

**Testimony of Commissioner Samuel A.A. Levine
New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection
Before the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection
Hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget**

March 19, 2026

Introduction

Hello, Chair Epstein and members of the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection. I am Samuel Levine, Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Today, I am joined by our General Counsel, Michael Tiger, my Chief of Staff, Carlos Ortiz, and our Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Labor Policy & Standards, Elizabeth Wagoner. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today before this committee to testify on the work of our agency and its budget for Fiscal Year 2027.

DCWP is the nation's leading municipal enforcement agency charged with delivering economic justice. DCWP leverages its authority to bring New Yorkers real economic relief and protect them from predatory, deceptive, and unconscionable practices that violate their rights as consumers and workers. This includes pioneering cutting-edge protections, such as the City's Consumer Protection Law, Protected Time Off Law, Fair Workweek Law, and Delivery Worker Laws, including the Minimum Pay Rate for delivery workers. Through licensing more than 45,000 businesses in over 45 industries, DCWP ensures fair competition and a level playing field for responsible small businesses that are integral to New York City's vibrant communities. DCWP also provides essential services such as free tax preparation for individuals and families as well as tax prep services for self-employed workers and small businesses, and one-on-one financial counseling to ensure New Yorkers keep more of what they earn and can plan for their futures. DCWP is committed to making sure New York City is a fairer, more affordable place to live.

I am incredibly honored to be entrusted with leading DCWP in its next chapter under Mayor Mamdani's Administration. Under my tenure, I promise that DCWP will be a champion for New Yorkers and our mission to deliver economic justice to consumers and workers across our city will be stronger than ever. I look forward to being a close partner with this Council, and I thank you for your work passing historic legislation and supporting DCWP's work. Today, I will provide the committee with a fiscal overview of our agency, our successes of the past year, and our path forward continuing to build a fairer, more affordable city for all.

DCWP's Budget

For Fiscal Year 2027, DCWP's preliminary budget is approximately \$74.7 million, with an authorized headcount of 484 and an active headcount of 425. Of this active headcount, only 387 are dedicated to DCWP's work. Last year, our team conducted more than 52,000 inspections and 1,230 investigations on behalf of consumers and workers, securing \$47.5 million in real economic relief for New Yorkers. Our Financial Empowerment Centers helped nearly 10,000 clients with free one-on-one financial counseling, and our NYC Free Tax Prep program completed more than 110,000 tax returns for New Yorkers. We are beyond proud of the work that we have accomplished this past year, and, with Mayor Mamdani standing beside us, we are looking forward to being able to accomplish even more for the City.

Championing Consumers Against Predatory Businesses and Corporate Greed

Since our landmark Consumer Protection Law was passed more than half a century ago, we have used our authority to safeguard the rights of New York City consumers and focused our efforts on securing economic relief, protecting New Yorkers from deceptive and unconscionable business practices, and ensuring that NYC is a fair marketplace for all businesses who comply with the law. Last year alone, DCWP returned \$3.1 million to New York City consumers, and we are continuing this work aggressively. Just this year, we have already announced major lawsuits against businesses exploiting and cheating New Yorkers, seeking millions in penalties and restitution for aggrieved consumers. Our case against Extra Space takes on the business for their false advertising, bait-and-switch tactics, and clear violations of our Consumer Protection Law, for which we are seeking at least \$5 million in penalties and restitution. We are also seeking nearly \$20 million from Radiant Solar for its deceptive and illegal schemes that drove up utility costs for consumers. Finally, DCWP has also taken legal action against three major employment agencies, CMP, Golden Rose, and Eleny's, for systematically exploiting economically vulnerable individuals with illegal "advance fees." This action has already led to almost \$1 million in restitution for New Yorkers seeking employment to feed and house their families, and we are continuing this work.

In the last year, our mandate grew, and we worked to establish new and innovative protections for consumers across the five boroughs. Last June, we implemented Council Member Osse's historic FARE Act, banning costly forced broker fees and ensuring prospective tenants have clarity on other fees related to the rental. We also implemented Speaker Menin's Safe Hotels Act, creating stronger standards for consumers and workers at hotels. This implementation highlighted the efficiency of our licensing customer service, with licenses being approved in only two days, and in-person wait times being an average of only four minutes. In support of small businesses, we worked with Speaker Menin on the enactment of a DCWP license reform package, which eases regulatory burdens and modernizes requirements for small businesses across the city. And, we advocated strongly in favor of the passage of the Street Vendor Reform package, allowing more of our city's smallest small businesses to operate in compliance with City laws.

In the Mamdani Administration, DCWP is taking aggressive and innovative measures to leverage our authority to ensure that consumers have a fierce protector in city government. Under Mayor Mamdani, we announced the adoption of the strongest prohibition of hotel junk fees in the country, which will protect New Yorkers traveling outside the city and those visiting our great city from facing unexpected and costly fees when traveling. Just last month, we also announced the publication of the Stopping Harassment and Intimidation and Ensuring Lawful Debt (SHIELD) Collection rule, or SHIELD, a new debt collector rule that provides New Yorkers with the nation's strongest protections against debt collector harassment. That rule surpasses the protections afforded by federal regulations and delivers 1st-in-the-nation innovative regulations related to the collection of medical debt.

In this new era of accountability, we will go further than ever before to crack down on deceptive and predatory corporate practices, like junk fees and onerous subscription traps. Predatory industries have been put on notice—comply with the laws of New York City or face the consequences. Just yesterday, Deputy Mayor Su officially launched the City's Junk Fees Taskforce, and we are excited about the potential to develop more groundbreaking policy to stop these practices that directly impact affordability for New Yorkers. And, Mayor Mamdani's Rental Ripoff Hearings have been a major step in identifying the key issues affecting renters in our city, including onerous and costly fees. This is all to say that we are

here to deliver economic relief to consumers who have been wronged, we have sent a clear message that preying on New Yorkers will come with serious consequences.

Restoring Economic Justice for Working New Yorkers

DCWP has been and will continue to be here to ensure that workers across our city can come to our office. DCWP has consistently set the standards for workers' rights and labor standards across the nation. Our cutting-edge worker protection laws not only establish greater stability in workers' schedules, incomes, and employment, but also ensure that workers are treated fairly and with dignity. When companies violate workers' rights, we prioritize monetary relief for workers and hold employers accountable to the fullest extent of the law. 2025 was a historic year for DCWP's worker protection efforts. With this committee, we passed laws to strengthen existing protections, and we delivered a record-breaking \$44.4 million in restitution to more than 24,000 workers through enforcement of cornerstone workplace laws. This includes the biggest worker protection settlement in New York City history—a landmark \$38.9 million settlement with Starbucks for violations of our Fair Workweek Law.

DCWP is a national leader in developing and implementing cutting-edge protections to raise labor standards for workers across industries. In 2025, we strengthened our cornerstone workplace laws while advocating for protections in new industries. With the help of Councilmembers Nurse, Gutierrez, and Abreu, we expanded our Delivery Worker Laws, strengthening protections related to tipping and pay transparency, and expanding the minimum pay rate to grocery delivery workers and other existing protections to all contracted delivery workers. We also worked closely with Councilmember Krishnan to pass much-needed deactivation protections for delivery workers and for-hire vehicle drivers, securing stability in employment for tens of thousands of hard-working New Yorkers. With the help of labor partners, and Councilmember Hudson, we fought to enact the Aland Etienne Safety and Security Act, which will provide security guards that keep us safe each and every day with better pay and benefit standards. And just last month, our strengthened Protected Time Off Law went into effect for 4.3 million New York City workers, requiring an additional 32 hours of unpaid time off and expanding the reasons for which an employee can use time off, including childcare, workplace violence, public benefits hearings, and more. This law, as well as our [February Benchmark Report](#), represents a standard for workers rights and stable schedules for the rest of the nation.

This is just the beginning. DCWP has already made great strides this year—we have already taken on businesses and major corporations that exploit their workers. We recently announced a major win against creative production company, Splashlight, for violations of our Freelance Isn't Free Act, securing \$500,000 for freelance workers who were cheated out of their hard-earned payments. At the start of the year, we released a report that revealed the corporate greed of businesses like Doordash and Uber, exploiting and cheating their workers out of \$550 million with tricks to make it harder for customers to tip. In January, we also announced a lawsuit against the delivery app, Motoclick, for egregious violations of the Delivery Worker Laws. And, through our team's efforts, we were able to get thousands of wrongfully deactivated delivery workers their jobs back, and secured nearly \$5 million in restitution. But we are not stopping there, because thanks to City Council, DCWP will be delivering even more for workers. We are working to implement laws that expand worker protections and improve labor standards for workers. None of this could have been achieved without the relentless efforts of workers, advocates, and this Council, and DCWP looks forward to these continued partnerships and doing even more this year.

Setting New Yorkers Up for Success

Over the course of the past two decades, DCWP has remained committed to supporting New Yorkers across the city by helping them reach their financial goals. Our financial empowerment work has impacted hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and their families through vital research, educational resources and direct services that help them take control of their financial health. As a part of the affordability agenda, we want to ensure that New Yorkers are able to keep more of their hard-earned money and that they are protected from being ripped off.

Each year, New York City Free Tax Prep saves New Yorkers tens of millions in tax preparation fees for expensive paid filing services while ensuring they can keep the entirety of their tax refund. DCWP's trusted providers across 141 tax prep sites provide free professional tax preparation services to thousands of New Yorkers. Last year, our program helped file more than 110,300 tax returns through NYC Free Tax Prep, saving clients nearly \$40 million in preparer fees and maximizing their refunds and access to valuable credits like the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits. This year, we are aiming to grow those savings, all while cracking down on exorbitant charges and deceptive practices that too often fill the tax industry. We have already gone after predatory tax preparers who use junk fees and deceptive practices to exploit the people of this city, and we are accelerating enforcement, deploying inspectors across the city to ensure tax preparers are following the law. Under NYC Free Tax Prep, New Yorkers can say goodbye to fees without sacrificing quality. DCWP will make sure you claim every credit you are entitled to.

DCWP's Financial Empowerment Centers offer New Yorkers free, confidential, one-on-one financial counseling sessions with trained financial counselors. These sessions help individuals and families achieve their financial goals and make a huge difference for households by addressing savings, banking, credit, debt, including student loan debt, and much more. Since their inception, Financial Empowerment Centers have served nearly 100,000 clients, increasing their savings by a total of \$15.4 million and reducing their debt by more than \$130 million. In 2025, DCWP expanded our Financial Empowerment Centers to eight NYC Health + Hospital and MetroPlusHealth sites, giving us the opportunity to serve even more New Yorkers and provide vital resources to assist constituents manage their money in the midst of the affordability crisis. We also announced our Financial Literacy for Youth Initiative, expanding financial and consumer education to the youth and families of our city - helping to set them up for success. Through this initiative, we will bring financial educators to NYC Public Schools and youth serving programs, developing a financially-healthy environment for students and their families.

Conclusion

We want to make clear that under the Mamdani Administration, more than ever before, DCWP is committed to delivering economic justice to all New Yorkers and making New York City a fairer, more affordable place to live, and work. We will protect New Yorkers by unleashing consumer protections against corporate greed, strengthening cornerstone protections for workers, and bringing economic relief and financial health to New Yorkers and their families. DCWP wants New Yorkers to know with full confidence—whether you are a worker, a consumer, or a household looking to improve your financial health—you have a champion and passionate ally in city government.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation once again for the opportunity to testify today on the incredible work of DCWP. We are eager to carry forward the torch of Mayor Mamdani's affordability agenda, and we look forward to partnering with you all in this new era of economic justice for all New Yorkers.

Lastly, I would like to thank my team for the support they've shown me from the moment I stepped into this role. In short order, our team has taken major steps to step up our efforts to protect workers and consumers from exploitation and bringing economic relief to countless New Yorkers across the city. As the Administration moves forward with an ambitious vision for economic justice, I am confident that together, we will transform this city into one that is fairer, more affordable and more just. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.