



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS**

**TESTIMONY OF JOCELYN E. STRAUBER  
COMMISSIONER, NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATION**

**CONCERNING THE PRELIMINARY BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 AND  
THE FISCAL 2025 PRELIMINARY MAYOR'S MANAGEMENT REPORT**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025  
Committee Room, City Hall**

Good morning. My name is Jocelyn Strauber and I have the honor of serving as the Commissioner of the Department of Investigation ("DOI"). Thank you, Chair Brewer and members of the Committee on Oversight and Investigations for the opportunity to speak with you today about DOI's Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget.

My testimony will discuss highlights of the agency's work over the past year, our preliminary budget and staffing, and the agency's new needs requests that have been submitted to the Office of Management and Budget ("OMB"). But first, I would like to share some important background on how DOI conducts investigations and the key principles that guide our work.

DOI is the City's Inspector General, a law enforcement agency that conducts *independent* investigations uncovering corruption, fraud, and waste. Our investigations develop in several different ways – from complaints that come into DOI, intelligence developed by the Inspectors General and their teams, media reports, and through joint investigations with our law enforcement partners. When we see potential for criminal charges we generally collaborate with prosecutors and sometimes other law enforcement agencies from the early stages of an investigation, working side-by-side to ensure that we develop admissible evidence and otherwise build the strongest case possible. For non-criminal matters we make referrals of our findings to the Conflicts of Interest Board, or to the relevant agencies for disciplinary action where appropriate.

DOI's investigations hold City officials and employees accountable, lead to recommendations for reform of City policies and procedures, and protect taxpayer dollars from waste and fraud. Our investigative expertise, deep knowledge of City government and critically, our commitment to conduct investigations independently and confidentially, instill confidence in complainants, witnesses, prosecutorial and law enforcement partners, and the public that our findings are based solely on our rigorous and objective fact-finding. DOI's freedom from outside interference from City Hall, the City Council or any other political body in the conduct of our investigations is foundational to our existence as a truly independent Inspector General.

As you know, DOI does not report to this Council, to City Hall, City agencies or any outside entity about complaints we receive and investigations we open, nor do we provide updates on ongoing matters. We share our factual conclusions only when they are final, whether in the form of the announcement of criminal charges, or the issuance of a public report. For public reports, we share final versions with the agencies and City Hall shortly before issuance, to obtain their feedback and ensure that recommendations are feasible. Whether we incorporate their feedback is a matter within our sole discretion. I want to underscore that during my tenure, no City Hall official has asked DOI for updates on the status of our investigations and had they asked, we would have declined to provide them.

As you know, the importance of ethical oversight of City government has been front and center over the past few weeks. We agree that safeguarding DOI's independence and protecting the agency from retaliation is a worthy goal. It will come as no surprise that we have given some thought over the past few years about the best ways to do this and I would like to share some of those thoughts with you today.

There are three core proposals, each of which would require a change in the law:

- (1) First, establishing a tenure of five or seven years for the DOI Commissioner, so that the Commissioner's term would span administrations, limiting the risk that a DOI Commissioner would be subject to improper influence by any Mayoral administration.
- (2) Second, expanding and strengthening the controls around removal of the DOI Commissioner. Under current law, the Mayor may remove the Commissioner after making a statement of

Friday, March 14, 2025

reasons for the termination, to be provided to the Department of Citywide Administrative Services and the DOI Commissioner, who has an opportunity to respond. To reduce the risk of removal for an improper purpose, the law should be amended to add a requirement that removal be for cause only, and with approval of the City Council, which can hold a public hearing to further explore the Mayor's statement of reasons and the Commissioner's response. This process would provide a check on the Mayor's removal power, and allow for a public exploration of the basis for the proposed removal. This process also is consistent with the appointment process for the Commissioner, who must be confirmed by the City Council.

- (3) Third, providing DOI budget independence, which would reduce the risk of City Hall control of, or retaliation against, DOI through control of the agency's budget and staffing. To be clear, while DOI has not been the target of retaliation during my tenure, at the same time our budgetary needs do not seem to be a key priority for this administration. As you are well aware, the City's budgetary challenges have significantly impacted DOI's ability to hire and to retain employees. Budget cuts that have applied equally to all City agencies have been particularly difficult for DOI due to our small size, and the constant shifts in the City's approach to hiring have made long-term planning with respect to staffing difficult if not impossible. The OMB approval process for hiring as well as capital funding also is extremely time-consuming.

Budgetary independence for oversight agencies is a feature of many City institutions, such as the City Campaign Finance Board, which sets its own budget; the Independent Budget Office, whose funding is a set percentage of the budget of OMB; and the Civilian Complaint Review Board, whose staffing is based on a percentage of the budgeted headcount of the New York City Police Department ("NYPD"), which it oversees. Funding DOI at an appropriate percentage of the City budget and giving DOI full control over its hiring, for example, would safeguard DOI's independence and reinforce the City's commitment to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. The Inspector General for the City of Chicago's budget is set in this way.

I believe these protections would further strengthen DOI's independence and that now is the time to consider them.

### **DOI's Accomplishments**

2024 was an extremely productive year for DOI. The work that we have done, ranging from large-scale criminal cases that have yielded numerous convictions, to complex criminal investigations of senior City officials, to public reports and recommendations about a range of issues, from the City's oversight of non-profit contracts to combatting contraband smuggling into Rikers, is a credit to our skilled and dedicated team of DOI investigators, auditors, and data analysts, and the support of our entire operational staff and our executive team. Together, they make DOI's accomplishments possible. Again and again, over the last three years, we have asked them to take on more work and more responsibility, often for no additional compensation, and every time they have stepped up and served the City admirably under very challenging conditions. I am very grateful to them.

To give you a sense of our accomplishments over the past year, I will share the statistics on certain major indicators and highlight particular investigations and prosecutions. I encourage you to review our 2024 calendar year-end report, which has been distributed with my testimony, and provides a full picture of the results of DOI's hard work.

A unique feature of DOI is that when we find misconduct, whether or not our findings result in criminal charges, we consider whether changes to City policies and procedures might close corruption vulnerabilities, limiting the risk of future misconduct. And if so, we make recommendations for policy and procedural reform. These recommendations, while not mandatory, are public, providing transparency about

Friday, March 14, 2025

areas where City practices, in our view, can improve. This past year we have focused on older pending recommendations, engaging with the agencies to advance them to accepted and implemented status.

In 2024, DOI made 370 arrests, a nearly 59% increase from 2022 when I began my tenure at DOI. Since 2022, the complaints we receive rose considerably, to approximately 14,800 in 2024, as did the number of cases we referred for prosecution, to approximately 498 in 2024. These figures are extraordinary given the number of resource-driven complex investigations underway at DOI and the approximately 10% decrease in our overall staffing since the beginning of 2022.

Last year, DOI and our law enforcement partners announced notable complex investigations leading to significant criminal prosecutions targeting official pay-to-play schemes and other misconduct, including:

- The arrests of two former high-ranking Fire Department officials on bribery and related charges for soliciting and accepting tens of thousands of dollars in payments in exchange for providing preferential treatment to certain individuals and companies with matters pending before the Bureau of Fire Prevention. Both defendants have pled guilty and no longer work for New York City.
- The indictment of Mayor Adams on bribery and campaign finance charges for allegedly obtaining illegal campaign contributions and luxury travel through the City government positions he has held for nearly a decade. As you know, the federal District Judge assigned to the case currently is considering the Department of Justice's motion to dismiss the charges, on grounds unrelated to the strength of the case or the conduct of the investigation.
- The arrest of a former City Hall official on witness tampering and destruction of evidence charges in connection with the investigation of alleged illegal campaign contributions to the Mayor. That case remains pending.
- The indictment of the Mayor's former Chief Advisor for monetizing her government position and influence to benefit herself and her family.
- The arrests of 70 current and former employees of the New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") for accepting cash payments from vendors in exchange for awarding NYCHA contracts, driving up the cost of services and depriving NYCHA residents of valuable resources. To date, 64 of the 70 defendants have been convicted; cases against six defendants remain pending. DOI made 14 recommendations to NYCHA as a result of this investigation, all of which have been implemented.
- The indictment of a company and six of its executives and employees, for operating a sham safety training school that issued safety certificates and cards to approximately 20,000 students. Nineteen individuals also were charged with acting as brokers by connecting individuals seeking safety certification to the school. Fourteen of the defendants have pled guilty and an additional defendant was convicted after trial. In light of the findings in this investigation, DOI issued a number of recommendations to the City Department of Buildings to improve its oversight of the construction Site Safety Training requirements mandated by the Local Law.

DOI investigations over the last year also focused on theft of City funds as well as misconduct impacting some of the City's most vulnerable residents, resulting in, for example:

- The guilty plea of a former fiscal officer who stole nearly \$2.3 million from the City-funded nonprofit where she worked, and spent the funds on home remodeling, landscaping, and luxury goods;

- A 42-month prison sentence for a Florida woman who defrauded at least 120 low-income City residents out of nearly \$50,000 in benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program;
- The indictment of a landlord and corporate entities he controlled for maintaining uninhabitable conditions in his rent-regulated properties, to induce the tenants to vacate so that he could sell the properties for profit; and for filing false documents with City agencies to conceal ownership of those buildings and evade responsibility for treatment of his tenants. DOI issued four recommendations to the City Department of Housing Preservation and Development to strengthen the City's response to landlords who persistently neglect their properties.

Another key aspect of DOI's mission is to provide public transparency with respect to the operations, practices and conduct of City government. We do this, in part, through our public reports. In 2024 DOI published 15 reports that explored important issues including the misuse of City-issued parking placards; compliance and governance risks at 51 City-funded nonprofits that operate City homeless shelters; safety, disciplinary, and staffing challenges at ACS's juvenile detention facilities; and a review of the NYPD's Community Response Team that found insufficient public information about the unit and an absence of written policies and procedures governing the unit's operations. These reports shed light on issues of significance to City Government by detailing DOI's factual findings and our recommendations for critical policy and procedural change.

#### **DOI's Fiscal Year 2025 Preliminary Budget**

DOI's Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget is \$54.9 million: \$30.3 million for personal services ("PS") and \$24.6 million for other than personal services ("OTPS"). At the start of Fiscal Year 2026, as it has in previous years, DOI anticipates receiving an additional \$1.6 million dollars in Intra-City funds from other agencies that support a portion of our staffing. The total Fiscal 2026 budget will support an anticipated 450 employees - 310 funded through DOI's budget and Memoranda of Understanding ("MOU") arrangements with other City agencies and public authorities, including NYCHA and NYC Health + Hospitals; and 140 who are on-loan employees directly funded by other agencies.

We recognize the enormous budget challenges that the City – and therefore all City agencies – continue to grapple with. I want to highlight today the aspects of the budget process that have been most difficult for DOI and that can impede our ability to fully fulfill our mission:

- The City's two-for-one hiring process significantly reduces our ability to hire qualified staff to fill critical vacancies. In light of past headcount cuts, all of our open positions are critical and two-for-one hiring materially delays, and sometimes prevents, the hiring of candidates that we have spent time and resources recruiting. For example, DOI made offers to three candidates to fill Investigative Analyst positions between September and October 2023. DOI did not receive OMB approval for these positions until July 2024, November 2024 and January 2025, respectively. Understandably, given that almost eighteen months had passed since the initial offer, one of the three candidates opted not to join DOI. Not only do we have to begin recruitment for that position anew, these delays in hiring require current staff to absorb the additional workload, leading to burnout and ultimately greater attrition.
- DOI has lost staff at all levels to private, state, and federal entities due to the disproportionately low salaries we offer, and the lack of growth opportunities permitted by the City's current hiring and promotion practices, which puts DOI at further risk of losing critical staff. For example, DOI's Deputy Agency Chief Contracting Officer ("DACCO") left the agency in September 2023 and despite several rounds of recruitment and offers to candidates, we have been unable to fill

the position because the current OMB hiring policies require us to offer a salary that is materially lower than DACCO salaries offered by similarly-sized City agencies.

DOI's current OTPS budget primarily pays the rent for our office space and the expenses of our monitorships (which as you know are paid to outside monitoring firms, not to DOI staff). DOI's baseline OTPS funding was cut by approximately \$4 million due to PEGs in Fiscal Year 2024. DOI's OTPS budget does not cover standard law enforcement agency expenses – such as cars, technology and training. We have used forfeiture funding to cover those expenses and while that is a permissible use of forfeiture funds, the funds are limited and the City should be prepared to fund our operating expenses in the future.

- DOI rarely seeks capital funding from OMB, but delays in that funding also have required us to use forfeiture funds for critical agency needs. For example, we decided in 2023 to obtain a new case management system, to replace an aging system that lacked key functionalities, including readily accessible records and case files, streamlined export capability for production of discovery, and the ability to easily generate statistical information. We submitted a request to OMB in 2023 for capital funding for this basic operational law enforcement need, a request that met all the capital funding requirements. However, after well over a year of back-and-forth with OMB, when DOI still did not have a clear path or timeline to approval, the urgency of our need required us to abandon the capital request and leverage forfeiture funding to procure Kaseware, our new electronic case management system which will cost approximately \$2.8 million that will be paid over five years.

I am pleased to say that Kaseware just launched last month, and DOI staff are learning to navigate the new system, one that vastly improves DOI's ability to maintain and access its information.

I want to return for the moment to the topic of forfeiture funds and the role that they play in supporting DOI's operations. Both federal and state law provide for forfeiture by defendants of the profits of criminal activity to the government, and for sharing of those funds with the investigating agencies that worked on the case. Forfeiture funds must be used to support legitimate law enforcement activities. The majority of our forfeiture funds come from federal prosecutions. There are very strict DOJ Guidelines on how forfeiture funds can be used and for what purposes, and the guidelines require that forfeiture funds **supplement**, not supplant, DOI's budget. This means the City cannot reduce DOI's budget due to the availability of forfeiture funds.

DOI has used forfeiture funds to support its basic operational needs, as I have just explained, but those funds are limited. The majority of our forfeiture funds came from the 2011 CityTime case, in which the defendants were ordered to forfeit very significant funds, a portion of which were shared with DOI. DOI has continued to receive forfeiture funds from the CityTime case as recently as 2023, through the identification and sale of properties subject to forfeiture. But DOI will not be able to fund our basic law enforcement needs with forfeiture indefinitely because we cannot expect to receive forfeiture in that amount again. Our use of forfeiture funds between FY22 and FY25 to fund our operational needs has saved the City \$16.2 million, but in the future the City must be prepared to fund those needs, when our forfeiture funding runs out. From 2014 through 2024, DOI spent an average of \$2.5 million forfeiture funds per year; however, in FY25 alone, that amount increased to \$10.2 million, taking into account the use of forfeiture funding to support our operational needs in light of the City's budget cuts.

### **New Needs Requests**

DOI submitted a New Needs' request for the Fiscal Year 2026 January Plan that included an exemption from the two-for-one hiring restriction, since our agency is relatively small and staff-driven and, as explained above, curtailing DOI's ability to hire directly limits our productivity. Critical positions, such as e-Discovery management, have remained open for far too long because, while we have funding available to fill these roles, the two-for-one policy prevents us from hiring for them. The restriction also has contributed to our current 17% vacancy rate. And while OMB has agreed that DOI may make requests for exemptions from the two-for-one policy for critical vacancies, we must do so on a case-by-case basis, with no guarantee of approval. While we have had some limited success, the process remains cumbersome and time-consuming.

DOI also requested \$1.7 million to fund 23 headcount that would support investigative staff, which included investigators with specialized skills such as data analytics, digital forensics and investigative auditing, and operational staff in information technology, finance and procurement. DOI received 10 of these lines, and \$745,000 in baselined funding to staff both investigative and operational units. Four of the approved investigative lines will go toward hiring Confidential Investigators and we plan to separately hire four additional confidential investigators using existing vacancies, to create a group of sufficient size to run our Investigative Officer Training Academy this year. We are thankful for this headcount in a budget-constrained environment, but must continue to ask for the remaining thirteen positions, which are required to fully meet our needs. It is worth noting that over the past three years these ten positions are the first additional headcount that we have received, putting aside the 18 unbaselined headcount granted to us in the FY23 Adopted Plan that we could not fill because they provided funding for only one fiscal year.

DOI has made additional requests for the Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Plan, including:

- \$75,000 to achieve salary parity for five supervisory investigative staff who were not included in the recent agency-wide salary adjustment effort that was approved by OMB and that has improved retention and hiring;
- \$308,000 for modest salary increases to support the successful tiered title-and-salary structure that DOI created in FY 2023 to attract and keep investigators by providing a path to promotion at DOI; and
- \$830,000 for the 13 headcount DOI did not receive in its last request, which includes specialized investigative staff.

These requests are essential operational needs for DOI to continue effectively carrying out its mission.

## **Conclusion**

The New York City Department of Investigation is unique among municipal oversight agencies. The investigations we have conducted this year make clear that we serve a critical City need. As an independent fact-finder, DOI's supports good government and provides public accountability, transparency, and confidence that corruption, fraud and waste allegations involving New York City will be independently and rigorously investigated. I thank you for your consistent support for our mission and I am happy to take any questions you may have.