough board in Brooklyn --

20 MR. GASPARD: But the answer is you're
21 proposing an independent --

22 MR. WILLIAMS: That is correct, Chair.

23 MR. GASPARD: Great. Thank you.

24 MS. PINNOCK: Thank you.

25 MR. WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

1 MR. GASPARD: Kapil, please.

2 MR. LOGANI: Yeah, real quick. Thank
3 you, Chair.

4 Two questions. I -- I find this idea
5 of digital sovereignty, particularly with your
6 example, quite interesting. And what city -- what
7 major city in the country is closest to digital
8 sovereignty right now, if you know? And I'd love to
9 know, like, how that's working out for them.

10 And -- and, secondly, if there was a
11 way to do so within the Charter, is New York City
12 ready to be digitally sovereign right now? Or is that
13 something that's going to take a period of time?
14 Like, can you get rid of all these private vendors
15 right now? I suspect the answer's no, and you'd have
16 to build a lot of infrastructure internally to do so.
17 But I'd love to get your thoughts.

18 MS. SHAPIRO: So, as far as I'm aware,
19 most cities in the United States are still partnering
20 with corporate entities, big tech, in order to -- to
21 procure their government services. However, there are
22 many, many examples, mostly in Europe, whereby there
23 are systems that where -- everything's going open
24 source. People are building things in-house. The
25 X-Road in Estonia is a federated -- open source,

1 federated data system.

2 Then your -- to your second question
3 about, like, "We're here. How do we get there," kind
4 of thing, our recommendation is that this becomes a
5 philosophy of how we then approach our broader
6 digitalization program and systems.

7 So if our idea is that we want to be
8 more digitally sovereign, we then put that into the
9 Charter. We say, "This is what all agencies are --
10 are -- this is our operating principle for agencies."
11 And each group -- or however it wants to -- however we
12 want to structure it; right? This is totally up to
13 the New York City government.

14 You say, "Do we do an audit and look
15 what can be trimmed? Where are the biggest contracts?
16 Where are we being sold services that we don't need
17 just because that was what the base package was? Who
18 are the most unequitable companies that we are
19 contracting with? How do we then overturn them so
20 that we can put something in place that's more
21 equitable that we own, that we're in charge of?"

22 Getting those digital services --
23 sorry -- design services teams in order to maintain
24 them, create cycles of leadership across the tech
25 ecosystem.

1 We're many generations into the, like,
2 technological evolution. We have many people who
3 could be supporting on this. And the question is,
4 "Are we asking them?"

5 MR. GASPARD: I'm sorry. So I think,
6 you know, just on -- on my experience having partnered
7 with Bloomberg Philanthropies on this issue in the
8 past, I know that Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Geneva
9 have made significant progress on digital sovereignty.
10 There's no city anywhere in the world that has
11 absolutely, you know, achieved digital sovereignty.

12 But I'd say that those are -- those
13 three are leading lights. And if you look at cities
14 that engaged in the -- the mayor's AI forum, it gives
15 you some -- they -- they actually created metrics for
16 this. And it gives you a sense of how far along those
17 cities are. And U.S. cities are in the dark ages
18 on -- on this.

19 So thank you, both. Appreciate it.
20 Thank you for your testimony.

21 MS. SHAPIRO: Thank you.

22 MR. GASPARD: Andrew Rasiej and Robert
23 Joyce.

24 And, Andrew, please forgive me if I
25 have mispronounced your last name.

1 MR. RASIEJ: It's okay. It's Rasiej.
2 It's fine.

3 MR. GASPARD: Rasiej. Thank you.

4 MR. JOYCE: Chairman and members of the
5 commission, thank you for your time and service. My
6 name's Robert Joyce. I'm the director of policy at
7 Abundance New York, an advocacy organization focused
8 on making it easier, faster, cheaper, and fairer to
9 build and deliver what New Yorkers need.

10 I'm a renter, a native Brooklynite, and
11 a career public servant. I too would like to bring up
12 certain reforms to the civil service system in this
13 city.

14 I'll take the Chair's direction and
15 veer from my prepared testimony to instead associate
16 myself with Mr. Gordon, my fellow witness, my fellow
17 Robert's, points that he made earlier and -- regarding
18 the number of positions that have -- sit vacant, the
19 percentage of positions that require an exam, the
20 amount of exams, et cetera.

21 So in proposing a -- a potential
22 solution here, I would propose that the commission
23 recommend an amendment to require the mayor to submit
24 a five-year City government workforce plan modeled on
25 the capital strategy to propose longer term hiring

1 targets, title combination and reforms, and -- and
2 hiring process and management reforms to achieve the
3 administration's overall policy goals.

4 The -- the larger principle here,
5 zooming out, is to make staffing decisions for the
6 City as a whole, downstream from our overall policy,
7 desired outcomes, and -- and staff from there.

8 So the -- the federal government's been
9 doing this for -- for years now in different ways.
10 I've worked for the Federal Emergency Management
11 Agency at the start of my career in the federal
12 government. FEMA is able to flexibly hire people on a
13 two to four year termed civil service contract.

14 They have the same -- you know, they --
15 they are civil servants in that they are not political
16 appointees, but they come in knowing that there's no
17 guarantee of a job for them after that two years.
18 They are regularly extended but not always extended.
19 And that is because there's not always a large amount
20 of disasters, thankfully, to recover from. And
21 there's not the same need for that same amount of
22 staff. Right?

23 And the -- and Congress and the federal
24 government in recognizing that the needs here are
25 serious, but they also ebb and flow, they've created

1 this flexible structure. DARPA famously is another
2 example of where the federal government does this;
3 right? They set up specialized teams to meet unique
4 needs based on national security outcomes that they
5 want.

6 So the -- I -- I'll leave with these
7 examples and say that a Charter amendment that creates
8 this workforce plan would be a regular opportunity for
9 the City to -- to revisit the workforce needs of the
10 city. And I'll -- I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

12 MR. RASIEJ: Thank you.

13 Good evening. My name is Andrew
14 Rasiej, and I'm the founder of Civic Hall @ Union
15 Square, which is the city's and, I think, the
16 country's largest center for people -- a community of
17 people working on solving problems -- technology
18 problems for the public good.

19 During the transition, I handed a memo
20 to the mayor, warning him that he was about to set on
21 a long -- he was about to set out on a long, arduous
22 road trip, but that the car he's being handed is a
23 1998 Pontiac -- old tires, a leaky gas tank, a
24 steering wheel that comes off in your hand, and a
25 speedometer stuck on 5.

1 I suggested he could choose a different
2 car, but it would take time. 'Cause this isn't really
3 about technology. It's about changing the City's
4 culture of innovation. So I admit I giggled when I
5 heard that COGE was going to work on -- on government
6 efficiency, because how efficient can you really make
7 a 1998 Pontiac?

8 I applaud the effort, but I just want
9 to suggest that you might develop a strategy to
10 upgrade the city to a 2015 Prius. So I -- so here's
11 just one example. When the City buys software, it
12 uses the same processes it uses to buy school buses
13 and pencils -- it procures.

14 But software isn't a school bus.
15 Software starts going out of date the day you install
16 it. And the City's process is so slow -- you've heard
17 about it earlier today, RFB contracting approvals --
18 that the technology is often obsolete by the time it's
19 delivered.

20 Software needs constant updates,
21 security patches, and fixes. So just think about your
22 iPhone. Apple doesn't tell you -- it doesn't sell you
23 an iPhone and then charge you every time the operating
24 system gets upgraded. It -- it does it on its -- it
25 does this on its own because it -- it knows that these

1 security fixes are important to its relationship with
2 you.

3 And the City should have the same
4 processes for the software that it pays for. It
5 should -- shouldn't procure software. It should
6 commission it with -- with whoever builds it and
7 keeping it -- keeping them on the hook to keep it
8 current and whatever is needed.

9 So here's the vision I'd like to give
10 you. Imagine a city where every agency has the
11 capacity to use the most modern tools itself because
12 the real prize, especially with AI, isn't one more
13 app. The tech issues you're hearing about today don't
14 get fixed one at a time.

15 They get solved through deep structural
16 change in how the city approaches modernization.
17 That's what lets -- that's what lets the city's data
18 finally talk to each other. And that's where the
19 massive gains and efficiencies actually live.

20 But that doesn't happen on its own
21 through the office of technology that delivers systems
22 down to everyone else. That's the old model. And
23 it's the bottleneck. Staying current on the
24 project -- staying current isn't the project finish,
25 it's the permanent condition of governing from now on.

1 So let me leave you with two quick
2 recommendations. First, the City should do what every
3 serious private sector company already does, which is
4 put someone in charge -- create the Office of Chief of
5 Digital Transformation led by a CDO, the chief digital
6 officer, reporting directly to the mayor, the first
7 deputy mayor, and a director of OMB.

8 And, second, and this is the most
9 important, is that you create a Commission on Digital
10 Transformation into the Charter itself -- a permanent
11 body that keeps upgrading the City from the Pontiac to
12 the Prius long after today's hearing is over. I made
13 it.

14 MR. GASPARD: That was so efficient.
15 Thank you.

16 Commissioners, questions for these two
17 witness? We have no questions.

18 You were -- you were both precise and
19 obviously really quite clear. Thank you so much.

20 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

21 MR. RASIEJ: Thank you very much.

22 MS. PINNOCK: Thank you.

23 MR. GASPARD: Margaret Brown, Julia
24 Stoyanovich.

25 Are you --

1 MS. STOYANOVICH: I'm Julia.

2 MR. GASPARD: You're Julia.

3 Is Margaret here? Margaret Brown?

4 If Margaret is not here, then I'd like
5 to invite Sherry Chung to come to the table. Thank
6 you.

7 Please.

8 MS. STOYANOVICH: All right. Thank you
9 for the opportunity to testify. Can you hear me?

10 MR. GASPARD: We can.

11 MS. STOYANOVICH: My name is Julia
12 Stoyanovich. I'm a professor of computer science and
13 data science at New York University, where I also
14 founded and direct the Center for Responsible AI.
15 I've worked on AI governance in the city for nearly a
16 decade. And I am a proud New Yorker. I think I'm the
17 first person with a foreign accent here. And we all
18 know that the New York accent is a foreign accent;
19 right?

20 So my proposal is very simple. To
21 streamline the government's use of AI, we must codify
22 AI governance in the New York City Charter. The
23 technology chapter, Chapter 48, is almost a punchline.
24 It still governs cable television franchises, and its
25 most important -- its most modern application is

1 publishing an online map of street closures.

2 There is not one word anywhere in the
3 Charter about artificial intelligence or automated
4 decision systems. And you can hold it up. The City's
5 foundational document regulates cable TV and says
6 nothing about the systems now deciding who gets
7 benefits, housing, or a school seat.

8 Codifying AI governance doesn't mean
9 freezing technology into law. It means writing down
10 three things the City already claims to believe but
11 has never recorded anywhere that lasts.

12 First, disclose it. When the City uses
13 an automated system to make decisions about you, you
14 are told in plain language. Today, the Department of
15 Education assigns every child a school lottery number
16 and then hands it to parents as a string of unreadable
17 code. This isn't transparency. It's transparency
18 theater.

19 Read disclosure -- a real disclosure
20 means telling people in words they understand that the
21 machine is deciding what it is deciding and how to
22 question it. It is the cheapest accountability we
23 have, and everything else depends on it.

24 Second, prove it works. No agency
25 deploys one of these systems where the stakes are

1 high -- like benefits, housing, hiring, or schools --
2 without showing that it actually works. And the City
3 does not buy what it cannot verify.

4 This isn't red tape. It's the
5 definition of efficiency. A tool that doesn't work is
6 the most expensive thing that the government can buy.
7 You don't have to look far. The City's own MyCity
8 Chatbot, costing over half a million dollars, told
9 business owners that they could pocket their workers'
10 tips, told landlords that they could turn away Section
11 8 tenants, and told stores that they could go
12 cashless. All of these things are illegal.

13 This administration shut it down to
14 save money. That instinct was exactly right. And
15 it's the standard I'm asking you to put before the
16 voters this November, so the next half-million dollar
17 mistake is never deployed in the first place.

18 Third, let people contest it. A
19 decision you cannot question isn't a decision. It's a
20 verdict. Anyone affected by one of these systems has
21 the right to a real explanation, a right to appeal,
22 and a right to reach a human being.

23 Machines make mistakes, and they make
24 them at scale. And the only protection against an
25 error you can see is a person you can actually reach.

1 That isn't a courtesy. It's the difference between
2 the government that serves people and one that
3 processes them.

4 Disclose it, prove it works, let people
5 contest it -- three lines in the Charter, three
6 questions for the ballot.

7 I'm out of time. I'm happy to tell you
8 why we need to do this. It's because nothing else has
9 worked, and I've been a witness to this since 2017 in
10 the city. And also I just want to tell you that you
11 should give New Yorkers the right to make this choice.
12 By withholding that choice from them, you are making a
13 choice.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Thank you so
15 much.

16 Please.

17 MS. BROWN: Good evening,
18 commissioners. My name is Cherie Chung. I live in
19 Park Slope. I run a company called Holly, which uses
20 AI to help local governments modernize recruitment,
21 job classifications, and compensation benchmarking.

22 I would love to talk more about one
23 core issue that has been raised by some others around
24 how the City hires, pays, and manages its people.
25 Some of the diagnosis has been shared around

1 challenges that are faced in this system -- 140-day
2 wait just to learn an exam score, a system designed in
3 1883.

4 I just want to add some things from my
5 line of work as a potential root cause in what I've
6 seen of that solution. Across 50 agencies that we
7 work with across eight states, behind a lot of those
8 delays is an HR team that is buried in manual work,
9 rewriting decades-old job sects by hand, building
10 salary spreadsheets from scratch, pushing paperwork
11 through processes that were designed a long time ago
12 and haven't kept up with modern times.

13 I believe that the system that we see
14 in hiring is often slow, not because of public
15 servants, but because we -- they don't have modern
16 tools to deal with the amount of work that they have
17 for the challenges at hand.

18 The problem is solvable. I do see this
19 in all of the clients that we work with across eight
20 states, and I want to give you some examples of how
21 they are using technology to make improvements.

22 First, rewriting job descriptions.
23 Many government specifications haven't been updated in
24 decades. They carry barriers that staff can no longer
25 see after years of familiarity. Something we work

1 with is driver's license requirements, for example, on
2 desk jobs that prevent qualified applicants from
3 applying for those roles, gendered language that
4 shapes to applies, degree requirements that screen out
5 qualified candidates for no reason.

6 The technology that we work with flags
7 these in seconds at scale. For one of -- for many of
8 our clients, they're working through these
9 requirements across thousands of classifications -- a
10 review that no staff member could do in a short amount
11 of time manually.

12 Second, salary surveys -- research
13 behind aligning pay with the market. Today, that
14 means analysts hunting through agency websites one by
15 one for salary schedules, labor contracts, job
16 descriptions -- rebuilding it all in a spreadsheet by
17 hand. The data is usually scaled -- scaled before the
18 spreadsheet is finished, which is why its work often
19 gets contracted out in an expensive cycle. And this
20 is -- prevents the pay from actually tracking the
21 market.

22 And, third, just the rout amount of
23 paperwork. Many of our clients formally did single
24 reclassification analyses. For example, one would
25 take 40 hours of staff time. These now take 30

1 minutes. Classification review worksheets going from
2 four weeks to one or two days.

3 So in many teams where they're
4 chronically and underwork -- overworked and
5 understaffed, AI is a tool that helps them when the
6 mandates keep growing, but the head count does not,
7 and allows them to spend it on strategic work that
8 actually gets people in the door faster.

9 And I do want to say that humans still
10 are making every single decision that matters, and the
11 technology is simply there to assemble the evidence
12 and allow the analysis to become more consistent. So
13 I do believe that treating civil service modernization
14 in hiring as the infrastructure project underneath
15 every other promises the administration has made is
16 important for speeding up the hiring cycle and
17 modernizing how people come into the public sector.
18 Thank you.

19 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

20 Thank you, both.

21 Questions, commissioners?

22 There are no questions for -- for --
23 there are no questions for this panel. But I -- I
24 want to say please do not take the lack of questions
25 as a -- as a lack of interest. I -- I saw lots of

1 heads nodding. There were many notes that were being
2 taken during your testimony and from the testimony of
3 the previous panel as well. Just know that there's
4 lots of engagement.

5 But we're all determined to be as
6 responsible as possible in getting as much testimony
7 as we can before 8 p.m. tonight.

8 But thank you, both.

9 MS. STOYANOVICH: Thank you for the
10 work you are doing.

11 MS. CHUNG: Thank you so much.

12 MS. WYLDE: Thank you.

13 MR. GASPARD: Appreciate you.

14 Hugh Francis and David Lee. Thank you.

15 MS. PINNOCK: Oh, thank you.

16 MR. GASPARD: Please.

17 MR. FRANCIS: Okay. Good evening,
18 Coach and NYC. Thank you so much for holding these
19 sessions and your service to New Yorkers. I'm beyond
20 excited in -- you know, by the passion and expertise
21 of everyone here and particularly our sign language
22 translator. So thank you.

23 Let me start by testifying one thing
24 that I have a strong belief in -- Knicks in five. My
25 name is Hugh Francis, and I'm here on behalf of

1 heymamdani.nyc. This is a coalition of New Yorkers
2 and leading civic tech organizations who want to help
3 this city work better. So you might've seen our
4 posters up around the city. We put them up on the
5 weekend. This is what they look like.

6 Our coalition includes the Mozilla
7 Foundation, the global nonprofit behind a more open
8 people-centered internet; RadicalxChange and -- who
9 design tools for participatory self-governing
10 democracy; Decentral Park; and Polis, an open source
11 platform that's helped entire cities and countries
12 find common ground on hard issues.

13 At my group, garden3d, we're
14 GSA-certified at the federal level. We built
15 technology for everyone from Google and Stripe to
16 Pratt, ACLU, and Brooklyn Museum. We came together at
17 an open assembly of a hundred local technologists.

18 And I'm here to speak to one idea,
19 which is that New York City can become dramatically
20 more efficient by making its technology open and
21 participatory to the people who live here. So I
22 handed you all a letter that we wrote to the mayor
23 about open government and civic technology. So if you
24 see him around City Hall, please give it to him.

25 And let me tell you where these ideas

1 have already worked. About a decade ago in Taiwan, a
2 group of volunteers, engineers, designers, and
3 everyday people got frustrated with the government
4 websites that were confusing and hard to use. Instead
5 of just complaining, they built better versions
6 themselves and made them free for anyone to use.

7 When an official site wasn't working,
8 residents could go to a community-built version that
9 actually did work. And the government would often
10 fold these improvements back into the real thing. It
11 cost the public almost nothing. And it turned
12 ordinary residents into a volunteer workforce, quietly
13 making public services better.

14 Over time, officials saw how valuable
15 this was and started inviting those volunteers to help
16 directly. And one of them was Audrey Tang. She went
17 on to be Taiwan's first digital minister. And she
18 brought that same open, practical approach to into
19 government.

20 Every week she held open office
21 hours -- a full day where anyone could walk in and
22 share an idea about how to make the government better.
23 She kept her work transparent, publishing notes from
24 her meetings so that the public could follow along.

25 And she built simple online tools that

1 let everyday residents weigh in on real decisions,
2 from how to regulate rideshare apps to the pandemic
3 response, where volunteers used open government data
4 to build real time maps showing which pharmacies had
5 masks in stock -- and in a matter of days, instead of
6 waiting for a long contract.

7 Audrey is now a Mozilla Foundation
8 fellow among with many other similar thinkers. And
9 this isn't unique to Taiwan. The U.S. web design
10 system built openly by the federal team at 18F cut
11 development time for agencies up to 30 percent.

12 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're at time.

13 MR. FRANCIS: Okay.

14 MR. GASPARD: Just --

15 MR. FRANCIS: All I'm saying is we're
16 here to help. This is not a rigid blueprint. But we
17 do feel that we could work with the connections of key
18 thinkers in this space, build --

19 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're at time.
20 We --

21 MR. FRANCIS: Okay. Okay. Thank you.
22 Thanks for listening.

23 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.
24 Please.

25 MR. LEE: Mr. Chair, commissioners,

1 thanks so much for being here. It's an amazing day
2 for New York City civics, as always. My name is David
3 Lee. I am a fiscal policy analyst at the Center for
4 New York City Affairs. And I also am an AI and
5 climate physics researcher at Columbia University.
6 However, I'm here specifically in my own capacity.

7 So, needless to say, I spent a lot of
8 time playing around with data from New York City.
9 Transparency and accessibility of the public data are
10 of course the paramount priorities of effective
11 digital governance. And in the last decade and a half
12 or so, the City has made really great strides towards
13 the idea of intuitive data infrastructure.

14 One great example being Local Law 11
15 passed in 2012 under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg,
16 colloquially known as the open data law, as well as
17 subsequent -- subsequent changes to the Local Laws 37
18 and 38 in 2014 that mandated the publication of
19 machine-readable laws -- so the City sources of law,
20 Charter, Administrative Code, and -- and the Rules, as
21 well as the City record.

22 Now, I have just some -- two, you know,
23 bite-sized proposed amendments to the City Charter to
24 help make more of this data, specifically on the
25 fiscal and budgetary side, more accessible.

1 So the first requirement -- or the
2 first proposal I have is to impose machine readability
3 requirements for something I would call the Annual
4 Comprehensive Financial Report or the ACFR, as some of
5 you know. This is required to be published by the
6 City Comptroller four months after the conclusion of a
7 city's fiscal year.

8 There is, to my knowledge, no Charter
9 requirement that actually mandates that the
10 comptroller publish all of the many hundreds of pages
11 of statistics in a -- in a machine-readable format.
12 In fact, this practice was only very recently started
13 under a former comptroller, Brad Lander, and hopefully
14 will be continued by Comptroller Mark Levine. So it
15 would be nice to enshrine that within the Charter as
16 an explicit requirement.

17 And then, secondly, you know, one of my
18 favorite things to do is -- is just going through the
19 reams of New York City budget data at 3 a.m. on a
20 Friday night. And it's just so much fun to do it, and
21 I'm so glad to be in good company with others who
22 hopefully feel the same way. But there's some
23 problems with it.

24 And one problem is on some documents
25 you don't quite have that granular subdivision of

1 expense budget data. So to give one example, if you
2 go to the expense budget data that disaggregates based
3 on funding source -- federal, state, local,
4 interagency lending -- you actually don't go down
5 below the unit of appropriation level. It only stops
6 there.

7 You don't go down to the smaller budget
8 items, but budget code, numbers, and -- and names.
9 And then, secondly, I'm calling for a consistent data
10 ontology that is consistent across time; right? We
11 want to do longitudinal studies to actually study our
12 fiscal policy changes over time. Let's make labeling
13 and --

14 MR. GASPARD: You're out of time.

15 MR. LEE: -- consistent. And I'm
16 finished. Thanks so much for your service to the
17 city.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. That was
19 great.

20 Questions from commissioners? You
21 sure?

22 All right. Thank you so very much.

23 MR. LEE: Thank you so much.

24 MS. WYLDE: Thank you.

25 MR. GASPARD: A lot of enthusiasm on

1 that panel. It was fantastic.

2 Margaret Brown and Charlotte -- one
3 sec -- Charlotte Munn-Wood. Margaret and Charlotte.
4 Margaret and Charlotte, paging.

5 Are you Margaret or Charlotte?

6 MS. MUNN-WOOD: I'm Charlotte.

7 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Charlotte. I
8 will assume Margaret is no longer here and -- well,
9 we'll move to online testimony next.

10 Please.

11 MS. MUNN-WOOD: Sounds good. Thank you
12 very much.

13 MR. GASPARD: You're on your own.

14 MS. MUNN-WOOD: I guess so. Good
15 evening, everyone. To Chairperson Gaspard and members
16 of the committee, my name is Charlotte, like the
17 spider, and I'm a working musician and a New York
18 constituent who lives in upper Manhattan. Thank you
19 for the opportunity for me to give testimony regarding
20 changes to the City Charter.

21 I have never worked in government or
22 politics, so I apologize in advance for my unpolished
23 delivery and any shakiness of the voice that you may
24 notice.

25 My neighborhood is Washington Heights.

1 And if you're familiar with the area around New York
2 Presbyterian Hospital, you will know that there's an
3 unusually high population of street drug use and
4 chronic homelessness. Some of my homeless neighbors
5 have been hanging out and breaking down in the 168th
6 Street subway stop for as long as I've lived in the
7 neighborhood. And that started in early 2021.

8 As study after study finds poverty and
9 untreated mental illness are the primary underlying
10 contributors to street drug use and homelessness,
11 despite this research, New York's first line of
12 treatment for these issues is a police response.

13 Despite the disastrous and sometimes
14 deadly track record that the police have with regard
15 to deescalating situations involving mental health and
16 addiction, officers are still dispatched to respond
17 first, and sometimes only, to 911 calls involving
18 mental health.

19 Most recently in the case of Jabez
20 Chakraborty, police response to a 911 call requesting
21 medical assistance led to Jabez being shot four times
22 in the chest while he was experiencing a mental health
23 crisis. The New York City of the 21st century has no
24 place for police violence towards New Yorkers,
25 especially those experiencing mental or physical

1 distress.

2 This is why I'm speaking in support of
3 the creation of a Department of Community Safety
4 through revisions to the City Charter. My neighbors
5 and I deserve to be able to call for medical help
6 without fearing misunderstanding by the police or
7 potentially deadly escalation of the situation by
8 responding officers.

9 With the creation of a Department of
10 Community safety, New York City has the opportunity to
11 separate the threat of physical violence from its care
12 response. We also have the opportunity to more
13 effectively and efficiently allocate funding currently
14 earmarked for the New York Police Department, whose
15 overtime spending, for instance, is expended -- is
16 expected to reach 860 million dollars in fiscal year
17 2026.

18 To better serve New Yorkers and to keep
19 the budget balanced, why not divert funding from
20 policing and reinvest in programs of prevention and
21 rehabilitation as housed in a Department of Community
22 Safety. Thank you.

23 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

24 Questions from commissioners?

25 Thank you. There are -- there are no

1 questions. Your testimony is well-received. You
2 know, of course the mayor established the -- the
3 Office of the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and many
4 of these questions are being taken up --

5 MS. MUNN-WOOD: I'm very glad to hear
6 that. Yes.

7 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so very much.

8 MS. MUNN-WOOD: Thank you.

9 MR. GASPARD: We will now receive
10 testimony from two online participants, Stacey Vogue
11 [ph] and Robin Graham.

12 MS. VOGUE: Hi. Could you hear me?

13 MR. GASPARD: Yes, we can. And we can
14 see you.

15 MS. VOGUE: Hi. Good evening. I am --
16 I'm going to try and make this as short as possible.
17 So I'm a parent advocate for families with
18 disabilities. My lane is autism. About a few years
19 ago, Gale Brewer --

20 MR. GASPARD: I'm -- I'm sorry. Are
21 you Stacey or Robin?

22 MS. VOGUE: Stacey.

23 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Stacey.

24 MS. VOGUE: Yep.

25 Gale Brewer and I were working -- we

1 were trying to get a public school built. I had to do
2 a report to present to David Banks' and Brad Lander's
3 office. And why this is really important is the DOE
4 and the HR departments are not talking to each other,
5 and there is a lot of confusion within the communities
6 of disability.

7 And it's very stressful. There's a
8 tremendous amount of paperwork that gets lost.
9 There's not one place that has all the information, as
10 Ruth Messinger was saying, like our healthcare system
11 in a hospital. You go to Northwell, they have
12 everything.

13 So I'm going to recommend a commission
14 based on both parents who have children with
15 disabilities -- 'cause I think it's really important.
16 A lot of time the commission and people in politics
17 have no idea what we're going through. And the DOE
18 and the HR department are broken.

19 And one of the interesting parts that
20 came out of this for me is there was no data. There
21 was no data to get. There was nothing. Because
22 nobody's been collecting data on this community. So
23 whether it's AI -- which sounds like it would help,
24 but you do need people.

25 But you need a commission or a

1 committee to sit together and really write down how to
2 make this run smoother. I also think you would save a
3 lot of money. 'Cause I think there's a lot of people
4 who are being hired who are not really doing enough
5 for the child that needs help.

6 And then what happens, the parent will
7 pass away, and this young adult is on their own. And
8 they don't have -- I have reams and boxes of paperwork
9 because that's the only way that we could represent
10 our child to get help within the system. New York
11 State is one of the best states for disabilities. So
12 I thank the state for that.

13 But that's my -- I can go on, but it's
14 late. So I just want to say I think it really needs
15 to be addressed.

16 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much. Thank
17 you.

18 Robin.

19 MS. GRAHAM: Good evening,
20 commissioners. And thank you so much for this
21 platform. My name is Robin Graham, and I'm
22 representing the voiceless -- the members of the
23 incarcerated community and their family members.

24 For 24 years, I have been mentoring
25 incarcerated citizens and returning citizens through

1 writing, sharing mental health issues, and responding
2 to them on JPay and Securus Technologies. I have to
3 say it's been a wonderful experience having them have
4 access to tablets while in prison. It really cut down
5 on stamps as such.

6 However, Securus Technologies has been
7 gingerly becoming a monopoly. Securus Technologies
8 charges 6.50 for any transaction -- monetary
9 transaction that a family member sends. They've
10 recently taken over JPay.

11 And JPay was free for families to
12 contact their loved ones by messaging. Now you have
13 to purchase stamps because Securus owns JPay. When
14 you sent money through JPay, it costs about \$3. Now
15 it costs 6.50. Now Securus is also going to take over
16 GTL, which handles California prisons and prisons out
17 west.

18 So my question is, can we take the
19 technology out of the hands of those vendors who are
20 pilfering the pockets of the loved ones, who are
21 already struggling financially and then trying to send
22 money to their loved ones?

23 It costs 2.55 right now for a money
24 order. So over the course of a year, it would be
25 \$61.20 if they were to send money orders. Some

1 prisons don't accept money orders. They'd rather you
2 use the Securus or another payment program.

3 If the loved one was to send two
4 payments per month for the year to a loved one in
5 prison, it would cost them \$156 as opposed to a money
6 order for the year, two payments a month at \$61.20.

7 So there's a problem with this Securus
8 Technologies. They should not become a monopoly.
9 Because then they have control over the money that
10 they could get for any transaction that a family
11 member would have to pay to support their loved one
12 while they're in prison.

13 In addition, you should look into those
14 other vendors who are overpriced -- selling overpriced
15 items to the incarcerated citizens. Why should they
16 have to pay more than we're paying for a sleeve of
17 cookies, for ramen noodles, for toiletries? Because
18 nobody's looking, and these companies can do that.

19 They're the most vulnerable in our
20 community, yet they are being asked to dig in the
21 pockets of their loved ones just to have the bare
22 necessities. So --

23 MR. GASPARD: Robin, you're -- you're
24 on time.

25 MS. GRAHAM: Thank you. Thank you

1 for --

2 MR. GASPARD: You can finish your
3 sentence. Finish -- you can finish the last sentence,
4 Robin.

5 MS. GRAHAM: Oh. Well, so I just
6 wanted to say for those who don't have a voice who
7 could not attend, that please look into Securus
8 Technologies and how they're trying to monopolize the
9 monetary support of the families who are struggling.

10 MR. GASPARD: Thank you --

11 MS. GRAHAM: Thank you.

12 MR. GASPARD: -- so much. Thank --
13 thank you.

14 Commissioners, any questions?

15 Marc?

16 MR. SHAW: Yeah.

17 Robin, are you referring to the -- the
18 state jail systems or the city jails at Rikers Island?

19 MS. GRAHAM: I couldn't hear you.
20 Could you say it a little louder?

21 MR. SHAW: Are you referring to the
22 state prison system, or are you referring --

23 MS. GRAHAM: Yes.

24 MR. SHAW: I mean --

25 MS. GRAHAM: The state prison systems

1 are under Securus Technologies for the tablets.

2 MR. SHAW: Right.

3 MS. GRAHAM: Federal prisons don't
4 have -- most of them don't have --

5 MR. SHAW: Access.

6 MS. GRAHAM: -- tablets, so they're
7 still corresponding by mail with the incarcerated
8 citizens in federal -- in federal prisons.

9 MR. SHAW: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.
10 It's -- it's just, you know, our -- our focus is on
11 the New York City Charter, which controls the New York
12 City's government.

13 MS. GRAHAM: I understand that. Yes.

14 MR. SHAW: Unfortunately, the state
15 prison system is controlled by Albany. So we can pass
16 that along, but it's not really subject to our issue.

17 MS. GRAHAM: But New York City has --
18 is on JPay, and Securus has taken over JPay. So --

19 MR. SHAW: Okay. There's a new
20 commissioner in New York City at Rikers that we could
21 also --

22 MS. GRAHAM: Okay. Thank you so much.

23 MR. GASPARD: I thank you.

24 Any other questions from commissioners?
25 Stacey, thank you for your personal and

1 public advocacy and sorry for the frustration of those
2 experiences.

3 And -- and, Robin, Marc is, of course,
4 right that we will convey all of this. And thank you
5 for being a voice for the voiceless. I -- I spent the
6 day a week and a half ago up at the Eastern
7 Correctional Facility and understand all the
8 deprivations that you described in terms of the cost
9 pressures for the families that are supporting inmates
10 who are working towards their rehabilitation. So
11 thank you so much.

12 Rebecca Heywood and David Sheldon.

13 Thank you, both.

14 Rebecca.

15 MS. HEYWOOD: Good evening. Thank you
16 for your patience. My name is Rebecca Heywood. I am
17 a former City employee with experience at DOT, DCAS,
18 and emergency management, and a technologist who has
19 advised senior state and local government leaders on
20 digital services, tech procurement, and workforce
21 strategy across the country.

22 I also run a job board and newsletter,
23 helping technologists move from the private sector
24 into government, that reaches thousands of people each
25 week and hear regularly from the people that this city

1 is trying to hire.

2 Technology is vital to how the city
3 runs and how New Yorkers receive services, like much
4 of the rest of our world today. Others have talked
5 about the effectiveness of digital services and the
6 need for civil service reform, but the City does not.
7 We also need to talk about other aspects of the
8 mechanism to hire these types of experts at scale.

9 It has also been a struggle to hold
10 vendors accountable for the technology, products, and
11 outcomes they deliver. We rely on these vendors to
12 build, maintain, and operate vital systems for
13 delivering on our policy goals and make -- by
14 decisions without sufficient internal capacity to be
15 savvy customers.

16 A recent analysis of City spending data
17 found New York City spent at least 769 million dollars
18 last year on outside digital services. We need to
19 make sure that we're set up to see the outcomes that
20 we want to see. There are numerous examples from
21 across the country that internal digital teams can
22 build more quickly at a lower cost, ensuring that
23 residents can access services more easily.

24 A couple of the limitations on the
25 hiring side. There's a lack of transparency for both

1 candidates and agencies on things like understanding
2 rules and procedures, on hiring timelines, and on
3 numerous other issues. This has real impacts on the
4 careers of City employees, the workload of waiting
5 colleagues, on the lives of potential employees, and
6 on residents receiving services.

7 Folks don't know what exam to take.
8 They don't know how to represent their experience in
9 order to pass an education and experience exam. And
10 they don't know how long they may need to wait to
11 start a job after receiving an offer.

12 A six-month or more wait, which is very
13 common between offer and start, is a financial filter
14 to City employment. It selects for people with stable
15 jobs with savings or family to fall back on.

16 In addition, the standard in technology
17 development has been a product-based model for decades
18 in the private sector and has been changing in
19 government for the last ten years or so. New York
20 City has a small number of teams and staff working in
21 this way. But there is no civil service pathway to
22 hire the type of staff needed to build in this modern
23 model.

24 We cannot hire staff at scale with
25 skills like product managers, user researchers, data

1 scientists, and more. The titles that exist for in IT
2 positions don't necessarily align with the backgrounds
3 of people who would excel in these roles or who may
4 have been trained in non-traditional ways.

5 We -- on the vendor side, our
6 procurement model makes it challenging to keep vendors
7 accountable and for the City to deliver on the
8 outcomes we need to see. We often see that we don't
9 have the skills internally and to hold vendors
10 accountable to understand if what they say they can
11 deliver can actually be delivered in the timeline.

12 Folks -- within this product model,
13 it's very common in other sectors to work in short
14 two-week sprint models, not months on end.

15 The last thing I'll share -- just we
16 can manage this through the City Charter. We need to
17 regularly think, "Do the agencies have the personnel
18 they need and the right titles to deliver services
19 effectively?" -- something called out merit and
20 fitness and effective service delivery.

21 MR. GASPARD: Let me stop there. Thank
22 you so much.

23 MS. HEYWOOD: Thank you.

24 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

25 David.

1 MR. SHELDON: Good evening, Chairman --
2 Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. Thank you
3 for the opportunity to testify. My name is David
4 Sheldon. I am a retired organizer and business rep
5 for Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians.

6 I am currently a public member of
7 Community Board 1, Manhattan, dealing with waterfront
8 matters. I am a member of Save Our Seaport, which is
9 a grassroots organization committed to the
10 preservation of the South Street Seaport historic
11 district for about a decade now. And I am an active
12 mariner at South Street Seaport. You're talking to a
13 sailor.

14 Okay. I have, as you may imagine,
15 participated in many meetings with the EDC, both as a
16 community board member, as a -- and as a member of the
17 public in public engagement sessions. We have dealt
18 with a long-term planning for resiliency, lower
19 Manhattan.

20 Of course, where I am, it would be
21 Manhattan. You have the same issues here in Brooklyn,
22 obviously. Dealt with immediate -- more immediate
23 concerns with the Seaport and FiDi, very low lying
24 areas and most recently with the use of the Seaport's
25 Pier 15.

1 It has been my experience, together
2 with that of many others, that public input at these
3 events is largely, in fact, notoriously ignored. We
4 have had convenings of maritime professionals ready
5 and willing to give advice and direction on maritime
6 use and facilities. That input has been ignored.

7 I have talked with a colleague of mine,
8 25 years active mariner in the Seaport, looking at EDC
9 plans for Pier 15. He hung his head, shook it, and
10 said, "EDC is just going to do what they want to do."

11 So as a major efficiency, as a savings
12 of both time and money, perhaps the EDC can just do
13 away with the sham of public engagement. They are a
14 waste of their time and ours. But the EDC show up,
15 show us all the pretty displays and PowerPoints, tell
16 us what they're going to do, do it, and go home.
17 Tremendous savings would be involved.

18 Of course, in the long run, efficiency
19 might better be served if EDC planning were actually
20 informed by public input. There would be fewer
21 sessions, fewer props and gimmicks, more real
22 dialogue, which could produce a better result for a
23 city. It could produce a waterfront with room for
24 small-scale vessel operations, as well as for large
25 commercial ventures that EDC favors.

1 It could bring communities in maritime
2 together across that waterfront. It could produce a
3 waterfront that meets and is at core with the concerns
4 and needs of adjacent communities. It could create a
5 waterfront and waterways that could now, as they
6 always have, join our city together.

7 So summary, two points. Can EDC
8 made -- be made publicly accountable? And, two,
9 have -- would you consider the creation of a Community
10 Board M, maritime, with delegates designated from each
11 of the community boards that share all waterfront --

12 MR. GASPARD: You're at time, David.

13 MR. SHELDON: Thank you.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

15 Thank you, both, Rebecca and David.

16 Questions from our commissioners?

17 Please.

18 MS. WYLDE: Just -- just very quickly.

19 I -- I just wanted to know if you worked during the
20 Bloomberg administration in the city, and if you were
21 familiar, because many of your recommendations are the
22 same reasons that they tried to set up a separate --
23 an entity, a nonprofit entity, that could go outside
24 the traditional civil service system and hire the
25 right people.

1 MS. HEYWOOD: I worked under the
2 De Blasio administration. But one of the challenges
3 is really how do we not create more opportunities to
4 go around the system? How do we make sure that the
5 system is working for the way that we want to be
6 working today?

7 How can we ensure that our agencies
8 have the capacity to hire the people that they need,
9 in this case the technologists that they need, that
10 match modern skill sets and with that can also build
11 internally and can manage the vendors that we're
12 contracting at very high amounts to do work on behalf
13 of the City.

14 MS. WYLDE: Yeah. I totally agreed
15 with your analysis of the problem. It's just that I
16 think that requires state action -- a solution.

17 MS. HEYWOOD: Some of these -- yeah,
18 some of these things may require state action. I
19 think there's a piece, though -- this current City
20 Charter connects the requirement for merit and fitness
21 to effective service delivery. It's saying that our
22 merit and fitness hiring program is what leads to
23 effective service delivery.

24 We don't have a mechanism to hold that
25 fact accountable. And so what we really also need to

1 be thinking about is when we're planning for these
2 things, what are -- how do we learn about the changes
3 that are needed? How do we use that as a basis to
4 then make changes either to how we hire, how -- or how
5 we deliver services, whether that's through employees
6 or through the contracts that we -- that we hold.

7 MS. WYLDE: But, again, that would be
8 state -- require the state to affirm those changes.

9 MS. HEYWOOD: For some civil service
10 title changes, yes. But there is a lot of things that
11 can be done at the city level. I mean, there's the
12 mechanism by which we can even explain how civil
13 service works in plain language and make sure that
14 people have the opportunity, if they have these skill
15 sets, to be able to be in the titles that they should
16 be in.

17 There's mechanisms and use of
18 non-competitive and exempt titles, thinking about how
19 we use those across the City as a stopgap as we think
20 about moving towards this as well.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank you for those
22 suggestions.

23 Thank you, both, for your testimony.

24 David, I -- I respect your skepticism,
25 but I appreciate that even through that you managed to

1 be solutions-oriented, and you have a vision for how
2 we make progress. So thank you.

3 Thank you both.

4 I'd now like to invite Yvonne Lee and
5 Ralph Yozzo to -- to testify.

6 As -- as Yvonne and Ralph make their
7 way to the front, I want to remind all of us that I've
8 noted at several times that this meeting will conclude
9 at 8 p.m. I know there are -- there are some of you
10 that are still waiting and hoping to testify. I'll --
11 I'll give this bit of encouragement to those of you
12 who are testifying now -- three minutes is a ceiling.
13 It is not a requirement. Thank you.

14 MS. LEE: Okay. So -- okay. I'm
15 Yvonne Lee. Good evening. And I'm -- I'm here to
16 talk about -- good evening, commissioners. My name is
17 Yvonne Lee, and I am a lifelong New Yorker. Seven
18 generations of my family was born in Harlem Hospital
19 since 1919. Okay?

20 So my name is Yvonne Lee. I live in
21 Harlem, and I'm a lifelong New Yorker and a long --
22 lifelong Independent voter. I recently retired from
23 Department of Housing Preservation, you know, as a
24 housing and community specialist. I really liked
25 that.

1 We have a democracy crisis in our city,
2 and I see it every day. So now I have more time to
3 walk through the streets and talk to people. We have
4 a primary election where us Independents are locked
5 out. It feels like we're being held hostage if we
6 don't choose a party. I grew up watching these
7 parties ignoring my community. So why would I want to
8 still be in them? Okay?

9 Our 1.2 million voters and young people
10 are registered Independents. I know I've registered a
11 lot of them over the years. And we know that most of
12 our time in City elections is the decision that counts
13 the most is the primary. Because that's where you
14 decide who's going to be on the ballot in December.

15 So you have people not going to vote
16 in -- in November because they don't particularly like
17 the people that's on the ballot. And we all know
18 they're not going to do anything. You're going to
19 have political amnesia the day of the election day,
20 which we've seen over and over again.

21 So we need all New Yorkers. That's
22 what democracy is about -- all New Yorkers be allowed
23 to participate in every election. We don't have to be
24 a Democrat or Republican or Independent, just
25 registered voters. The primaries, that's the most

1 important part of the election. And we need to be let
2 in.

3 We shouldn't be held hostage and demand
4 that we do this and do that. Why? It's never worked
5 for us before. So now why is it going to work for us
6 now?

7 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Yvonne.

8 MS. LEE: So -- yeah. Oh, my time is
9 up. Okay.

10 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

11 MS. LEE: Okay.

12 MR. GASPARD: Ralph.

13 MR. YOZZO: And thank you. My name is
14 Ralph Yozzo. I've been a lifelong New Yorker. I've
15 served in community education council in different
16 areas, and I've worked in the private sector my whole
17 life.

18 I want to go back to the word
19 efficiency. Efficiency also means possible cuts;
20 right? I -- I barely hear anyone talking about cuts.
21 We won't have COGE if we don't talk about cuts; right?
22 We'll have bloating, right, instead of efficiency;
23 right?

24 And I think everyone here should step
25 back and look at the budget. The budget is growing

1 exponentially. Exponential doesn't mean rockets to
2 the moon. It just means it's growing at a percentage
3 of its current value; right? So 6 percent of a dollar
4 is 6 cents, but 6 percent of a hundred billion dollars
5 is 6 billion dollar.

6 So if it keeps growing at its current
7 rate, it's going to grow very fast. It's the -- the
8 curve of a hockey stick; right? In the beginning it's
9 small, but then it -- it grows exponentially. If you
10 look back at the budget just 20 years ago, it was
11 microscopic to what it is now.

12 And so I know we're not supposed to ask
13 questions, but why is that happening? Why is the
14 population of Department of Education pupils
15 decreasing, and the budget is still growing
16 exponentially? Why? That's my question.

17 And I also want to confirm or add to
18 what other people have said that we need real time
19 disclosure of contracts, hiring deals. Did everyone
20 know that salaries are completely disclosed on the New
21 York City Open Data website? Has anyone ever even
22 tried to use Checkbook NYC? Has anyone tried to make
23 sense at -- one gentleman did mention something about
24 the expense budget.

25 And he's right. It goes down to a unit

1 of appropriation, and that's it. And literally
2 they'll have a line in there that says, "Lump sum, 6
3 billion dollars." And the people are supposed to
4 understand this? We should have monthly or weekly
5 classes on what's going on. We have a Community
6 Education Council. We should have a Community Budget
7 Council.

8 And I -- I just have so many other
9 things, but as the chairman said, we should yield
10 time. So in the -- in the spirit of efficiency, I
11 will yield the rest of my time. But thank you.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you, both.
13 Questions for commissioner?

14 No -- no questions.

15 We -- we appreciate your testimony.

16 MS. LEE: Thank you.

17 MR. GASPARD: It is -- it is now
18 7:58 p.m. I will invite testimony from two last
19 participants. And I apologize again to those of you
20 who hoped to be able to testify in person or online.
21 I will ask you to all take the opportunity to submit
22 your testimonies into the record. And we're terribly
23 sorry that we can't hear from everyone. But we do
24 have time constraints.

25 So I'd like to invite Lola Starr and

1 Sergio Marrero to join us, please.

2 I can't apologize enough to those of
3 you who have not had an opportunity to testify. Thank
4 you.

5 MR. MARRERO: Thank you. Hello. Thank
6 you. Good evening, commissioners. And my name is
7 Sergio Marrero. I am the founder of Rebel One, an
8 impact investor that supports tech founders building
9 for social good. Formerly, I led Blue Ridge Labs.
10 It's the innovation unit of the Robin Hood Foundation.

11 And echoing similar sentiments of what
12 Andrew and -- and Julie Samuels shared -- shared
13 tonight, but for -- for years, I've been working with
14 founders who have built to serve low-income
15 communities -- built tech specifically for low-income
16 communities -- you know, Propel -- Grouper, ALICE and
17 everything from SNAP to disability benefits.

18 And sometimes the challenge really is
19 they're building solutions, and it's not the
20 technology. It's they're having a difficult time
21 working with the government institutions. And so I
22 have three ideas to -- to throw into the mix.

23 One is a -- a sandbox of some sort, so
24 where -- where they can actually deploy this
25 technology. And failure is -- is part of the process

1 rather than a long, rigorous process where it -- it
2 only gets, you know, assessed for the entire city --
3 like being able to deploy in a -- an area and
4 understand, you know, iterate and -- and really get to
5 a working solution with community.

6 Second is, for those actually to be
7 paid engagements and not run through the same RFP
8 process, that these are paid -- that they're able
9 to -- you're talking about one to three-person
10 organizations. They have solutions.

11 And -- and I have stories of -- of
12 founders that have built great solutions, tracking --
13 you know, tracking and automatically informing or
14 reporting on landlords for -- for not turning on the
15 heat. And some of those founders, they -- they just
16 didn't get the contract or didn't -- or they couldn't,
17 you know, also build while testing at the same time
18 and -- and closing the sale.

19 So the third is actually the City has
20 done a great job with transparency -- you know,
21 actually creating a place where some of the employees
22 inside the -- the government can share where things
23 aren't working so that -- like, there's really
24 passionate people willing to build outside. And you'd
25 probably be surprised at who will come back and say,

1 "Hey, here's a solution."

2 And I will yield the rest of my time.

3 Thank you.

4 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

5 MS. STAR: I thank you for this
6 opportunity. My name is Lola Star. I'm a small
7 business owner, artist, and community advocate from
8 Coney Island. I am here because New York allowed --
9 has allowed public land to be governed in a way that
10 prioritizes private power over public benefit.

11 Public land belongs to the people of
12 New York, but too often decisions are made through
13 systems that strip power from the communities who are
14 forced to live with the consequences.

15 For more than 20 years, I operated an
16 independent business on the Coney Island boardwalk.
17 That business became a part of the -- a beloved part
18 of the community and the boardwalk experience. What I
19 experienced is not isolated. It reflects a broader
20 pattern in how public land is managed In New York.

21 No entity illustrates that more clearly
22 than the New York Economic Development Corporation.
23 NYC EDC controls vast amounts of public land and
24 shapes neighborhoods, redevelopments across the city,
25 yet operates with very limited democratic

1 accountability and strong allegiance to large-scale
2 developers and private and investment priorities.

3 In Coney Island, the EDC controls the
4 majority of the amusement district. And that
5 corporate allegiance has had dire consequences. I'm
6 going to skip some of my personal experience.

7 The -- the structural imbalance on
8 public land -- in both cases, public spaces I helped
9 to activate became easier to displace than the private
10 corporation's position to replace or monetize it.
11 This is the pattern New York is failing to confront.

12 Public land is being managed through
13 systems that favor large corporations with capital,
14 institutional access, and contractual power over the
15 communities that actually create cultural and
16 neighborhood value. This is not simply a development
17 issue. It is a government issue. It is a failure of
18 accountability. It is failure of democratic control
19 over public assets.

20 If the City Charter is to correct that,
21 it must include the following enforceable reforms.
22 Public land transparency requirement -- all leases,
23 dispositions, and redevelopment agreements involving
24 public land must be disclosed before finalization with
25 time for public review.

1 A community pre-approval standard --
2 major public land decisions should not be finalized
3 until structured community review is completed and
4 publicly documented.

5 Independent oversight mechanism --
6 create an independent body to audit public land
7 decisions and assess whether they meet public benefit
8 standards.

9 Small business protection
10 requirements -- public land should be a place where
11 local small businesses are allowed to thrive. Require
12 impact displacement assessments for all public land
13 projects, including mitigation plans for legacy
14 tenants. Small business advocate --

15 MR. GASPARD: You -- you're -- you're
16 at time.

17 MS. STAR: Okay.

18 MR. GASPARD: You could finish the
19 sentence -- that one sentence.

20 MS. STAR: A small business advocate
21 with enforcement authority.

22 MR. GASPARD: Great. Thank -- thank
23 you.

24 MS. WILLIAMS: Chair, can I just say
25 one thing?

1 MR. GASPARD: Please.

2 MS. WILLIAMS: I just want to --

3 Sergio -- Uplift, Heat Seek, which is one of the --

4 MR. MARRERO: That's -- I was part --

5 MS. WILLIAMS: -- organizations, which
6 is the only way we knew when there was no heat in
7 seniors' apartments. And JustFix NYC, which is, to
8 this day, the only way we know the entity -- ownership
9 entity behind many of our landlord buildings,
10 including how government itself knows it.

11 MR. MARRERO: Thank you very much.

12 MR. GASPARD: Any other comments or
13 questions from commissioners?

14 MS. WOLFE: I just have a quick one,
15 Sergio. If you can -- if you didn't already submit
16 testimony, or if you can send us more real-life
17 examples on the pilots that you were talking about --

18 MR. GASPARD: Yes.

19 MR. MARRERO: Sure.

20 MS. WOLFE: -- it would be terrific.
21 And if you can say, even if you're not sure, what --
22 which ones you think are Charter, and you can say
23 which ones you think are not Charter -- great.

24 MR. MARRERO: Okay.

25 MS. WOLFE: Thank you.

1 MR. MARRERO: Awesome.

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, both.

3 And -- and Lola, I'm going to make a
4 confession to you. When -- when I announced that we
5 were closing out on 8 p.m., and I would be shutting
6 down testimony, you were so demonstrative in your
7 disappointment that I decided to call on two other
8 people. I did not know that you would be the
9 beneficiary of that. So -- so I thank you.

10 So this concludes the -- the
11 opportunity to testify this evening. Again, my
12 apologies to those of you who could not testify. If
13 you wish to -- either submit written testimony or RSVP
14 for one of our other upcoming meetings. Either can be
15 done at nyc.gov forward slash COGE.

16 Thank you, everyone, who testified.

17 Special appreciation for our
18 stenographer, the staff at Brooklyn College, and our
19 hard-working interpreter, who made this an inclusive
20 and accessible event.

21 The next public hearing of the
22 commission will be held next week in Queens -- next,
23 next week -- actually two weeks from now, in Queens on
24 June 22nd at 5 p.m. at the Department of Design and --
25 and Construction. So we thank you for that. That's

1 at 30-30 Thomson Avenue in Long Island City, Queens.

2 I'd like to turn to the commission for
3 a motion to adjourn. Is there a motion?

4 MS. KANG: Motion to move.

5 MR. GASPARD: Is there a second?

6 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Second.

7 MR. GASPARD: All in favor?

8 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

9 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. We are
10 adjourned.

11 (Whereupon, the meeting concluded at
12 8:07 p.m.)

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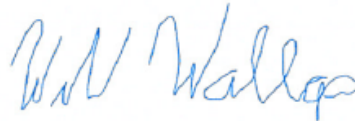
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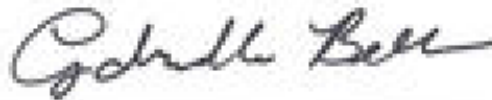


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