

1 BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE
2 AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES

3 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING
4 In the Matter of the
5 2025-2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET
6 ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS/
7 GENERAL GOVERNMENT

8 Hearing Room B
9 Legislative Office Building
10 Albany, New York

11 February 4, 2025
12 9:42 a.m.

13 PRESIDING:

14 Senator Liz Krueger
15 Chair, Senate Finance Committee

16 Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow
17 Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

18 PRESENT:

19 Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
20 Senate Finance Committee (RM)

21 Assemblyman Edward P. Ra
22 Assembly Ways & Means Committee (RM)

23 Assemblyman Patrick Burke
24 Chair, Assembly Committee on Cities

 Senator Luis R. Sepúlveda
 Chair, Senate Committee on Cities 1

 Assemblyman Billy Jones
 Chair, Assembly Committee on Local Governments

 Senator Monica R. Martinez
 Chair, Senate Committee on Local Government

 Senator Christopher J. Ryan
 Chair, Senate Committee on Cities 2

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5 PRESENT: (Continued)

6 Assemblywoman Latrice M. Walker
7 Chair, Assembly Committee on Election Law

8 Senator Kristen Gonzalez
9 Chair, Senate Elections Committee

10 Senator John C. Liu

11 Senator Jeremy A. Cooney

12 Assemblyman Charles D. Fall

13 Assemblyman Jonathan G. Jacobson

14 Assemblyman William Conrad

15 Senator Shelley Mayer

16 Assemblyman Steven Otis

17 Assemblywoman Rebecca A. Seawright

18 Assemblywoman MaryJane Shimsky

19 Senator Rob Rolison

20 Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

21 Assemblyman Al Taylor

22 Senator Roxanne J. Persaud

23 Senator Cordell Cleare

24 Assemblyman Michael Tannousis

Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas

Assemblyman Zohran K. Mamdani

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5 PRESENT: (Continued)

6 Senator Patricia Fahy

7 Assemblyman Anil Beephan, Jr.

8 Assemblyman Landon C. Dais

9 Assemblyman Jordan J.G. Wright

10 Assemblywoman Claire Valdez

11 Assemblyman Kalman Yeger

12 Assemblyman Aron Wieder

13 Assemblyman Ari Brown

14 Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan

15 Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar

16 Assemblyman Edward C. Braunstein

17 Assemblywoman Dana Levenberg

18 Senator Robert Jackson

19 Assemblywoman Maritza Davila

20 Assemblyman William Colton

21 Senator Samra G. Brouk

22 Assemblyman Jonathan Rivera

23 Assemblyman Edward Gibbs

24 Senator Mark Walczyk

Senator Stephen T. Chan

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5 PRESENT: (Continued)

6 Assemblywoman Chantel Jackson

7 Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal

8 Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn

9 Senator James Sanders Jr.

10 Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny

11 Senator Alexis Weik

12 Assemblyman Nader J. Sayegh

13 Assemblyman Lester Chang

14 Senator George M. Borrello

15 Assemblyman Harvey Epstein

16 Assemblywoman Karines Reyes

17 Senator Rachel May

18 Assemblywoman Rebecca Kassay

19 Senator Kevin S. Parker

20 Assemblyman Tommy John Schiavoni

21 Senator Jessica Ramos

22 Assemblyman Matt Slater

23 Senator Julia Salazar

24

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1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Good morning. I'm
2 Gary Pretlow, chair of the New York State
3 Assembly Ways and Means Committee.

4 Today we begin the fourth in a series
5 of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal
6 committees of the Legislature regarding the
7 Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year
8 '25-'26. The hearings are conducted pursuant
9 to the New York State Constitution and the
10 Legislative Law.

11 Today the Assembly Ways and Means
12 Committee and the Senate Finance Committee
13 will hear testimony concerning the Governor's
14 proposed budget proposal for local
15 governments.

16 I'll now introduce the participating
17 members from the Assembly. After that,
18 Senator Krueger will introduce members from
19 the Senate.

20 In addition, Ranking Ways and Means
21 Member Ra will introduce members from his
22 conference.

23 We have with us today the chair of the
24 Local Governments Committee, Billy Jones,

1 Assemblyman Jones; the Cities chair,
2 Assemblyman Burke.

3 Also we have with us Assemblypeople
4 Shimsky, Wieder, Taylor, Jacobson, Fall,
5 Gonzalez-Rojas, Mamdani, Diaz, Valdez,
6 Braunstein, Seawright, Bichotte Hermelyn,
7 Simon.

8 And we have as observers, not to
9 question, Assemblymembers Wright and Yeger.

10 Senator?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 Good morning, everyone. So as always,
13 we have committee meetings overlapping so we
14 may see Senators and Assemblymembers coming
15 in and out throughout the day, and we will
16 try to make sure to recognize them when they
17 get here.

18 Also, just because of the crowd
19 interest with the first panel, we're asking
20 any Assemblymembers or Senators who come in,
21 stay on the Assembly side or the Senate side
22 as appropriate.

23 We have the chair of Local
24 Governments, Senator Martinez; the chair of

1 Cities 1 -- we call that New York City --
2 Senator Sepúlveda. We have Senator Persaud,
3 Senator Hoylman-Sigal, Senator Liu.

4 And my colleague Tom O'Mara, who's the
5 ranker on Finance, will introduce his
6 members.

7 (Off the record.)

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Go ahead, Senator.

9 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you.

10 Good morning. On the Republican side
11 of the aisle we are joined by Senator Alexis
12 Weik, our ranking member on Local
13 Governments; Senator Steve Chan, ranking
14 member on Cities 1; Senator Mark Walczyk,
15 ranking member on Cities 2; and Senators Rob
16 Rolison and George Borrello.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good morning.

19 We have Assemblyman Ari Brown, who is
20 our ranking member on Local Governments;
21 Assemblymember Lester Chang, who is our
22 ranking member on -- we don't have Cities 1
23 and 2, we just have Cities. He's our ranker
24 on Cities.

1 And we have also Members Beephan,
2 Tannousis, Gallahan, and Brook-Krasny.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Today looks like it
4 will be a long day, so we have time limits in
5 place which will be strictly enforced. The
6 time limits are, for witnesses, government
7 witnesses get 10 minutes to testify,
8 nongovernmental witnesses get three minutes.
9 The chairs of the committees relevant to each
10 governmental witness will get 10 minutes for
11 questions and a second round of three minutes
12 if desired.

13 Ranking members of these committees
14 will each get five minutes.

15 All other members of the relevant
16 committees will get three minutes and no
17 follow-ups.

18 To all witnesses: All written
19 testimony has been submitted to the
20 Legislature in advance, so we ask that all
21 witnesses please do not read your written
22 testimony to us. Instead, please summarize.

23 To all legislators: Please let myself
24 or Senator Krueger know if you wish to

1 question each witness or panel of witnesses.
2 After the opening remarks of each witness or
3 panel of witnesses have been concluded, the
4 list will be closed.

5 Everyone, witnesses and legislators,
6 should locate the time clocks, which are
7 conveniently located throughout this room.
8 Please note that when the clock winds down to
9 zero, you will be alerted that your time is
10 up. And I don't want to seem rude, but I
11 will interrupt you.

12 Please be considerate and respectful
13 of the clock so that everyone has a chance to
14 be heard. Please note that these time frames
15 for questioning include both questions and
16 answers. So members are respectfully
17 requested not to commence a question with
18 insufficient time on the clock to permit the
19 witness to answer.

20 Due to the length of our hearings, we
21 have no alternative but to strictly enforce
22 these time limits. I should add that if
23 there's any witness now or later in the day
24 that has not yet registered, please do so at

1 the top of the stairs.

2 I will now call the first witness, the
3 Honorable Eric Adams, mayor of the City of
4 New York.

5 Mr. Mayor.

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: {Mic off} -- back to
7 Albany, and to Cities Chairs Sepúlveda and
8 Burke, Local Government Chairs Martinez and
9 Jones, and members of the Assembly Ways and
10 Means and Senate Finance committees.

11 My name is Eric Adams. I'm the mayor
12 of the City of New York. And I'm proud to be
13 here today with my team: Jacques Jiha,
14 director of our Office of Management and
15 Budget; First Deputy Mayor Maria
16 Torres-Springer; Deputy Mayor for
17 Intergovernmental Affairs Tiffany Raspberry;
18 and former State Senator and Senior Advisor
19 to the Mayor Diane Savino.

20 Since day one we've been clear in this
21 administration our mission has been to make
22 New York City a safer, more affordable city
23 that is the best place to raise a family.
24 While we have to do more, we have made

1 significant progress. Crime is down on our
2 streets and in the subways. In 2024,
3 homicides and shooters reduced for the third
4 consecutive year -- and are both down double
5 digits since we came into office.

6 And what's more, our January crime
7 stats are now out, and for the second month
8 in a row overall crime in our city is down by
9 double digits. Last month crime was down
10 17 percent above ground and 36 percent
11 below ground. Shootings were also down
12 22 percent last month, continuing the steady
13 decrease we've seen. And we've removed over
14 20,000 illegal guns off our streets.

15 We currently have an all-time-high
16 number of jobs in our city and broke the
17 record for the most jobs in New York City's
18 history eight times over the course of our
19 administration. And this is important:
20 Unemployment has dropped among all
21 demographics in general, but specifically
22 Black and brown unemployment has dropped
23 close to 20 percent.

24 These achievements would not be

1 possible without our strong fiscal
2 management. We have delivered three balanced
3 budgets. The nation's leading independent
4 credit rating agencies have affirmed our
5 strong fiscal standing. And our most recent
6 preliminary budget includes the largest-ever
7 capital plan for housing, infrastructure,
8 schools, libraries and more.

9 Last year we worked closely with you
10 and the Governor to make progress on every
11 single one of the legislative priorities.
12 Together, we passed historic legislation that
13 protects tenants and gives our city new tools
14 to build the affordable housing needed to
15 take on a generational housing crisis.

16 We won mayoral accountability for the
17 second time, and we gained legal authority to
18 close illegal cannabis shops. The power you
19 gave us allowed us to close 1300 illegal
20 shops, and we're watching the legal industry
21 profit.

22 We passed legislation on red-light
23 cameras and e-bikes to keep our streets safe.
24 We removed over 80,000 illegal vehicles off

1 our streets.

2 And all this builds on our past work,
3 in partnership, to expand the Earned Income
4 Tax Credit for the first time in 20 years;
5 allocate aid to the unprecedented
6 international humanitarian crisis we face
7 together, and so much more.

8 That is why I'm here today to talk
9 about our shared priorities and how we plan
10 to work with the lawmakers to once again
11 deliver for working-class people.

12 We're seeking support in four key
13 areas. First, passage of our "Axe the Tax
14 for the Working Class" legislation to make
15 life more affordable for working-class New
16 Yorkers.

17 Second, passage of the Supportive
18 Interventions Act, to finally allow people
19 with severe mental illness to get the lasting
20 support they need.

21 And third, passage of measured reforms
22 to the discovery law that would continue to
23 protect defenders' rights while improving the
24 efficiency of our criminal justice system.

1 We know how important it is, and we want to
2 continue to do so.

3 We also did something significant in
4 our City of Yes for Housing plan, the most
5 significant pro-housing reform in our city's
6 history. We want to continue to move forward
7 and continue to expand and grow in this area,
8 something that the first deputy mayor has
9 been clear on breaking record after record,
10 year after year, on building affordable
11 housing.

12 And with the help of Governor Hochul
13 and the state's support, City of Yes will
14 invest \$5 billion. These investments,
15 combined with our generational zoning
16 reforms, will create over 80,000 new homes
17 over the next 15 years across every
18 neighborhood in the five boroughs.

19 Working-class New Yorkers must be able
20 to afford groceries, medicine,
21 transportation, and other necessities. Every
22 penny counts to our families, and that's why
23 we're proud that we put \$30 billion back into
24 the pockets of working-class people. Over

1 and 100 Runaway Homeless Youth beds to
2 protect our most vulnerable. We are
3 launching our Bridge to Home program, an
4 innovative model to provide homeless
5 New Yorkers with serious mental illness the
6 intensive support they need.

7 Our administration has already moved
8 2800 people from streets and subways to
9 permanent housing, and our partnership with
10 SCOUT and PATH put clinicians with law
11 enforcement officers to continue that
12 success. This is why we're really calling on
13 you to enact the Supportive Interventions
14 Act, which clarifies that a person requires
15 hospitalization if a mental illness is
16 preventing them from meeting their basic
17 human needs of food, clothing, shelter or
18 medical needs. It also will help ensure
19 people remain hospitalized until they are
20 truly ready for discharge.

21 We are grateful for the Governor's
22 embrace of many of these proposals and look
23 forward to working with you to pass
24 meaningful reforms this year.

1 Next, we also must do more to ensure
2 repeat offenders are truly held accountable.
3 Well-meaning criminal justice reform has led
4 to an unintended consequence, and this
5 includes dismissal of cases due to minor
6 violations. We need your help in this area,
7 as the five district attorneys have joined us
8 in this initiative.

9 Finally, as I have said many times, no
10 city should have to shoulder the cost of an
11 international humanitarian crisis on its own.
12 Our fiscal year 2026 preliminary budget is
13 balanced and includes \$2.4 billion in savings
14 in this fiscal year and the next, related to
15 the decline in migrant arrivals over the past
16 31 weeks.

17 This trend is due to the steps we have
18 taken to put more than 184,000 migrants on
19 the path to self-sufficiency. But we need
20 help. We spent close to \$7 billion to care
21 for immigrants and migrants over just three
22 fiscal years, and anticipate spending
23 billions more in the years to come.

24 While we appreciate the contributions

1 the state has made, we know we have a gap of
2 a \$1.1 billion budget shortfall for this
3 program within 12 weeks that we must fill.
4 This is on top of the costs of complying with
5 the New York State budget provision that will
6 cost New York City taxpayers \$165 million
7 more annually for the MTA needs and
8 \$347 million from lower-than-expected
9 Foundation Aid.

10 We have high hopes for the year to
11 come. We're looking forward to working with
12 you as we fight to make New York City a
13 safer, more affordable city, the best place
14 to live and raise a family for generations to
15 come.

16 I look forward to your questions as we
17 go into the needs of the city. Thank you
18 very much.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: (Mic off;
20 inaudible.)

21 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Good morning,
22 Mr. Mayor.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Last year in the

1 New York State budget we budgeted
2 \$2.3 billion for the migrant crisis, as you
3 just mentioned. My questions are pretty
4 simple. How much of that money has been
5 spent? How was it spent -- programs,
6 et cetera? And what is the amount left over,
7 and how will that be spent?

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Jacques Jiha, the
9 budget director, will give you the exact
10 numbers. But the spending went to all means
11 of care. When a migrant or asylum seeker
12 came into the city, we had to pay for
13 housing, educating the children, clothing,
14 cleaning, security, all the things that an
15 adult would need.

16 And what we have done, as the costs
17 have come in, we have to return the receipts
18 to the state to be reimbursed for the dollars
19 that we spent and how much we are spending.

20 Jacques, can you go over the exact
21 numbers?

22 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Yes. Thus
23 far we spent over \$7 billion. As you know,
24 the grants that we get from the state is a

1 reimbursable grant. So we spent first, we
2 advance the resources, and then get
3 reimbursement from the state. Thus far we
4 have claimed about a billion dollars, and we
5 have another claim for another 750 --

6 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: I'm sorry, you've
7 spent a billion dollars of the 2.3 billion?

8 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: No. No.
9 We claimed -- we received a billion dollars
10 from the state so far. We put a claim for
11 750, okay, and we're still working with the
12 state to process all the other -- the rest of
13 the claims.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: So that
15 2.3 billion that was allocated hasn't been
16 spent down yet.

17 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Every
18 single dollar has been allocated.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Every single
20 dollar has been allocated?

21 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Has been
22 allocated. The issue is reimbursement, how
23 much we're getting back from the state.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay.

1 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: We received
2 so far a billion. We put in a claim for
3 \$750 million. And we're putting in a claim
4 for the rest of the resources.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: So you're waiting
6 for the reimbursable from the state to get
7 the -- to spend down the extra money, the
8 2.3 billion.

9 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Yes.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: It will be all
11 allocated and spent out.

12 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And, Assemblyman, we
13 still have 46,000 still in our care. And we
14 have successfully moved over 180,000 out of
15 the care and we've successfully brought down
16 the cost of the migrant asylum seeker crisis
17 from our 30- and 60-day program to move
18 people on to the next step.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Is this contracted
20 out? How is it actually spent? How is it --
21 through the programs, you mentioned a few of
22 the programs. But how is the money actually
23 spent? Do we contract that out with groups
24 to spend it? How does that work?

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: A combination of
2 everything from housing to utilizing small
3 hotel spaces to building out the Randall
4 Island to building out the Floyd Bennett
5 Field to building out Creedmoor, putting
6 up -- placing the tents up into place, paying
7 for food, paying for services. All the
8 services that you could think of, from a
9 combination of city employees to contracts
10 out to individuals.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: How much would you
12 say is out -- contracted out, out of that
13 2.3 billion?

14 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: It's --
15 most of it is contracted out.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Pardon?

17 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Most of it
18 is contracted out.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay. And how
20 many migrants do you have in your care from
21 when you started to now?

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We've had a total of
23 220,000 that have gone through our system.
24 Now we're down to 46,000. At one time we had

1 a high of approximately 97,000 at any given
2 time.

3 We were experiencing anywhere from
4 4,000 a week, 8,000 every two weeks, 16,000 a
5 month, that we had to cycle through the
6 system. And we got a lot of pushback when we
7 said we were going to limit the 30 and 60
8 days. But people did not come here to live
9 in a shelter. They came here to take the
10 next step on the journey, and we moved
11 forward regardless of that pushback.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay, thank you.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
16 much.

17 Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning,
19 Senator, how are you?

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Just for everyone
21 on the panel, your testimony is getting
22 printed, so you're sitting there going why
23 don't we have the mayor's testimony -- it's
24 coming. So I just want to let everybody know

1 that.

2 And our first speaker -- excuse me,
3 our first questioner will be Chair Martinez,
4 10 minutes.

5 (Off the record.)

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Right, we traded
7 them because Senator Sepúlveda has a
8 conflict. So put your mic on. Ten minutes,
9 thank you.

10 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: Good morning,
11 Mr. Mayor.

12 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning, how
13 are you?

14 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: I'm doing great.

15 I'm going to sound like a broken
16 record, because I've asked this same thing
17 for two straight years. From 2007 to 2013,
18 the Office of State Comptroller received
19 approximately 41 percent of unrestricted
20 state aid, which is known as revenue-sharing
21 or AIM. In 2006, New York State received
22 \$328 million in AIM funding. In his infinite
23 wisdom, Cuomo removed New York from AIM
24 funding in 2011. If New York City had

1 insisted on returning that funding, in the
2 last 14 years New York would have received
3 about \$4.6 billion in funding. In the last
4 three years, over \$1.2 billion in AIM
5 funding.

6 Myself and my predecessor on the
7 committee, Senator Jackson, have been
8 fighting a quixotic battle to get New York
9 City involved for this AIM funding. And we
10 have gotten --

11 (Off the record.)

12 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm sorry.

13 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: We have gotten --
14 we have not been able to work with the city
15 to restore this funding. When we ask the
16 administration and leadership about it, they
17 say the city's not pushing hard enough for
18 it.

19 So how do we get a commitment from the
20 city to get a funding, AIM funding, which
21 will probably be in excess of \$200 million,
22 which you can use for a lot of things, I'm
23 sure, in the city, but we can't get the city
24 committed to helping us get that funding for

1 them.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You were right last
3 year, Senator, and you're right this year.
4 And I'm not quite sure why they're feeling
5 that we're not pushing hard enough for it,
6 because we believe it is important to get it.
7 And we would like to join you and the
8 colleagues up here, particularly those who
9 represent New York City, to assist us in
10 pushing for that money.

11 And you're right, we need every dollar
12 that we can to continue to deal with the
13 crises that are in front of us.

14 Jacques, you want to talk about any
15 particulars there?

16 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: No. We --
17 again, like the mayor said, we would very
18 happy to work with you, okay, to make sure
19 that we get this aid. Diane and I were just
20 talking about it this morning, okay, that is
21 how critical we know it would be for the
22 city.

23 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: I've heard -- you
24 know, I've had this discussion before and

1 I've gotten commitments about it. And I
2 don't know if you can sense the frustration I
3 have because there's a lot of money we can
4 get to the city for a lot of programs. And
5 I'm not getting the kind of cooperation I
6 think we should be getting so that we can
7 make the city have even more funding to pay
8 for some of these programs.

9 So later on you can tell me someone I
10 can speak with. I mean, Diane's been great,
11 Tiffany's been great, but I need to get a
12 real strong commitment so that I can get more
13 money for the city.

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Help me -- define it
15 for me a little, Senator. When you say
16 strong commitment and you're not getting the
17 cooperation, help me understand that.

18 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: Well, someone who
19 will reach out with me with the
20 administration, someone who will call my
21 office and say, look, we have AIM -- let's
22 work on this AIM funding. I haven't gotten
23 anything like that.

24 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Okay. Well, I'll do

1 that. I'm the somebody. You know, the buck
2 stops with me. And if you're stating that
3 you're not getting the cooperation you
4 deserve, next week we will hop on a Zoom with
5 the team and I want to get some specificity
6 on what you need to show that we are engaged.

7 So it's going to start with me, and I
8 will make sure we do the follow-up with the
9 team. I'm responsible for making sure you
10 get what you need so you can deliver for the
11 city.

12 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: I appreciate that,
13 Mayor, and I will be reaching out to make
14 sure that we can make this happen, because
15 it's money that we can use in the city.

16 The other issue I have -- and I've
17 spoken to your staff about it. Again, to
18 Diane, Tiffany and some of your other staff
19 members about the issue of the property tax
20 reforms in New York City.

21 The plan that the city came up with
22 and we worked on was going to benefit about
23 70 percent of New York City residents. The
24 other 30 percent, we'll give them an

1 opportunity to opt in slowly to the plan so
2 that they don't get this large bill. But
3 70 percent of New York City residents are
4 paying, are subsidizing property taxes for
5 the richest people in New York City. And the
6 system that your administration's plan came
7 to me a couple of months ago was great. But
8 we can't get anyone to follow through --
9 well, I shouldn't say that. We're not
10 getting this done at the rate that I think we
11 should get it done so that more people in
12 New York City can benefit from a fairer
13 property tax system.

14 And again, I need your commitment to
15 make sure that we can work this through,
16 because it will be a great cost-saving
17 measure for people in New York City who
18 shouldn't be paying as much in property taxes
19 as other, more affluent neighborhoods.

20 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And as you know,
21 there's a court case that's currently
22 underway as well. And I'm glad you pulled
23 back on that follow-through, because we have
24 been really banging our heads against the

1 wall to fix a broken system, property tax
2 system, that has been disproportionately
3 impacting particularly communities of color,
4 and I happen to be one of them. Living in
5 Bed-Stuy, I know that I'm paying a
6 disproportionate amount of property tax.

7 Both Diane and Deputy Mayor Raspberry,
8 they have been on top of this issue. We want
9 to present our proposal as well to find a
10 way, how do we not overburden our communities
11 and further exacerbate this problem?

12 Tiffany, you want to follow up on
13 that?

14 DEPUTY MAYOR RASPBERRY: Thank you.
15 We'll be following up with your office in the
16 coming weeks with our updated proposal and
17 legislative language that you can advance
18 here.

19 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: That's all we ask
20 for. Thank you.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
22 Forty years -- 40 years, Senator, we've been
23 fighting this fight. Forty years. And
24 everyone kicked the can down the road. They

1 said, Let's wait until Eric becomes the mayor
2 so we can fix it.

3 (Laughter.)

4 SENATOR SEPÚLVEDA: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

6 (Inaudible; mic off.)

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And we've been
8 joined by Assemblymembers Davila and Colton.
9 Assemblyman Burke.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you,
11 Chairman.

12 Good morning, Mayor.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning, how
14 are you?

15 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Good.

16 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: So I'm the new
18 chair of Cities. I come from Buffalo, I'm a
19 proud Buffalonian, so I'm getting my head
20 around all these New York City-based issues.
21 I've had the pleasure of meeting several
22 members of your leadership team -- very
23 bright and capable people. So I'm looking
24 forward to continuing those conversations.

1 I have a few questions, again, as I
2 sort of come in contact with these concepts
3 and New York City-specific issues for the
4 first time. I want to talk about TFA,
5 progressive design, and joint bidding.

6 So the TFA. Last year you went up in
7 your request for I think \$14 billion. Now
8 the new request is \$3 billion. That's a
9 pretty dramatic increase, and now we're going
10 to be at 30.5 billion. That's double from
11 what it was. Can you explain why the city
12 needs this?

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Jacques?

14 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Yeah, the
15 city needs it because the Governor is asking
16 for the city to cooperate, to provide
17 resources to the MTA. This is our
18 contribution. The capacity that you gave us
19 last year was all used, because we had to
20 make a commitment for class size, for four
21 new jails, and for the BQE. So all of the
22 resources that were granted to us last year
23 were fully utilized.

24 So therefore this year, as part of our

1 contribution to the MTA, the state is asking
2 us to give \$3 billion, but at the same time
3 they also know we don't have the capacity to
4 fund it. So therefore they're giving us the
5 capacity to issue \$3 billion in one debt, TFA
6 debt.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: So this 3 billion,
8 this is just going --

9 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: It's going
10 to the MTA. It's going to the MTA.

11 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: It's coming in and
12 out. And it's -- and then, you know, when
13 you think about it, Assemblymember, we have a
14 mandate by the City Council by 2027 to close
15 Rikers Island. It started out costing us
16 \$8 billion to close it. It has now ballooned
17 to close to \$16 billion to close it, to build
18 four jails that can house the current
19 population that we have. So we are dealing
20 with some real capital issues. And as
21 Jacques directly stated, 3 billion came in
22 but 3 billion is going out to the MTA.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: I'd like to follow
24 up on that Rikers Island conversation a

1 different time. Just if you could make a
2 note of it.

3 Okay, I'd like to jump to progressive
4 design. So we haven't really finished -- we
5 haven't finished fully implementing
6 progressive design now. What is, you know,
7 the driver in expanding it before the process
8 has had a chance to complete?

9 SENIOR MAYORAL ADVISOR SAVINO: Thank
10 you, Assemblyman Burke.

11 If you recall, last year at our
12 request the Legislature expanded progressive
13 design-build for the City of New York. In
14 this budget process the Governor has said
15 that she wanted to expand it statewide to all
16 city agencies as well as expanding it to
17 other city agencies.

18 But I'm looking around here, I think
19 maybe myself, Senator Parker,
20 Senator Krueger, and at the time, former
21 Senator Adams, we were here when --
22 progressive design-build was born in the
23 Legislature. It was an opportunity to
24 increase efficiency, bring projects sooner to

1 completion, and drive down the cost.

2 And it's been incredibly successful,
3 and this was an opportunity to first expand
4 it to other city agencies and now to the rest
5 of the state.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Okay. Right.
7 Good. So and then lastly, I want to talk
8 about joint bidding --

9 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
10 Assemblyman, if I could just add, we have
11 also already compiled some data on what some
12 of those early successes are with the
13 additional flexibility that we have for
14 delivering capital projects. And already
15 we're seeing savings, we're seeing the
16 limiting of change orders, we're seeing
17 dollar savings -- not just time savings, but
18 dollar savings in the area of about 10
19 percent for projects.

20 So we'd be happy to follow up with
21 that data. But any additional flexibility
22 and more tools to deliver our capital
23 projects means that for critical projects,
24 whether it's energy retrofitting for our city

1 buildings or the types of projects to improve
2 public housing, and many others that we're
3 able to build more quickly and more
4 efficiently for New Yorkers.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you.

6 On joint bidding, I've had more joint
7 building conversations than I ever thought or
8 wanted to have in the last couple of weeks.

9 Where is it? Are all parties at the
10 table? And, you know, obviously I hope
11 everyone's negotiating in good faith. But
12 again, as a Buffalo guy, dealing with joint
13 bidding, you know, it seems to be something
14 that continually comes up. Where are we?

15 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER: I'd
16 be happy to follow up with that.

17 As you know, Assemblymember, when we
18 open up the streets we see a lot of things
19 and there are a lot of owners and a lot of
20 jurisdictional issues. So joint bidding in
21 general allows us to operate in a more
22 coordinated fashion in order to get the
23 projects done.

24 Specifically in response to your

1 question, yes, we are in constant
2 conversation with all of the many
3 stakeholders, contractors, labor and
4 utilities on an improved proposal following
5 last year's extender. And we certainly want
6 to continue that to ensure that any
7 additional improvements that need to be made
8 we're implementing properly.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Good, thank you.

10 Lastly, I want to follow up on Chair
11 Jones's discussion on migrants. This has
12 certainly affected my area in Western
13 New York. You know, we've had our own
14 issues, but it's sourced from New York, so
15 New York City to the Buffalo area.

16 Can you just take me through the
17 process? Because it's been such an issue.
18 You know, my understanding is that most of
19 this was -- some of it, at least, was sort of
20 a callous political machination, you know,
21 sending folks from Florida, from Texas to
22 New York City.

23 I'm just curious. Like you had this
24 influx of migrants. How are they getting

1 there? You know, was it based on New York
2 City's right to house? And how did you deal
3 with that?

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, the influx was
5 coming through buses, through planes --

6 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: But buses from
7 where?

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm sorry?

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Buses from where?
10 What was the genesis of them?

11 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: From Texas, but they
12 were also coming from other areas as well.
13 They were coming through planes, through our
14 airports. There were federally sponsored
15 programs from the federal government that was
16 doing the same. So there was an
17 accumulation; all roads were leading to
18 New York City and New York State.

19 And we had an obligation to make sure
20 that no child or family was sleeping on the
21 streets, and we fulfilled that obligation.
22 It was an unbelievable burden. That we
23 received from the federal government, as I
24 stated, close to \$7 billion. They gave us

1 roughly \$200 million allocated for it, but
2 New Yorkers had to step up and fulfill the
3 obligation.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Okay. I look
5 forward to working with you all in the future
6 and continuing to work with you. And I would
7 entreat you, come to Buffalo sometime. We'll
8 host you at a Bills game, the only NFL team
9 in the State of New York, so.

10 (Laughter.)

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Martinez.

12 SENATOR MARTINEZ: Good morning,
13 Mayor.

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning,
15 Senator, how are you?

16 SENATOR MARTINEZ: I am well, thank
17 you. Hope the same for you.

18 I just have one question. In the
19 Executive Budget there is a proposal to
20 increase the TFA by \$3 billion. This is the
21 New York City transitional funding. It
22 should be -- usually it's a temporary funding
23 that you get for bonding, but there's an
24 additional 3 billion in this year's budget.

1 One, my question is, why the
2 recurring? And is this \$3 billion connected
3 to any MTA capital projects?

4 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: That's the
5 MTA capital project, yes. Or the \$3 billion
6 will go for the MTA.

7 SENATOR MARTINEZ: Thank you.

8 That's it for me, Chair.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 Assembly.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Chang,
12 five minutes.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Thank you,
14 Mr. Mayor.

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you. Good to
16 see you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Yes, good to see
18 you. And I represent South Brooklyn. Of
19 course you represented the Borough of
20 Brooklyn when you were borough president and
21 Senator, so we both know the borough very
22 well. And both of us live in New York City
23 for a long time.

24 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And thank you for

1 your military service.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Well, thank you,
3 sir. And your service in uniform as a
4 transit police too. Both of us served
5 two decades.

6 This is going to be broad in New York.
7 When you were campaigning as a mayor, you
8 proposed to stop the mega-jail in Chinatown.
9 And of course now you're elected to office
10 and you said you're unable to close it
11 because of the City Council mandate.

12 Now, right now it's stopped, that
13 mega-jail, because the proposed cost has
14 ballooned up to \$3.5 billion. That's what I
15 was hearing from the news report. Wouldn't
16 that be better served to re-look and to have
17 that mega-jail going back to Rikers Island
18 and then save that 3.5 billion?

19 Have you -- or is there anything in
20 our State Legislature to do something about
21 that to override the City Council mandate?
22 Because this to me is a waste of money and
23 it's a real estate property that we'd be
24 better served to use as senior housing or

1 affordable housing in the Chinatown area,
2 which they desperately need. And a mega-jail
3 in that community I don't think is a
4 well-thought-out avenue.

5 And Rikers Island is a facility, all
6 we have to do is repurpose it and make it
7 better both for these inmates and possibly as
8 a homeless shelter as well.

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, we sat down,
10 Assemblyman, with the City Council to point
11 out how flawed this plan is of four more
12 jails in each borough. And it doesn't fit
13 the current capacity of Rikers' population.
14 Ballooning costs to get it done. The 2027
15 date is not a realistic date; 51 percent of
16 the inmates on Rikers Island are dealing with
17 a mental health issues, 20 percent are
18 dealing with severe mental health issues.

19 So to build smaller Rikers throughout
20 the city and not fix the problem is a
21 problem.

22 Deputy Mayor Parker is presenting a
23 real plan so that everyone can see how they
24 must do a better job. Too many inmates at

1 Rikers Island are sitting there not getting
2 their court cases moved forward. There's a
3 bottleneck in the system. And I don't think
4 building four more smaller jails is going to
5 solve the problem when it currently does not
6 fit the current population and it almost has
7 doubled the cost.

8 And this is in the power of the
9 City Council, not the mayor. We have to
10 abide by the law. And we have had continuous
11 conversations with the City Council about
12 this. I believe what we should be building
13 is a state-of-the-art mental health facility
14 to deal with that 51 percent so we can stop
15 criminalizing mental health issues and start
16 getting people the proper inpatient and
17 outpatient care.

18 But again, this is a City Council law.
19 It's flawed. We have to follow the law.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: As you mentioned
21 in this testimony, migrants have decreased
22 coming into the city, and you've been closing
23 down major shelters for the migrants
24 themselves, like closing down Floyd Bennett

1 Field. And recently I've been notified that
2 you plan to put homeless women in the family
3 shelter in Borough Park, as well as in the
4 Bronx.

5 So why are we adding that while you're
6 closing down the migrant shelter? Wouldn't
7 we just stop closing down and just repurpose
8 that?

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You know, the one
10 uniqueness that I've found in government,
11 that I have not found one elected official
12 that's stated, Please, put the shelter here.
13 No matter where we put the shelter, we get
14 the same questions.

15 When you look at places like the
16 Bronx, where we have over 30 shelters that
17 are located -- South Jamaica, Queens, and
18 other facilities. There's some places in our
19 city that many of you may represent that they
20 have either one or two or in some cases no
21 shelter.

22 And so it's not our desire to do that.
23 As we deal with the population of migrants
24 and asylum seekers that are here, we still

1 have children and families who are in our
2 shelter system that are long-time
3 New Yorkers. And what we're finding that's
4 even more fascinating, that a lot of the new
5 arrivals in the city are coming from other
6 parts of America. They're not even migrants
7 and asylum seekers. We're finding that other
8 Americans are coming to New York. Our
9 incoming shelter population is increasing at
10 an alarming rate.

11 And so we have to find places to do
12 shelter, and it's unfair when you have a
13 Councilman Salamanca who has over 30 shelters
14 and then we have another community that may
15 have one or two shelters. It's unfair, and
16 we need to spread out the shelter crisis of
17 long-term New Yorkers and migrants and
18 asylum seekers.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Thank you,
20 Mr. Mayor.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

23 Senator?

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. We

1 have our new Senator Chan, from Brooklyn, who
2 is the ranker on Cities.

3 SENATOR CHAN: Thank you.

4 Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning.
6 Congratulations.

7 SENATOR CHAN: Thank you very much.
8 And it's a pleasure to see you over here.
9 You and I were police officers right around
10 the same time on the same job, although in
11 different neighborhoods. I think we see a
12 lot of the same things.

13 So building on Assemblyman Chang's
14 question, do you have an idea of what it
15 costs to, let's say, service a homeless
16 shelter per man per day, on the average?

17 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, that number
18 is -- it's a lot. It's a lot.

19 SENATOR CHAN: Yes, it's about \$750,
20 according to some of my own research in
21 various databases, \$750 per day per man.
22 That's \$22,000 month per person. So what if
23 we give them \$200 a day for a month? That
24 comes out to about \$6,000. I think that

1 would solve their homeless issue, now
2 wouldn't it?

3 So now, going back to the jails and
4 the homeless and the migrants, right, I
5 understand that nobody wants a shelter in
6 their district, right? Now, I'm not talking
7 about a district. Do you think there's --
8 every day we see new stories about violent
9 crimes in the subways, usually a lot of times
10 perpetrated by homeless men. The female that
11 was burned alive in the subway happened just
12 a few blocks out of my district in
13 Coney Island.

14 What's the sense of reasoning,
15 insisting on putting a homeless shelter
16 within feet of a subway station? I'm talking
17 about 20 feet. When I say feet, I mean
18 20 feet. I mean, that's like putting a
19 liquor store next to a gun store next to a
20 school. What's the sense of reasoning behind
21 that? I'm not talking about a district. I'm
22 talking about one particular location.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Mm-hmm. So let's
24 look at that for a moment, because you made

1 two important points. You were talking about
2 the cost of housing someone, and that cost
3 can, you know, actually put people into
4 homes. That's why we passed the City of Yes.
5 Because every time you look to build
6 affordable housing, the amount of pushback we
7 get -- everybody says housing is a right, but
8 once you want to put it in communities, not
9 on my block.

10 So when we passed City of Yes, it's
11 building a little more housing in every
12 neighborhood in the city, the most
13 comprehensive housing plan in the history of
14 the city.

15 And so yes, we want to transition
16 people out of homeless shelters into
17 permanent housing. We've done that. We
18 moved people off our subway system, as you
19 indicated, into permanent housing. We've
20 built more permanent housing, affordable
21 permanent housing in Year 1 and 2 and single
22 years in the history of this city, moved more
23 people out of homeless shelters into
24 permanent housing in Year 1 and Year 2 in the

1 history of the city. More people participate
2 in the vouchers program.

3 And so when you say why would you
4 build it near a transportation, that's one of
5 the ideal places to build it. Because many
6 people who are in homeless shelters or many
7 people who need housing don't need to have
8 access to good-quality transportation.
9 That's why you want to pick an identification
10 like that.

11 And let me finally say this. I'm
12 hearing all this about how dangerous our
13 subway system is. That's not the reality.
14 We have 4.6 million daily riders, an average
15 of six felonies a day -- six felonies a day
16 out of 4.6 million riders. And so no, we
17 don't want to see someone burn to death. No,
18 we want to get rid of those six felonies. We
19 don't want the robbery in our system. We got
20 that.

21 But we have failed in the perception
22 issue. We have not failed in the criminal
23 justice issue. These cops are working --
24 (Overtalk.)

1 SENATOR CHAN: I'm sorry to cut you
2 off. I understand that right now you're
3 converting a storage unit in the Bronx into a
4 2200-bed migrant shelter as you shut down
5 other migrant shelters.

6 Why wouldn't you convert that storage
7 unit for a shelter for our own people?

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, we are -- we
9 are -- first of all, everyone in New York has
10 a right to shelter. So it's not as though we
11 are turning away long-time New Yorkers. We
12 also have a shelter population of long-time
13 New Yorkers. Everyone that requires shelter
14 is in shelter.

15 So what we have successfully done,
16 we've successfully navigated 179,000 people
17 on the migrant and asylum issue out of the
18 system. We've closed down Ebbets Field -- I
19 mean, we closed down Floyd Bennett Field. We
20 closed down the Randalls Island to turn the
21 park back over to the people. We've closed
22 down even more. We've closed down over
23 40-something shelters to address the
24 communities' concerns and needs.

1 Senator, we have actually --

2 SENATOR CHAN: So why are you trying
3 to build a shelter 20 feet from a subway
4 station where kids and women and our families
5 and elderly have to travel to and from every
6 day, and jeopardizing the innocent victims
7 of -- a lot of times the mentally ill, let's
8 say. I'm not saying that we shouldn't help
9 them, but --

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.
11 Assemblyman Brown.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you,
13 Chairman.

14 Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you?

16 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: As I said last
17 year -- well, thank you. As I said last
18 year, it's nice to see the
19 second-best-dressed guy in the state here
20 before us.

21 (Laughter.)

22 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: I think we can
23 agree that the first obligation of government
24 is to protect its citizenry.

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: And I'd like
3 to thank you for being one of those first
4 responders, a former police officer.

5 As the grandson of a former FDNY fire
6 chief and as the father of a former volunteer
7 fireman, I have to ask, regarding congestion
8 pricing, why is it that our firefighters are
9 not getting the exemption for this congestion
10 pricing? These guys have to move their cars
11 back and forth all day long to get from one
12 firehouse to the other. What's your opinion
13 on that, and what can we do to rectify that
14 injustice?

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, I think it
16 starts up here. You know, I'm not the
17 creator of the program. People stop me every
18 day -- and, you know, people don't know all
19 their lawmakers, but they know their mayor,
20 and I get an earful every day.

21 Congestion pricing is managed by the
22 MTA and the Governor. They will make the
23 determination. We put in for several
24 waivers. We were able to secure \$100 million

1 for those areas that have an environmental
2 impact. We were able to get waivers for
3 those with disabilities. I would love to
4 have a slew of waivers, not only for
5 firefighters but TA employees, for teachers,
6 a whole host of people.

7 But I don't make that decision and I
8 don't make that determination.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you,
10 Mayor. But we need your loud voice when it
11 comes to this issue. We love our teachers.
12 Two of my daughters are New York City public
13 school teachers --

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm sorry?

15 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: I said two of
16 my children are New York City public school
17 teachers.

18 But there's a big difference when it
19 comes to our -- people who are our first
20 responders. Our firefighters need this
21 exemption because if there's delays in
22 getting to a fire because they're having to
23 move their personal vehicles from place to
24 place.

1 Your voice should be louder, if I may
2 suggest, and stronger. Whether you have
3 control, don't have control, it would make a
4 big difference. And I ask you to do that.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, there's a
6 technical aspect that the president of the
7 UFA brought to my attention, because they
8 have some type of permission of moving their
9 vehicles. And I think there's a cost-saving
10 measure by allowing them to do that aspect of
11 it.

12 We're going to sit down, we're going
13 to explore it, and we're going to see how we
14 could carry it out. Seems as though there's
15 some type of agreement that firefighters are
16 able to move within the command, that it
17 would save us money if we don't have to buy
18 vans, if we don't have to carry that out.
19 We're going to sit down and see how we can go
20 about implementing that.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: I appreciate
22 your answer, Mr. Mayor. I think we're kind
23 of mixing up two different things. These
24 firefighters are actually having to pay out

1 of pocket for congestion pricing to move
2 their vehicles throughout the day. It's
3 causing big delays. I think we're mixing up
4 two different issues.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We agree. I don't
6 disagree. I agree with you on that. And as
7 I stated, the UFA president, one of the
8 firefighters unions, stopped me, we engaged
9 in a preliminary conversation. I'm looking
10 forward to sitting down and hearing their
11 exact rationale.

12 But, you know, once you start opening
13 the door of waivers, of, you know, police
14 officers are first responders also. Our
15 EMTs. There's a whole host of first
16 responders. But we're going to do everything
17 we can to advocate for those waivers when
18 they are appropriate.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Easy solution:
20 Just get rid of congestion pricing. Totally
21 inappropriate, especially for us here in
22 local government and suburbanites.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: The birth came from
24 up here. The birth didn't come from

1 City Hall. That's your baby. (Laughing.)

2 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Mr. Mayor, I'm
3 going to move on to bail reform for a moment.
4 In the Governor's State of the State address
5 she commented how recent changes in
6 New York's bail law were giving judges more
7 discretion and there was no need to do any
8 adjustments to the bail law. Your opinion,
9 please. Working okay for us?

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Listen, I think the
11 advocates for understanding and making a fair
12 bail system was a righteous fight. Now we
13 should do an analysis to see what are the
14 unintended consequences of that. And one of
15 them is discovery.

16 When I speak with my district
17 attorneys, they tell us we need to have a
18 closer examination of discovery to make sure
19 that we're not getting any unintended
20 consequences. And I respect the DAs who are
21 calling for that, and we need to reexamine
22 that, and I thank the Governor for looking at
23 that reexamination.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Right. But

1 again, in her speech, she actually said she
2 didn't see a need to do any adjustments. And
3 I think we've kind of examined this over the
4 past few years. It's failed and failed
5 miserably. I think it's about time we all
6 get together and do the right thing and do
7 this big adjustment to bail reform.

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: The number-one issue
9 for me that we're seeing when I speak with
10 Commissioner Tisch and Chief LiPetri, who
11 does our crime analysis, is that we are
12 having a problem with habitual violent
13 repeated offenders.

14 When you have 570 people --
15 (Time clock sounds.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you,
17 Mr. Mayor.

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 Senator John Liu.

21 SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How you doing, John?

23 SENATOR LIU: How you doing,
24 Mr. Mayor?

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good. Good to see
2 you.

3 SENATOR LIU: I want to commend you
4 first for bringing on some really great
5 people, especially the fantabulous First
6 Deputy Mayor that you have.

7 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: (Chuckling.)

8 SENATOR LIU: So things are a bit --
9 you know, it's been difficult, I certainly
10 understand that. But I think most of the
11 city has been running pretty well. And, you
12 know, you've got your own challenges. I
13 think last week we spoke with Chancellor
14 Aviles-Ramos, and she did report a
15 significant -- what I consider a significant
16 decline in New York City public school
17 attendance over the past few weeks.

18 And my question to you is, do you
19 think there's a particular reason for that, a
20 significant decline over previous years in
21 enrollment in public schools over the past
22 few weeks?

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Chancellor Banks
24 said it best, and the current chancellor, who

1 is his hand-picked successor and someone that
2 I work closely with, fully understands that
3 our product must be an attractive product.
4 It must be a place where our children are
5 challenged, it must be a safe place, it must
6 be a place where we are preparing them for
7 the future.

8 And I think there's a combination of
9 things that may have led to the erosion in
10 population. We're looking at that, the
11 chancellor's looking at that and examining.
12 But we have an obligation to go out and
13 encourage parents to see that we have the
14 best product. We have done that.

15 Some of the things that we are
16 continuing to do --

17 SENATOR LIU: I don't think parents --
18 I don't think parents are worried that we
19 don't have the best product. I think they're
20 worried about other things. I think they're
21 worried about keeping their families
22 together. I think they're worried about
23 possibly what might happen to their kids if
24 they happen not to be home when the kids are

1 supposed to be coming home.

2 Do you think that's any kind of
3 factor? Is that happening in the City of
4 New York?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, we have been
6 clear. And if you are alluding to migrants
7 and asylum parents, if that's what you're
8 doing --

9 SENATOR LIU: I am.

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Okay. If you're
11 alluding to that, we've been clear that
12 children should go to school. If you need
13 medical care, you should go to the hospital.
14 If you are the victim of a police
15 interaction, you should go to -- you should
16 call the police. We have been clear on that,
17 and we will continue to take that stance.

18 SENATOR LIU: I have reports that
19 there are members of the NYPD asking parents
20 and teachers for identification in front of
21 public schools, particularly around dismissal
22 time.

23 Do you know of any such actions by the
24 NYPD?

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, listen. You
2 know, I always say where do these rumors come
3 from. You know, I was not --

4 SENATOR LIU: No, they're not rumors.
5 I mean --

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: That's not
7 happening. That's not happening. John --
8 Senator, let's be very clear. And if anyone
9 is giving you a rumor or a lie that New York
10 City police officers are participating in
11 civil enforcement, that is a lie.

12 SENATOR LIU: Okay. So you're very
13 clear that no members of the NYPD would be
14 asking parents and teachers for
15 identification out of -- out of a general
16 sense of duty?

17 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: That is -- that is
18 not a general requirement --

19 (Time clock chimes.)

20 SENATOR LIU: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.
22 Assemblyman Ra, five minutes.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Notice how
24 disciplined I've been as soon as I hear that

1 bell?

2 (Laughter.)

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Mayor, good morning.

4 Thanks for --

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning. How
6 are you?

7 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I'm doing well.

8 So I wanted to ask about staffing in
9 terms of corrections. You know, we know over
10 the years -- in recent years, at least, my
11 understanding is the numbers were down as
12 much as 25 percent. Where is the current
13 staffing levels in terms of corrections?

14 Obviously having adequate staffing is
15 safer for both the officers and those, you
16 know, they're charged with the custody of.

17 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, first of all,
18 we are at a critical stage in law enforcement
19 in general, but specifically in the
20 Department of Correction. The challenge of
21 filling a job, the challenge of getting
22 people to come into the administration, into
23 the Department of Correction, is at a code
24 red. Many of the current correction

1 officers are retiring, and we're having
2 challenges in filling those classes in the
3 Department of Correction.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: So are there
5 initiatives your administration is
6 undertaking in terms of recruitment, in terms
7 of retention?

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes. Two years ago
9 we identified through the department, DCAS,
10 that we were not doing a very active
11 recruitment plan on the thousands of jobs
12 that we've had open. We made each agency
13 identify a real recruitment plan, including
14 the Department of Correction, to go out and
15 actively recruit.

16 And we're also looking at some of the
17 archaic civil service rules that allow people
18 to have entry into these agencies. Some of
19 the college requirements, some of the
20 restrictions that are put in place, we're
21 looking at to analyze that to sort of
22 incentivize people coming in, and retention.

23 One way of retention is with the
24 president of the union. He'll tell you we

1 gave a fair contract to make the job an
2 attractive job as well as the 97 other
3 percent of contracts that we settled with
4 civil employees.

5 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Also,
6 Mayor, in the general plan we just added a
7 lot of resources for a major campaign for
8 them to recruit, to go around the city and
9 recruit. So we added resources in the plan
10 for that.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And have you
12 been able to compile any data on corrections
13 in terms of bringing down -- I know that, you
14 know, there were a lot of triple tours being
15 worked, things like that, that obviously
16 nobody's at their best going through that.

17 Have you been able to start to bring
18 that down through staffing? I mean,
19 obviously those things go hand in hand,
20 having an adequate number of corrections
21 officers so that you don't have people
22 working, you know, double or triple tours.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You're correct.

24 And really we treated our correction

1 officers unfairly during COVID, not giving
2 them masks. Many of them were doing triples,
3 as you stated, just the tension of doing
4 that. And we're really pleased with our
5 current commissioner who's there, who has --
6 she has brought a real humane approach
7 towards not only the correction officers but
8 the inmates. And I'm proud to say I've
9 been -- I have been on Rikers Island more
10 than any other mayor in the history of this
11 city, speaking to the officers, speaking to
12 the inmates, realizing how we could change
13 that environment.

14 She's decreased some of the violence
15 on Rikers Island, and she has brought that
16 humane approach to it and has brought down
17 the level of overtime. But a lot of that
18 overtime is due to the shortage of manpower
19 that we have to improve the population in
20 DOC.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And then lastly, just
22 in terms of some of the crime within the
23 system, I know that there has been a problem
24 with sexual assaults, in particular with

1 female officers. I think we need to do our
2 part in Albany. There's been this bill
3 pending to increase the penalties.

4 But with regard to that topic,
5 anything going on internally to make sure
6 we're protecting those officers from those
7 type of assaults?

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: So important. And,
9 you know, we communicate with a group of
10 correction officers who were the victims of
11 those assaults. And it is imperative that we
12 send a clear message.

13 And, you know, the district attorney
14 of the Bronx, she has been clear when you
15 assault, sexually or a regular assault, she
16 has been willing to recharge the inmate
17 that's responsible. And that sends the right
18 message, and we want to make sure that's
19 carried out.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Thank you,
21 Mayor.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry. Thank
24 you. We've been joined, since the last time

1 I made announcements, by Senator Parker,
2 Senator Jackson, Senator Sanders.

3 But next up is Senator Borrello.

4 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you,
5 Madam Chair.

6 Thank you, Mayor, for being here, you
7 and your team.

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

9 SENATOR BORRELLO: You know, you had
10 mentioned that you have 46,000 folks in your
11 care, but you have 180,000 that you moved
12 out. I'm assuming that those folks with your
13 contract with DocGo NYC, many of those folks
14 were moved upstate, including Western
15 New York, where I am.

16 We found out at the end of last year,
17 at the end of 2024, that DocGo was canceling
18 their contracts with Western New York
19 organizations, not-for-profits like Jewish
20 Family Services and Journey's End. And we
21 were told that those families would be then
22 moved back down to New York City, but there's
23 been no confirmation.

24 Can you speak to if those migrant

1 families are being moved back to New York
2 City?

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: A combination of --
4 there was a substantial number of people who
5 moved upstate, they found their way. You
6 have a beautiful place that people want to
7 stay. They figured that New York City's not
8 the only place to be.

9 And we're receiving a smaller number
10 of people who are coming back down to the
11 city. Those who do, they don't come back
12 into our care, they found their way.

13 We do intense training, we give them
14 information on how to survive in the city and
15 the state, and many people have found their
16 ways.

17 SENATOR BORRELLO: But the funding is
18 ending. So those folks are basically on
19 their own. So you have 180,000 people that
20 were sent largely upstate that are now
21 fending for themselves, essentially, which is
22 very troubling.

23 So I'll ask you the same question I
24 asked you last year at this hearing. Do you

1 think it's time to end New York City's
2 sanctuary policy? Last year the answer was
3 no, it's who we are.

4 So after seeing the chaos and the
5 expense and now the pain that has been spread
6 throughout New York State, do you think it's
7 time to end sanctuary policies?

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Okay. First, that
9 large number, 180,000, did not go upstate. A
10 small number went upstate.

11 SENATOR BORRELLO: Okay. We still
12 have them, you know, again, without funding
13 that was promised.

14 So again, don't you think it's time
15 for us to shut off that spigot and stop this
16 humanitarian crisis, as you called it, from
17 landing in New York State?

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: First, we need to
19 secure our borders -- I say this over and
20 over again -- and we need to remove those who
21 are committing violent acts in our city and
22 our country. And I think people need to be
23 clear on what the sanctuary city law is,
24 because sometimes people conflate it.

1 SENATOR BORRELLO: The sanctuary city
2 law is we will make sure that people who have
3 committed crimes are not deported, that
4 they're not handed over to ICE. That's
5 essentially what I think most New Yorkers
6 understand. That's the concern that I have.

7 And I realize that the landscape has
8 changed and now we have the border being
9 secured, which I think will reduce that flow.
10 But ultimately we still have a lot of people
11 that are here. You know, I was told roughly
12 68,000 with criminal records here in New York
13 State. We have to address that.

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And the sanctuary
15 city law, Senator, is not what you just
16 described. The sanctuary city law is exactly
17 what one of your colleagues just -- I think
18 John Liu just talked about.

19 If you are here paying your taxes,
20 living your life here, based on those taxes
21 you pay, you have the right to go to
22 school --

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.

24 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you.

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Have I got
2 discipline?

3 (Laughter.)

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The next set of
5 Assemblymembers, at least, will be limited to
6 three minutes. Please note, members, that
7 this is a budget hearing and please limit
8 your questions to budgetary items. This is
9 not a campaign.

10 First we have Assemblymember Bichotte
11 Hermelyn.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN:
13 Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN: It's
16 great to see you and the whole team here.
17 Thank you. And I just want to quickly thank
18 you and your team for your hard work with the
19 City of New York. It's a progress, given
20 that -- how New York City is overwhelmed with
21 a lot of issues. And it's just really hard
22 to fix something overnight that's been broken
23 for many, many years and many, many decades.

24 But just want to thank you for that.

1 And also with public safety as top concern --
2 by the way, good pick with NYPD Commissioner
3 Jessica Tisch. We want to thank you for
4 really addressing those issues around
5 homelessness and keeping the crime rate down.

6 I have -- and also I want to thank you
7 for partnering with Senator Comrie and I on
8 the "Axe the Tax" as we focus on
9 working-class families and making sure that
10 we're putting millions of dollars back into
11 their pockets to serve their families.

12 I do have three questions. And the
13 first question is you talked about the
14 asylum seekers. You have about 46,000,
15 47,000 in the system currently, and I guess
16 over the course of time the number of
17 asylum seekers have -- the gap has decreased.

18 My question to you is, how -- where
19 are you going to get the money? Like how are
20 you going to continue to support these
21 migrants? I know you talked about the
22 2.3 billion, and I know there's some money
23 still staggering. But will it take a new
24 budget, or will you continue to support these

1 migrants with the remaining budget that's
2 there? So how does that work?

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, we have a gap
4 in our current system that we need to fill,
5 in the current budget gap that we need to
6 fill, a little over a billion dollars that
7 needs to be filled.

8 And our goal is to continue our 30-
9 and 60-day program so that we can decrease
10 that number -- and we're seeing a substantial
11 decrease every day there -- so we can close
12 these facilities and no longer have to pick
13 up this financial burden. But there is a gap
14 that we have, and that's -- that is our ask
15 in Albany.

16 What's the exact dollar amount?

17 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: It's about
18 \$1 billion currently. We planned, we
19 budgeted for about a billion dollars that --
20 of state aid that we will be receiving. But
21 currently the budget doesn't have any
22 resources at all for the asylum seekers. So
23 if we don't get resources from the state,
24 we're going to have a hole of about a billion

1 dollars that we have to backfill.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BICHOTTE HERMELYN:

3 Okay. Thank you.

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

6 Senator?

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Senator Kevin Parker.

9 SENATOR PARKER: Good morning,
10 Mr. Mayor.

11 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you,
12 Senator?

13 SENATOR PARKER: Excellent.

14 And good morning to your illustrious
15 staff, many of which I know well.

16 A couple of things, the first of
17 which, in honor of Black History Month, we'd
18 really love to hear about the work that
19 you've done around MWBE and what impact that
20 you think that's made economically, being
21 that we're having a budget, an actual budget
22 hearing. And what can we be doing better on
23 the state level in order to, you know,
24 advance the work that you're doing on MWBE?

1 And then the second thing is we've had
2 a serious issue last budget in the context of
3 illegal smoke shops in these cannabis illegal
4 places. Like have we made any progress on
5 that? And again, what kind of things should
6 we be doing in the context of our budget in
7 order to help facilitate the proper
8 implementation of our cannabis plan?

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, first, dealing
10 with the MWBEs, what can you do -- listen to
11 Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn.
12 She started out with half a million dollars
13 in discretionary, she went up to a million,
14 and now we're up to \$1.5 million.

15 What you guys have done around local
16 hiring has been unbelievable. We're now
17 having many of our city agencies look at some
18 of the jobs to make sure you get local
19 hiring. We watch our communities build up
20 and the futures go down of those who are
21 working there.

22 And our numbers are unbelievable.
23 Michael Gardner, who's in charge, when you
24 look at what we have done under Local Law 1,

1 we are at 33 percent in the city, first time
2 in history in the city, around MWBEs. In
3 fiscal year '24 the city awarded \$6.4 billion
4 to MWBE contracts and continues to make
5 meaningful progress.

6 And so we're seeing a real rethinking
7 of how do we look at women- and
8 minority-owned businesses that can provide
9 services to the constituents that actually
10 look like the diversity of this city.

11 You had a second question, you know --

12 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: Cannabis.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: The cannabis. We
14 came here and asked the state to help us go
15 after those illegal cannabis shops. You did
16 so. And the power you gave us allowed us to
17 close over 1100 illegal cannabis shops. And
18 in the process, the legal cannabis business
19 started doing better.

20 And so because of the help and the
21 partnership we've had here in Albany, we've
22 been able to close those illegal shops.
23 Those illegal shops were known for robberies,
24 for violence, for quality-of-life issues.

1 And because of the help from Albany, we were
2 able to really rein in the problem.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
4 Assembly.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

6 Before I go on, we've been joined by
7 Assemblymembers Gibbs and Rajkumar.

8 Assemblymember Taylor, three minutes.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN TAYLOR: Good morning,
10 Mr. Mayor, and thank you so much for joining
11 us today.

12 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN TAYLOR: Last year we gave
14 you all a lot of support to help alleviate
15 the housing crisis. So with respect to J-51,
16 485 -- I got three in there, right -- how has
17 that been beneficial? And what do you see as
18 the big whole?

19 But before you answer that one, I want
20 to lean over and look at the 145 project,
21 because the 145 is stopped. I'm not sure if
22 you're familiar with it, 145th. And it's
23 tall. And what we want to do is be able to
24 make sure that it's affordable for the

1 residents that are there.

2 And what are some of the things that
3 we can do in the City of Yes that will impact
4 that with some of the other tools that we
5 gave you in the war chest to make this
6 possible?

7 Because Harlem sits at 41 percent as
8 of the last siting, so we're not even
9 50 percent of Black folks in Harlem. And I
10 represent Harlem, Washington Heights and
11 Inwood. But we want to make sure those
12 numbers are consistent in going up for the
13 working-class people that are there, and
14 affordable.

15 And the last one is the Mitchell-Lama
16 piece. I'm just throwing it all in. I'm
17 going to get out of here so you can answer,
18 because you've been holding it. And with the
19 Mitchell-Lama, we need help in the biggest
20 way for New York City housing. And you're
21 familiar, you spent a lot of time at
22 Esplanade Gardens. They're in dire need of
23 infrastructure and resources. And how can we
24 help you get that job done as a partnership?

For the 467-m program, that is fully operational. We've been already receiving applications, and about 500 units are on

1 their way.

2 For 485-x, we are starting to really
3 see interest in that program increase. And
4 we are earlier in that implementation
5 process, but we expect that the market will
6 also take hold and we'll start seeing those
7 programs move forward.

8 For J-51, HPD, working very feverishly
9 on making all of the application materials
10 available. We recently were able to get the
11 home rule and work on the home rule with the
12 City Council. So that's needed to move it
13 forward.

14 All of these tools, Assemblymember,
15 are critical to ensuring that we have the
16 financing that we need and then when you
17 combine that with lifting of all of the
18 zoning barriers to the City of Yes --

19 (Time clock sounding; pause.)

20 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER: --
21 we make more housing.

22 (Laughter.)

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

24 Senator?

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 Senator Jessica Ramos.

3 SENATOR RAMOS: Good morning. Thanks
4 for being here.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning, thank
6 you.

7 SENATOR RAMOS: Mayor, good morning.

8 Your preliminary budget includes a
9 \$300 million cut to early childhood
10 education. Your own EDC estimates that
11 New York City loses \$23 billion in lost tax
12 revenue and productivity due to the childcare
13 crisis. How does this cut aid our shared
14 goal of improving affordability?

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, when you look
16 at the early childhood initiative, you've
17 really got to examine what we accomplished.
18 For the first time in the history of the
19 city, 150,000 children were able to get
20 spaces. And as I lived up to my
21 commitment -- every child that needed a seat
22 will get access to a seat -- we fulfilled
23 that. That record number is clear.

24 We have also reduced the cost of

1 childcare from 55 --

2 SENATOR RAMOS: Actually, parents are
3 really, really worried about the early
4 childhood education seats that have
5 disappeared. And on top of that, the city
6 has chosen not to renew leases for some
7 childcare centers in Brooklyn and one in
8 Queens. So I'm not sure how that correlates
9 with what your intentions are.

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: As I was stating, we
11 dropped the cost of childcare from \$55 a week
12 to less than \$5 a week. And what's another
13 number that's very impressive, giving access
14 to it -- before the pandemic in 2019, we have
15 14,000 applicants. Under this
16 administration 43,000 --

17 SENATOR RAMOS: No, that is not
18 accurate, Mr. Mayor. And as I said, we've
19 had several seats from 3-K cut. There are
20 parents worried that they can't even find a
21 3-K or a universal pre-K seat that makes
22 sense with where they live and with their
23 daily routine. And that is really where your
24 focus should be.

1 Here in Albany, we've been improving
2 affordability for childcare. We're now up to
3 400 percent of the federal poverty line in
4 order to make sure that we're providing
5 subsidies.

6 I'm going to move on to mental health.
7 When will the \$154 million granted to New
8 York City in the opioid settlement money be
9 distributed to the community-based
10 organizations that are on the ground doing
11 the work? We're in desperate need of
12 thousands of supportive housing units. How
13 and when is that money going to be released?

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, I just want to
15 go back. Your statement about parents being
16 worried, I think you missed the part that I
17 said we broke a record, record, of 150,000
18 children across our system. Everyone who
19 applied on time had access to a seat.

20 Not only that, when you talk about the
21 opioid dollars, it was -- Staten Island was
22 not -- Staten Island was approved to get the
23 opioid dollars. Partnering with AG James --

24 (Time clock sounding.)

1 SENATOR RAMOS: How convenient.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

3 Assemblyman Mamdani, three minutes.

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you,
5 Assemblyman?

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: I'm doing all
7 right, Mayor Adams.

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: (Inaudible.)

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: Building off of
10 Senator Liu's point, we've seen declines in
11 attendance from immigrant students since
12 President Trump rescinded a longstanding
13 policy that prevented ICE from making arrests
14 at sensitive locations like schools.

15 To put these families at ease, will
16 you today clearly state that as long as ICE
17 does not have a judicial warrant signed by a
18 judge, you will deny them entry into New York
19 City public schools, hospitals, and any other
20 city property?

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We are examining all
22 the EOs. And based on those EOs, we will
23 never put an employee of the city in harm's
24 way. The corporation counsel will make the

1 determination of the training that we gave
2 and protect not only the people of the city
3 but also our employees.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: So the reason I
5 ask this is this is the law as of 2017. And
6 because of the lack of clarity from city
7 leadership, including yourself, we have seen
8 incredible declines of students -- you know,
9 your chancellor was --

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm sorry, you've
11 seen what?

12 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: Incredible
13 declines of attendance. Your chancellor has
14 said up to 5 percent; we've heard from
15 specific schools in parts of New York City
16 where it's up to 20 percent. That's why I
17 asked that question.

18 In the interests of time, just to move
19 forward, you know, today in your budget
20 testimony you spoke about committing to make
21 New York City the, quote, best place to raise
22 a family. Are those the right words?

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Mm-hmm.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: And on

1 January 16th, however, in your budget
2 proposal you had a \$112 million cut in
3 funding for 3-K, and your Department of
4 Education informed five Early Childhood
5 Centers that the city would not be renewing
6 their leases. One parent of a 4-year-old who
7 attended pre-K at Nuestros Ninos in
8 Williamsburg said the news sent them into
9 panic mode. How does cutting funding for
10 childcare, closing those five Early Childhood
11 Centers, make New York City the best place to
12 raise a family?

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, let's first
14 start with we do an analysis, you should
15 always look how well you're doing from year
16 to year to year. I said it again and I'll
17 say it one more time: 150,000 children,
18 record. Previous administrations did not
19 come near what we have done.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: I think the
21 issue is, Mayor Adams, is that these are
22 families -- these are centers that are
23 75 percent enrolled, these are centers that
24 have been operating, some of them, for more

1 than 50 years. Waitlists, full enrollment,
2 and those parents are now scrambling to find
3 new childcare.

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And let me tell you
5 what we inherited, Assemblyman, when we came
6 into office. We had 30,000 vacant seats that
7 taxpayers were paying for. We had to come
8 in, realign --

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: But now you're
10 taking those seats away.

11 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We had to come in,
12 realign the seats to make sure tax dollars
13 were being paid accordingly.

14 In addition to that, what we found
15 that I'm sure you will be surprised to know,
16 that we had some facilities that were
17 50 percent full, 40 percent full. We had one
18 facility that --

19 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: These five
20 facilities are at 70 percent enrollment --
21 75 percent at least, and you're proposing
22 closing them. How do you explain that?

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, I would, but I
24 don't have time.

1 (Laughter.)

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That will remain a
3 mystery.

4 Senator?

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Weik,
6 ranker, for five minutes.

7 SENATOR WEIK: Good morning, Mayor.
8 How are you today?

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Quite well. How are
10 you?

11 SENATOR WEIK: Over here (waving).

12 (Laughter.)

13 SENATOR WEIK: So you have maintained
14 the sanctuary status of New York City. And
15 with that, with local governments concerned,
16 that has affected governments all across
17 New York State. And that has sent county
18 executives, town supervisors scrambling for
19 years trying to figure out what their next
20 steps were going to be.

21 And in -- you've received millions of
22 dollars from the federal government, billions
23 of dollars from New York State to assist in
24 the sanctuary status of New York City. And

1 I'm just curious, in the vein of trying to
2 make New York State more affordable, do you
3 have any plans of reversing your sanctuary
4 status?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I don't control that
6 law. It's a City Council law. And I always
7 will support if people are paying their
8 taxes, that the services that come from those
9 taxes, they should be allowed to get them.
10 But I don't control that law.

11 I am asking the City Council to modify
12 that law. If you commit a violent act in our
13 city, you have violated your right to be in
14 our city. You should be removed from our
15 city after you serve your time. That's what
16 I believe.

17 They don't want to change that. I
18 don't control that law. That is not a law
19 that I created. Mayor Koch started it.
20 Mayor Bloomberg made some --

21 SENATOR WEIK: But you've maintained
22 it. And you certainly have the ability to
23 reverse that in any court that you want. You
24 are the mayor of New York City.

1 And with that, it does still have an
2 effect --

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: No, Senator -- no,
4 Senator, that's not true. Hold on --

5 SENATOR WEIK: It does still have an
6 affect on all the counties across New York
7 State. And so counties on Long Island and
8 upstate New York have to scramble to try to
9 figure out are they going to issue an
10 executive order to protect their county
11 because they can't afford the decisions of
12 New York State {sic} when New York State
13 {sic} clearly receives an enormous amount of
14 funding from the state in the state budget
15 every single year -- more so than any
16 counties receive from New York State.

17 And with that in mind, what are your
18 plans to make this more affordable? Did you
19 look at the Executive Budget and identify
20 things that you could reduce and not have to
21 take that money so that you're becoming more
22 streamlined?

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I do it every day.

24 But, Senator, we need to go back to

1 your original comment --

2 SENATOR WEIK: Can you identify any of
3 those -- any of those items within the
4 Executive Budget?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We need to go back
6 to your original comment that I control the
7 sanctuary city law and I maintain it.

8 I took great strides to explain that
9 that's the City Council. I do not pass laws.
10 The City Council, that's the level of
11 government in New York. There's executive
12 and there's the legislative. City Council
13 has to make the determination to change that
14 law, not Eric.

15 SENATOR WEIK: Did you encourage them
16 at all? You're the advocate. Do you
17 encourage them to change that status since
18 you cannot fund it on your own? And even
19 with federal and New York State funding
20 infused into that, and you still can't seem
21 to afford it. It's still a tremendous burden
22 on all the taxpayers of New York State. What
23 encouragement are you giving them to reverse
24 that or make better budgetary decisions?

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I think I took great
2 strides in explaining to you what -- the
3 modification I believe that's needed. But
4 whomever is in our city and paying taxes,
5 they should be able to utilize the services
6 of the city because their tax dollars are
7 paying for it as well.

8 But when you commit violent acts in
9 our city, you have violated your right to be
10 in our city. And I've made that clear for
11 several years now.

12 SENATOR WEIK: But you recognize that
13 your sanctuary status and inviting these
14 individuals to come to New York City to be
15 provided for -- when you cannot clearly
16 provide for them -- has created an enormous
17 impact on other counties outside of New York
18 City that now have to provide funding and
19 housing and resources to those individuals
20 that they had not planned on before.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm not -- I'm not
22 -- I'm not quite understanding -- maybe I'm
23 misunderstanding the question. How what
24 happens in the city is making something

1 happen in one of the municipalities out of
2 the city, I'm not getting that.

3 SENATOR WEIK: So when the migrants
4 came to New York City and were bused out to
5 other areas throughout the state because you
6 had no housing for them but had encouraged
7 them to come to New York City, what -- you
8 know, they were not provided for. And this
9 put an enormous amount of burden on those
10 counties and those towns.

11 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: No. And we
12 allocated resources when we did that.

13 But I think sometimes people really
14 misunderstand that New York City is the
15 economic engine of this entire state. And
16 the amount of money we send to the state, we
17 don't get back. So we have been lifting up
18 counties for years.

19 SENATOR WEIK: Living on Long Island,
20 I will tell you that we out-send to Albany.
21 So Long Islanders send more money to New York
22 State than New York City does. And we get a
23 smaller return on investment.

24 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm not sure -- I'm

1 not sure when that happens. That's that
2 tricky math I used to do in school.

3 (Laughter.)

4 SENATOR WEIK: I think we're going to
5 agree to disagree on that.

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Don't -- don't think
7 for one moment that anywhere sends more money
8 to the state than New York City. We're the
9 economic engine, and we have lifted up this
10 state during difficult times when other
11 municipi --

12 (Time clock sounding; laughter.)

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

14 Assemblyman Fall.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN FALL: Thank you, Chair
16 Pretlow.

17 Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for being here.

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you? Thank
19 you.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN FALL: Thank you for the
21 works that you guys are doing.

22 I sent you a letter last year about
23 adding more NYPD officers on the North Shore
24 of Staten Island. You responded, and you

1 added more officers, so I want to thank you
2 for that. We do need more officers at the
3 1st Precinct in Lower Manhattan on the other
4 side of my district, so I encourage you guys
5 to please look into that.

6 Last year I also asked you guys to
7 address the issue at the Carter Center. You
8 changed the provider, and things have
9 significantly changed, and I hear good
10 feedback from the community about that.

11 Lastly, the fence at Martling in
12 Clove Lakes, DOT made a bad decision. You
13 stepped in, you made a good decision,
14 everybody's happy in Westerleigh and
15 West Brighton for that.

16 I want to get into EDC, New York City
17 EDC. I have three counties in my Assembly
18 district. When we reach out to EDC about
19 helicopter concerns, they've addressed it and
20 they actually have a long-term plan on how
21 they're going to fix that, and also the
22 resiliency issues, they have a plan. When it
23 comes to the Kings County Marine Terminal,
24 they keep me in the loop of everything that's

7 And I also want to get your
8 perspective if EDC cannot handle what's going
9 on on Staten Island, should we look at maybe
10 New York State EDC possibly taking over the
11 operations of the Empire Outlets and the
12 Wheel site? Any thoughts on that?

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah. You know,
14 before coming into office as mayor,
15 Staten Island was called the "forgotten
16 borough." And now you're the remembered
17 borough. Even when they -- with your
18 advocacy, when there was an attempt not to
19 give you opioid money, you stood up and we
20 were able to fight to make that happen, with
21 developing the whole North Shore, what we're
22 doing there. And we're going to make sure we
23 continue to look out for Staten Island.

24 But I know you're biting at the bit to

1 talk about that --

2 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER: I
3 am. Given your leadership and partnership,
4 Assemblymember, it is -- I do not like
5 hearing that any agency has not been
6 responsive or communicative on issues that I
7 think are of common interest.

8 And so the commitment of Economic
9 Development Corporation to the North Shore is
10 long, and many investments on public ground,
11 and wanting to unstick a number of
12 challenging development projects over time.

13 But I will personally make sure that
14 you have a detailed briefing, and we can
15 schedule that next week, on all of those
16 aspects. Because we want to not just keep
17 you in the loop, but make sure that you
18 continue to be a partner in the development
19 there that brings homes and jobs to the
20 people of Staten Island.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN FALL: I appreciate that.

22 And in my last seconds, I do want to
23 thank you for also closing the shelter at 99
24 Washington Street. I'm curious to know

1 what's going there next.

2 And also curious to know if there's
3 any updates with our Staten Island Ferry to
4 Brooklyn. And the Police Museum has been
5 closed since Sandy in Lower Manhattan -- need
6 it reopened. Need your support for BRT.

7 Thank you very much.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 Senator Roxanne Persaud.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Good morning,
12 Mr. Mayor.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good morning.

14 SENATOR PERSAUD: Good seeing you
15 here.

16 So as the chair of the Social Services
17 Committee, I just have a question pertaining
18 to shelters and the Department of
19 Investigations report that came out in August
20 of 2024. And it addressed some serious
21 issues -- it raised some serious issues. How
22 do you go about addressing the report on
23 shelters? And how do we fix the issue with
24 the overspending that's seen to be taking

1 place in shelters?

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I really want to
3 bring -- all of us lawmakers here, I really
4 want to bring us back to what we inherited.
5 Senator, we were getting 4,000 people coming
6 to our city a week, 8,000 every two weeks.
7 We had to open a space. We had to find
8 vendors that were willing to take on some of
9 these contracts.

10 The enormity of this problem -- we
11 were being sued by Legal Aid because we
12 weren't finding housing in a certain period
13 of time due to the right to shelter law that
14 was supposed to just accommodate 40,000
15 people.

16 What this team did, we had to build a
17 shelter system in weeks, something that took
18 40 years to build. And so we did, under the
19 leadership of my chief of staff, Camille
20 Joseph, Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom, O'Malley.
21 The whole team came together and said, Let's
22 build a system that took 40 years to build.
23 And during that time we had to find those
24 vendors, we had to find the contracts, and

1 all of us know in government it's easy to
2 look after the game was over and say what the
3 quarterback should have done. But when
4 you're on that field moving that ball down
5 the field -- we did it, 220,000 people,
6 180,000 no longer in our care, not one child
7 or family sleeping on the streets because of
8 what we've done.

9 Yes, when you did an analysis, can you
10 do things better? Yes. We were able to
11 bring down the costs. We saved billions of
12 dollars because of what we did. We committed
13 to a 30 percent decrease in asylum-seeker
14 costs. We did it. And this is a learning
15 experience, but I guarantee you when people
16 go back and read this part of the history,
17 they're going to see how successful we were
18 on managing the greatest humanitarian crisis
19 in the history of this city.

20 SENATOR PERSAUD: So I just want to
21 commend your team for all the work they did
22 in keeping us informed as to the issues that
23 were occurring. That is not -- but I just
24 want to make sure that we respond to what the

1 DOI report showed. That's all that is about.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes.

3 SENATOR PERSAUD: And talking about,
4 you know, Assemblymember Fall talking about
5 the needs of our precincts, I just want to
6 advocate for the six police precincts that I
7 have in my district and the two PSAs. They
8 are wholly understaffed. And as you know, in
9 parts of my district there is a spike in
10 crime and we need the assistance of NYPD.

11 Thank you.

12 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We're going to look
13 at that. And I want to thank you for running
14 your bills, my team told me, on menopause.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: Yes. Yes.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We've been joined
18 by Assemblymembers Reyes and Jackson.

19 Our next person is Assemblymember
20 Dais.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Good morning,
22 Mayor.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you doing,
24 Assemblyman?

1 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: A little aghast.

2 My Assemblymember Mr. Brown said you're the
3 best-dressed in the Assembly now. I feel a
4 little {inaudible} about that.

5 (Laughter.)

6 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: I'm going to -- we
7 have a short time, so I'm going to be rapid
8 fire, real quick. I have a construction
9 background. I care deeply about
10 infrastructure in New York. So my question
11 is a follow-up to Chairman Burke in reference
12 to progressive design and alternative
13 delivery. Is it working, and is it the best
14 way for New York City to move forward?

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You want to take
16 that?

17 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
18 Sure. We are seeing very positive results
19 both in terms of savings on time, savings on
20 money and the limiting of change orders,
21 which often create more expense and delays
22 for projects. And the dollar savings we have
23 estimated at about 10 percent for projects
24 that utilize the tool.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: That's key. And
2 one thing I have been noticing -- and I'm
3 hoping that the city will be able to provide
4 a study on the impact on MBEs, WBES,
5 specifically segmented into each one. As
6 someone with a construction background we
7 like to talk about WBES -- women do extremely
8 well -- but when you look at the racial
9 breakdown, Black and Latino businesses
10 sometimes are underperforming in
11 construction. So I want to put a focus.

12 Joint bidding. It's a complicated
13 matter. I've worked on those type of
14 projects. We've got to get the utilities to
15 the table. What is the city doing with the
16 utilities and the contractors to make sure
17 that we can push an agreement to get an
18 agreement on the table?

19 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
20 We're in constant and repeated conversation
21 with all stakeholders, including contractors,
22 labor, et cetera, because lots of different
23 players who have to work together so that the
24 objective of joint bidding, which is to

1 reduce complexity, are achieved.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Thank you.

3 And to make a quick switch to
4 childcare, one issue we're having in the
5 Bronx and throughout the city is amazing --
6 my wife's in childcare, she runs it for 1199,
7 and we're seeing an issue with reimbursement
8 payments to some of these nonprofits and
9 organizations, and there seems to be a
10 bottleneck.

11 What are we doing for this next
12 quarter to help alleviate that issue?

13 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER: It
14 is a multipronged approach, Assemblymember.

15 Specifically on childcare invoices, in
16 the last fiscal year we accelerated about
17 440 million. But I also want to say in those
18 payments -- but I also want to assure you
19 that as relates to nonprofit payments in
20 general, it includes bringing down the
21 bureaucratic barriers and a new discretionary
22 method to get more funds to not-for-profits
23 more easily.

24 We have an interagency approach. We

1 have a new executive order so every agency
2 has a not-for-profit point who is focused on
3 these issues. We have been
4 extraordinarily committed to this sector,
5 which is why we also provided a COLA
6 affecting 80,000 workers and bringing more
7 than 700 million in funds to them because our
8 commitment to this sector and its workers is
9 quite strong.

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
12 much.

13 Senator Cordell Cleare.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: How you doing,
15 Mr. Mayor?

16 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How you doing,
17 Senator?

18 SENATOR CLEARE: I hope you're well.

19 I'm good. I want to get right to the
20 questions.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: You know, we are
23 experiencing an affordability crisis in
24 housing. I'm continuously concerned about

1 the migration of Blacks in New York as well
2 as the burden on older New Yorkers. So I
3 wanted you to -- if your administration can
4 speak to what we are doing to create more
5 affordable housing, affordable to Black
6 New Yorkers and their incomes, as well as
7 older New Yorkers and workforce in New York
8 City.

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: So important. And
10 you have been a real strong and leading voice
11 around that. And that is what City of Yes
12 was about. Far too many neighborhoods were a
13 City of No. Every time we wanted to build in
14 those neighborhoods, when you look at
15 51 community boards, I believe out of the 51,
16 10 of them build more housing than the other
17 40-something combined.

18 And so, FDM, you want to go into some
19 of the specific --

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Not just building
21 more housing. Building housing that is
22 affordable to Black New Yorkers and seniors.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: That's important.
24 Because -- and you're right, and Black

1 New Yorkers are also teachers.

2 SENATOR CLEARE: Yes.

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: They're also
4 firefighters.

5 SENATOR CLEARE: Yes.

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And it can't be just
7 extremely low. When I speak to my accountant
8 and my teacher, they're saying, Eric, we're
9 fleeing. When you look at those hundreds of
10 thousands that left the city --

11 SENATOR CLEARE: I'm talking about
12 both.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: -- they were
14 middle-income Black and brown folks.

15 So we want to focus on that.

16 But you want to --

17 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
18 Yes, I'll just -- I'll mention a few of the
19 highlights because -- on the financing of
20 affordable housing, which has -- the last few
21 years we've seen records broken, because we
22 need to see those records broken to provide
23 more affordable homes to New Yorkers.

24 However you cut it, the last two

1 calendar years, the last two fiscal years are
2 back-to-back records for not just the
3 construction of new housing for
4 extremely-low-income individuals and for
5 New Yorkers across the income spectrum, but
6 also for housing for the formerly homeless,
7 housing -- supportive homes.

8 And specifically to your question on
9 senior production, the last calendar year saw
10 the most senior units produced on record for
11 the agency at close to 3,000. And we want to
12 continue that in the years to come.

13 SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah, there's a great
14 need for more. I just want to ask
15 specifically about TIL buildings in the
16 pipeline and if you can speak about where
17 we're at in terms of transitioning those
18 properties to low-income home ownership for
19 tenants, and also making the vacant units
20 available for rent or sale.

21 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
22 Yes. I know, Senator, this has been a great
23 area of focus for Commissioner Adolfo
24 Carrión. And so the TIL buildings have

1 been -- they've been waiting for
2 revitalization and to move forward in the
3 process for many years, and so the ANCP
4 program is the answer to that.

5 (Inaudible; laughter.)

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
7 Epstein.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Over here,
9 Mr. Mayor.

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you doing?

11 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Good, how are
12 you today?

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Good. So I want
15 to turn back to the issue of the mental
16 health crisis. And how are we going to get
17 more supportive housing units online in the
18 city to ensure that people with serious
19 mental health issues have a place to live?

20 Because we see that crisis, we see
21 people getting services, but they're coming
22 back right to the streets instead of getting
23 supportive housing. We need to double and
24 triple those units online. And what's the

1 city doing to make sure that happens?

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You know, you have
3 to inspect what you expect or suspect, I like
4 to say. And the challenge of dealing with
5 those with severe mental health illness --
6 when I go into the subway system with our
7 crisis team, with PATH and SCOUT, the amount
8 of time it takes to build trust, to get
9 people off the street into the supportive
10 housing -- and then when they get into
11 supportive housing, the challenge that you
12 meet of making sure that they stay in
13 supportive housing. It's a real challenge.

14 Under Dr. Vasan, we want to embrace
15 the clubhouse model that we've done for some
16 time. But, you know, we removed 7700
17 individuals that we transported to the
18 hospital. The system that we put in place
19 now under Dr. Katz is that we need the proper
20 handoff. You know, once you give people --
21 once you convince people to come inside, you
22 have to properly hand them off to the
23 hospital facilities and they have to hand
24 them off with a community-based organization

1 that's going to give them the care, making
2 sure they're getting the support that they
3 deserve. But it's a real challenge.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Yeah, and I -- I
5 do think we just need to build more units,
6 Mr. Mayor, and I hope that we will encourage
7 that happening this year, to expand more
8 supportive housing units.

9 But I know I don't have a lot of time.
10 I want to turn to the discharge planning
11 issues that are coming out of Rikers. You
12 know, this gentleman Ramon Rivera, stabbed
13 three people in November in New York; he had
14 been in Rikers, kept for nine months there in
15 a mental health unit. He was released from
16 Rikers to the men's shelter in my district,
17 and then he stabbed and unfortunately killed
18 two people in my district as well as a third
19 person.

20 There needs to be stronger discharging
21 plans for those folks who are leaving Rikers
22 Island. And what are we going to do to
23 ensure that people who are leaving get to a
24 place that they can get support? The guy

1 just didn't show up for his appointments, and
2 then he was just lost. And then that
3 resulted in three New Yorkers dying.

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Without a doubt.
5 And you're dead on. Our analysis, we clearly
6 saw that the system was a revolving-door
7 system. You pick a person up, you take them
8 inside the hospital, in many cases they did
9 not want to keep them in. Then you turn them
10 back out to the street, you wait until they
11 commit some form of violent act, then you put
12 them up in Rikers.

13 Rikers has become the defunct mental
14 health facilities, and we want to change
15 that. And that's what H+H is trying to do.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Yeah, we really
17 need to do that.

18 And the last thing is we put money in
19 for middle-income housing. We haven't built
20 a new Mitchell-Lama development in 60 years
21 in the city. Can we commit to getting more
22 middle-income housing in our city?

23 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
24 Yes.

1 (Laughter.)

2 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Nice short answer
4 there.

5 Senate?

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

7 Senator Sanders.

8 SENATOR SANDERS: Good morning. Good
9 morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning to your
10 team.

11 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you,
12 Commissioner?

13 SENATOR SANDERS: I feel real.

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I mean, how are you,
15 Senator?

16 (Laughter.)

17 SENATOR SANDERS: It's all good. It's
18 all good. Maybe it's a future thing that
19 you're thinking about.

20 (Laughter.)

21 SENATOR SANDERS: Who knows. Who
22 knows.

23 A statement, a thank you, and a
24 question. First, the statement on MWBE.

1 New York City, with a budget of around
2 \$129 billion, has been able to do
3 \$6.4 billion in MWBE. New York State, with a
4 budget of \$259 billion, has done 3 billion.
5 You may want to -- hey, we need some help,
6 give us some ideas.

7 And thank you. Thank you for your
8 support on initiatives. I'm very interested
9 in what we're doing for the next generation.
10 What are we doing not just about problems,
11 but how are we going to move this city
12 forward? So I'm very grateful for your help
13 with a media school that we're doing in
14 Queens. Thank you for that.

15 Speaking of schools, I want to -- you
16 raise an issue, and I'm chair of Banks, so
17 I'm very interested in these things. You
18 raise an issue of banks in schools, an
19 initiative that you're interested in doing.
20 Can you expand a little bit on the
21 initiative? I'm very interested. And in
22 fact we want to be first.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And Commissioner
24 Mayuga from DCWP, this is her baby.

1 You know, all of us know -- I left
2 high school with a credit rating that was
3 just dismal, you know. We are now focusing
4 on financial literacy. We want our children
5 to be healthy physically; mentally, by doing
6 our meditation in school, breathing
7 exercises; academically -- but what about
8 financially? If you don't understand how to
9 use your money, you're going to find yourself
10 perpetually in debt.

11 And so we are now going to partner
12 with banks, other institutions to come in,
13 teach our children how to open up bank
14 accounts, what is checking about, what are
15 credit card interest rates. We're going to
16 have an entire financial literacy program in
17 our schools so our children can become
18 financially sound to match their academics in
19 the schools.

20 And so we would love to partner with
21 you. I know you've been talking about this
22 for some time. We would like for you to be a
23 partner with us, accomplishing this task.

24 SENATOR SANDERS: We can recommend two

1 or three schools immediately that would --
2 could use these things. Are there any other
3 initiatives that you would like to put
4 forward from your administration?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Around young people?

6 SENATOR SANDERS: On any issue.

7 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Preparing them for
8 the future, partner with our business leaders
9 in allowing them to go into real careers.
10 And we are really making them career-ready in
11 the process. If I could share later --

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You can finish the
13 sentence (laughing).

14 SENATOR SANDERS: Thank you very much.
15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember
17 Valdez.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN VALDEZ: Okay. Thank
19 you, Chair. Good morning, Mayor Adams.

20 As was already mentioned by I think a
21 few of my colleagues at this point, we're
22 seeing that students around New York City are
23 afraid to go to school. Attendance rates in
24 public schools has dropped following the

1 Trump administration's change in guidance to
2 sensitive areas.

3 Do you think it makes New York City a
4 better place to live when our kids are afraid
5 to go to school and parents are keeping them
6 home?

7 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm having a problem
8 hearing you.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN VALDEZ: Oh, sorry.
10 I'll get closer. So -- yeah.

11 Do you think it makes New York City a
12 safer place when our kids are afraid to go to
13 school because they're worried that when they
14 come home their parents won't be home or that
15 there'll be, you know, immigration
16 consequences to participating in public
17 education?

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah. And I think
19 how we do that, how we make it safer and deal
20 with the anxiety and take down the tone is
21 not so much what children are doing, but what
22 adults are doing.

23 I think that we need to let these
24 children know that they can continue their

1 education -- our administration has stated
2 this over and over again -- of create a safe
3 environment for children. The staff at the
4 Department of Education, the teachers, the
5 principals, they have done that. They have
6 embraced thousands of -- 40,000 children.
7 Some of them pay out of their own pockets to
8 buy clothing, school books, materials.

9 I think if adults take down this tone
10 and just ensure that these children are going
11 to be in a healthy environment, that's what
12 we've provided. We provided a healthy
13 environment.

14 Just the other day someone called me
15 and said, ICE is outside the school, raiding
16 the school. It just wasn't true. An adult
17 posted that on social media. And so how much
18 are we contributing to this anxiety that
19 these children are facing?

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN VALDEZ: Mr. Mayor, with
21 all due respect, I've had superintendents
22 throughout schools in my district say that
23 they don't feel that they've gotten the
24 guidance they need from your administration

1 to make sure that students are staying safe.

2 So I just want to make sure that
3 guidance is coming from your administration,
4 understanding with our parents and our
5 teachers and our students, no matter where
6 they come from.

7 Just in the interests of time, this
8 morning as I was getting ready to come to
9 this hearing, I heard on the radio that when
10 asked if you had any concerns about the
11 changes that are happening at the National
12 Labor Relations Board right now, you said no.

13 To everyone who might not be paying
14 attention, Jennifer Abruzzo, the general
15 counsel for the National Labor Relations
16 Board, was fired. So was Gwynne Wilcox, a
17 board member. Did I hear you correctly? Do
18 you have no concerns about the changes there?

19 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: No. No, you didn't.
20 But let's go back. Just as you stated that
21 people have stated that we have not done
22 enough, I've heard people say we have done
23 enough.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN VALDEZ: Differences of

1 opinion, perhaps.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: So I always say 8.3
3 million people, 35 million opinions.

4 I did not say no. Gary Labarber was
5 standing next to me. The question I said no
6 to was the concerns around tariffs. We have
7 to secure our borders. And we cannot
8 continue to allow terrorists to come across
9 the borders. So I did not say no.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN VALDEZ: So you are
11 concerned about what's happening at the NLRB
12 right now.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm sorry, say it
14 again?

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN VALDEZ: You are
16 concerned about what's happening at the NLRB
17 right now.

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I can answer another
19 time. The buzzer went off.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.
21 Senate?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Sanders.
23 (Overtalk, off the record.)

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And yet it was

1 Senator Jackson's turn.

2 SENATOR SANDERS: The better-looking
3 Sanders.

4 (Laughter.)

5 SENATOR JACKSON: Well, thank you.

6 So, Mayor, first, let me thank you and
7 your team for coming up to Albany during our
8 joint budget hearings and all that, and
9 answer all of the questions that are put
10 forward.

11 I have a couple. How are we doing
12 with Foundation Aid for New York City?
13 Obviously, you know, education is the key to
14 uplift all families. It doesn't matter who
15 you are. That's number one.

16 Number two, a group of people,
17 advocates, came into my office yesterday
18 and -- about funding at the federal level for
19 autism, for a program that New York City is
20 running. Can you -- have any information on
21 that?

22 And then I look at your information
23 that your staff have given out about the Axe
24 the Tax for the Working Class. In my

1 district, a majority of the people that live
2 in my district are the working class. And
3 I'm very interested in all of the information
4 that you have on this page.

5 So those are the questions I have.

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: So just the
7 Foundation Aid piece, the changes proposed by
8 the Governor result in the city receiving
9 \$347 million less in Foundation Aid in '26.
10 And so we agree with the data, but, you know,
11 any less dollars that come from the state to
12 the city is going to impact, particularly
13 when we look at -- we're dealing with the
14 class size issue, when we're dealing with
15 hiring new teachers. We have to hire
16 thousands more teachers. And so any cut to
17 Foundation Aid is going to impact us greatly.

18 SENATOR JACKSON: Okay. And the other
19 ones about autism --

20 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm sorry?

21 SENATOR JACKSON: The autism program
22 has been cut by DOE. A group came into my
23 office yesterday speaking about that, and
24 they wanted to know what you're doing about

1 federal cuts to the -- federal cuts. Yeah,
2 that's what they said.

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, all of these
4 EOs we are examining to make sure our legal
5 team are looking over them, to make sure that
6 we're responding accordingly. And we're
7 going to always fight to get the funding that
8 we need from not only Washington, D.C., but
9 Albany as well. New York City residents, we
10 are fighters for every dollar we need.

11 SENATOR JACKSON: Okay. And as I said
12 to you, the working class is the majority of
13 the people that I represent. And I'm just
14 trying to look after their best interest.

15 So thank you.

16 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you very much.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 Assembly.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
20 Shimsky? Who is no longer with us.
21 Assemblywoman González-Rojas? She left.
22 Assemblyman Beephan?

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, no, she is
24 there.

1 (Overtalk.)

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: There
3 we go. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Timely
6 processing for cash assistance applications
7 in New York City sits at a meager 53 percent.
8 SNAP processing is far below the 95 percent
9 target. I just learned that city workers are
10 living in shelters.

11 You say you want to address
12 affordability for New Yorkers, but your Rent
13 guidelines Board has increased the rent each
14 year since you began. You fought the
15 City Council on housing vouchers that would
16 prevent homelessness. And public assistance
17 applications are still not processed at the
18 rate they should be.

19 How are those moves addressing
20 affordability for everyday New Yorkers?

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I didn't get -- I
22 don't know, the mikes up there, I can't
23 really hear that well. But I think you were
24 talking about our housing vouchers.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: The
2 housing vouchers, the slow applications for
3 cash assistance, which is now at 53 percent.
4 SNAP processing is still below the 95 percent
5 rate. And many city workers, I just learned,
6 are actually living in shelters because they
7 can't afford to live here.

8 So how do these moves support your
9 affordability goals in New York City?

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah. No, thank you
11 for that. And Senator, when I was a Senator,
12 I was hearing about city employees living in
13 shelters.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: I'm an
15 Assemblymember.

16 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Assemblywoman. I
17 was hearing about city employees living in
18 shelters.

19 That's why when you look at what we
20 did in settling 97 percent of our contracts
21 with 97, 98 percent ratification rate, one of
22 our largest unions, DC37, would tell you how
23 much we wanted to give fair contracts to our
24 city employees. Because I know what it is to

1 be on the verge of homelessness.

2 So we have -- FDM, go into some of
3 these stats on cleaning up our backlogs that
4 we've had.

5 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:

6 Yes, of course. We've been really focused,
7 Assemblywoman, on making sure that those
8 backlogs that existed when we started in this
9 administration for both SNAP and cash have
10 been cleared.

11 And so to be specific about it, as a
12 result of that increased focus over the past
13 year for SNAP, the timeliness rate has
14 increased 27 percentage points from
15 51 percent in December '03 to 86 percent.
16 And in terms of cash assistance, the
17 timeliness increased by 39 percentage points.
18 There's more --

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: But
20 it's still at 53 percent. That's very low.

21 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:

22 There might be more work to do, but I can
23 assure you that the good people at HRA and
24 across city agencies are spending every day,

1 because they know that these are lifelines,
2 making sure that they're cleared and we keep
3 increasing those rates.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS:

5 Mr. Mayor, I do want to hear from you
6 directly about how you are targeting and
7 addressing affordability. We know that's the
8 number-one issue in our city and in our
9 state.

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And as you stated,
11 the numbers are still low. We're getting a
12 larger volume of people who are applying.
13 Everything from paying medical debt to --

14 (Time clock sounding.)

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 Senator Julia Salazar.

18 SENATOR SALAZAR: Thank you, Chair.

19 Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for your
20 testimony today.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you, Senator.
22 Good to see you.

23 SENATOR SALAZAR: Good to see you.

24 Senator Ramos referenced this, but I

1 have to return to it since it particularly
2 impacts my district. City Hall has declined
3 to renew the leases of two childcare centers
4 in my district, Nuestros Ninos in
5 Williamsburg and Grand Street Settlement's
6 Stanhope Street location. Both of these
7 childcare centers are models for quality
8 childcare in New York City. High enrollment
9 at both -- in fact, full enrollment with a
10 waiting list at the Grand Street site.

11 Forcing these centers to close would
12 devastate the families that they serve, it
13 would hurt the union workers, the childcare
14 providers who work there, and it would
15 exacerbate the lack of affordable childcare
16 options that we are dealing with in the city.

17 What will you do to ensure that these
18 childcare centers can stay open? And what
19 would you say to families affected by this
20 decision?

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We -- and I spoke
22 with Attorney General Letitia James yesterday
23 about this, and other electeds on this,
24 including Borough President Reynoso.

1 And so what we look at, we look at
2 three items. Number one, are you reaching
3 the capacity of the young people in your
4 childcare center? Because we have 30,000
5 empty seats. We have to reconfig.

6 Number two, what is the cost? One
7 landlord is trying to jump the rent from
8 \$30,000 a month to \$80,000 a month.

9 Number three, do you have other
10 childcare centers in the area? Because many
11 of these childcare centers were densely
12 populated and we were having low enrollment.

13 Those five centers didn't meet any of
14 those items -- didn't meet those three items,
15 I should say. And so what we're doing now, I
16 told the chief of staff, let's sit down with
17 the electeds in the area and let's figure out
18 what we can do to resolve this issue.

19 But we're going to need help, because
20 too many of our children who should be in
21 these centers, we're now recruiting them to
22 get them in. The City Council partnered with
23 us. We're using a large amount of money,
24 millions of dollars, to get children in. But

1 we can't have centers occupied with
2 40 percent vacancy and you have other centers
3 in the area, which is feeding that crisis
4 that we saw when we first came into office.

5 So I would like for you to be part of
6 this team with Chief of Staff Camille Joseph
7 Varlack and the chancellor and see how we can
8 resolve this issue.

9 SENATOR SALAZAR: Thank you. I look
10 forward to continuing that conversation.

11 With the time I have left, there are
12 recruitment and retention issues for civil
13 service jobs across the state. Right? We
14 know this. Currently New York State law does
15 not allow non-U.S. citizens to hold a number
16 of public service positions, certain public
17 service positions in state law, although many
18 people are interested in serving and are
19 uniquely qualified to serve their
20 communities.

21 We know that this has affected the
22 City of New York. There's a vacancy rate for
23 public-sector jobs. Would you support
24 changing state law --

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.

2 SENATOR SALAZAR: Okay.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
4 Seawright.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you,
6 Mr. Chairman. Hello, Mayor.

7 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you?

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: As chair of
9 the Aging Committee, I'm hearing a lot from
10 older constituents in my district on the
11 Upper East Side that have reported serious
12 injuries due to electric bicycles, including
13 on the sidewalk.

14 So what changes could be made with the
15 NYPD to support enforcement of existing laws
16 in apprehending these people?

17 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I have not attended
18 one senior center, one forum, one community
19 group when this question did not come up.
20 I'm surprised it took this long, because I
21 hear it all the time.

22 And I instructed the NYPD under
23 Deputy Commissioner Kaz Daughtry to put in
24 place a real plan with Chief of Patrol John

1 Chell, to go after them.

2 We have removed over 80,000 illegal
3 vehicles off our streets. Many of them are
4 dirt bikes, three-wheelers. You go back two,
5 three years ago, they were running rampant.
6 Large motorcycle gangs was going through our
7 streets. You don't see that anymore.

8 Now we're zeroing in on those who are
9 delivery workers, those who are, you know,
10 just using it for transportation, and we're
11 doing better enforcement and educating those
12 who are utilizing this effort to go after the
13 proper uses of e-bikes.

14 This is a real concern. We've heard
15 it over and over again. And we want to make
16 sure that it's handled correctly, and they're
17 doing that as well.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

19 I know you're a proud graduate of John
20 Jay College of Criminal Justice. In an
21 effort to tap into the pipeline of young
22 people interested in law enforcement careers,
23 the current Police Cadet Program has under
24 250 participating in it. So is this

1 something that you could ask your new highly
2 regarded Police Commissioner Tisch to take
3 on, looking into expanding greatly this
4 program for the five boroughs?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes, without a
6 doubt. I think it's -- it's probably the
7 secret weapon to how we've improved
8 relationships between police and young
9 people. The Cadet Program, the Explorer
10 Program, those are excellent programs, and we
11 would like to see it increase and expand even
12 more.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: And lastly,
14 I have Roosevelt Island in my district. I
15 thank you for visiting a while back.

16 The constituents are interested in
17 priority boarding on the tram. As you know,
18 Roosevelt Island was originally invented for
19 people with disabilities and they're
20 incurring long, long wait lines due to the
21 visitors to the island, and tourists.

22 Would you support priority boarding?
23 Community Board 8 has passed a resolution in
24 support of it.

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Tell me that again?

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Would you
3 support priority boarding of the tram on
4 Roosevelt Island for local residents of the
5 island?

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Before I say yes, I
7 need -- oh.

8 (Time clock sounding.)

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
10 Assemblywoman.

11 Could I just remind everyone, when you
12 see the yellow light, that means you have
13 30 seconds remaining. If you continue your
14 question through the yellow light, you don't
15 leave any time for a response. Which just
16 happened.

17 Senate.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

19 Senator Rolison.

20 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
21 Madam Chair.

22 Good morning, Mr. Mayor and the team.

23 A lot has been said -- the Governor's
24 talked about it, you have been an advocate

1 for it, the involuntary commitment of the
2 individuals who are in crisis on your
3 streets, our streets. And it is a larger
4 problem than just talking about it. You
5 mentioned, Mr. Mayor, correctly, that these
6 individuals, multiple interactions, it's very
7 difficult to get them to want to get help.

8 And what do you see, and your team
9 sees, as the buildout of this system needs to
10 happen? You know, you've got the people
11 trained, on the streets, as many communities
12 do. But after -- and they're ready to make a
13 commitment or they have to be taken in
14 custody, so to speak, on a commissioner's
15 order or whatever, to go to an involuntary
16 commitment or even any commitment, for that
17 matter, Mr. Mayor.

18 What does that infrastructure look
19 like? And what does this state need to do to
20 help you and other communities get there?
21 It's one thing to talk about it, but what
22 else do we need to do as a state to create
23 that system?

24 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Great, great

1 question. And that's why we're really
2 pushing the Supportive Intervention Act,
3 because it starts with family members who
4 want to refer their loved ones to care and
5 not just push them to the streets.

6 And there's not a real well understood
7 pipeline to accomplish that. And so we first
8 must make sure our programs like SCOUT and
9 PATH must partner with clinicians and
10 law enforcement officers when they need it,
11 to get people to the hospital to get care
12 when it's needed.

13 And then our hospital staff must have
14 clarity codified in law that they can hold
15 people to the appropriate amount of time, not
16 feel they have to release them right away.
17 You give someone their medication, they go
18 right back out into the street when it's one
19 day. We should look at their history, are
20 they using drugs with the medication that
21 they're receiving, and give them a period of
22 time to hold them. And then the proper
23 hand-off.

24 The community-based groups and

1 organizations that are out there that can
2 give them that continuing care to make sure
3 that they get the support that they deserve,
4 that they don't slip and fall back into the
5 system. That is how we address this problem.

6 SENATOR ROLISON: And briefly, if that
7 was all ready to go today, are the supportive
8 beds available?

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, we put back
10 online our psychiatric beds. Many went
11 offline after COVID. We need our private
12 hospitals also to do so. And we have to
13 continue to build out to get those supportive
14 beds. And everyone needs to embrace it.
15 When we try to put supportive beds or
16 supportive housing in certain locations,
17 there's a lot of pushback. And we need to
18 know that these are our citizens, they're our
19 residents, our neighbors, and we need to be
20 there to allow them to be part of the
21 community.

22 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
24 Beephan.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Good morning.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Good, thank you.

4 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: So back to your
6 favorite topic, migrants. Mostly particular
7 to Dutchess County.

8 So in 2023 your administration
9 transferred both adult and children migrants
10 to Dutchess County. My questions are
11 pertaining to the adults that are currently
12 housed at the Red Roof Inn. It led to
13 litigation and executive orders and all of
14 that. But in December there was an
15 announcement from your office stating that
16 the migrants from Dutchess County were going
17 to be transferred out.

18 What is the status of that transfer?

19 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Now, they're in your
20 county? Help me understand.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Correct. Yup,
22 Dutchess County. Poughkeepsie.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: They're in
24 Poughkeepsie.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Correct.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And you're saying
3 they're going to be transferred back --

4 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Correct. Yeah,
5 by a statement made from your office in
6 December that you had stated or someone from
7 your office stated that migrants were going
8 to be transferred out of Poughkeepsie.

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Let me look into
10 that. Every deal we made with those
11 counties -- who were extremely helpful when
12 we needed it -- we lived up to all those
13 deals. And if there's a reason that we did
14 not live up to those deals, I'm going to make
15 sure that my chief of staff, who has been
16 part of this, and Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom,
17 zero in and find out exactly what happened.

18 But we've lived up to all the deals.
19 And those counties that came in and stepped
20 up for us, we don't want to violate any
21 agreement we made with them.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Understood. Was
23 there coordination with Dutchess County prior
24 to the migrants being relocated there?

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Every time we moved
2 migrants and asylum seekers up into a county,
3 we coordinated, we communicated. We did not
4 want them to wake up and feel like New York
5 was doing to them what has been done to us.
6 And so we took great strides in that
7 communication.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN BEEPHAN: Understood.
9 Well, I have heard from several local
10 business owners in that area that there's
11 been issues stemming from that ongoing
12 situation there. I won't get into the
13 details, but if your administration could
14 look into that, we would greatly appreciate
15 that, especially if the transfer's pending
16 sometime soon.

17 Thank you.

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Okay. Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is that it?

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you,
21 Mr. Mayor. I believe I'm the last Senator,
22 so to speak.

23 So I know there's been a number of
24 questions about migrants and federal policy

1 and what the City of New York's been doing.
2 And I was just sent an article from Crain's
3 Business that while the Greater New York
4 Hospital Association has sent out a memo to
5 its members urging them how to handle
6 situations if ICE agents show up for
7 patients, that New York NYU Langone, a
8 hospital in my district has taken the
9 position that the staff -- "Please note, it
10 is illegal to intentionally protect a person
11 who is in the United States unlawfully from
12 detention." And not saying privacy for
13 patients not cooperating.

14 And I'm just curious now what the
15 administration's going to do about this. I
16 find it both very disturbing and frankly
17 actually a violation of patient privacy
18 rights in the State of New York. And I don't
19 know that you know about this, because I've
20 just seen this right this second, but I do
21 think this is a real concern, particularly
22 because NYU Langone, of course as you know,
23 is directly next door to Bellevue, which is
24 probably the public hospital with the largest

1 number of patients that are not U.S.
2 citizens, and they overlap medical staffs and
3 residents.

4 So if you're on one side of the floor,
5 you get one set of instructions about how to
6 handle ICE, and if you're on another side of
7 the floor in the other building you get
8 different. I think we have to deal with
9 this.

10 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah. And what is
11 the instruction? I'm sorry. You said they
12 told them --

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: This is from
14 Crain's Business, Crain's Health Pulse, that
15 that hospital focuses on our obligation to
16 comply with federal laws and regulations,
17 instructs staff to notify the security
18 department when a government agent requests
19 information on a patient or access to a
20 nonpublic area, and states it is illegal to
21 intentionally protect a person who is in the
22 United States unlawfully.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, I'm not
24 familiar with -- and those are definitely not

1 under -- the hospital is not under H+H.

2 That's a private hospital.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: It's a private
4 hospital. But we have lots of private
5 hospitals in New York City.

6 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah. And I'm not
7 familiar with exactly what is in that
8 article, and we would look it over and see
9 exactly what's in that article.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm urging you
11 that you need to look into this and do
12 something. I didn't expect you would know
13 this now, because it's coming across as a
14 press story right this second. But it's a
15 very disturbing one to us. Frankly, from a
16 public health perspective, for all of us,
17 regardless of our legal status here.

18 If people don't think they can go to
19 hospitals for healthcare, you have a new
20 public health crisis on our hands here in
21 New York City.

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We agree
23 100 percent. And we have articulated it over
24 and over again, not only going to hospitals,

1 going to schools, getting services from
2 law enforcement. And, you know, I've often
3 heard today about the substantial drop in
4 enrollment in schools. And I should have
5 said it right away: That is not true. We
6 don't have a substantial drop in enrollment.

7 That is -- again, adults need to tone
8 down the anxiety. We can't just put rumors
9 out there. We don't have a substantial drop
10 in our schools.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So during the
12 Education Hearing -- and it was after your
13 chancellor had already left, so I couldn't
14 ask her -- there was a discussion that the
15 superintendents of the other Big 5 schools
16 were complaining that when students enroll in
17 charter schools but then drop out or are
18 asked to leave, that the money doesn't come
19 back to the local public school system.

20 And I'm curious, what's your
21 understanding for New York City?

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I'm not sure -- I'm
23 sorry? Charter schools, the money? When
24 people drop out of the charter schools, does

1 the money go back to the district schools.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Correct.

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You know, I'm not
4 sure.

5 NYC BUDGET DIRECTOR JIHA: (Shaking
6 head.)

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You don't know
8 either.

9 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: No.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Well, I encourage
11 you to look into that, because legally it is
12 supposed to go back for the public schools.
13 And the fact that the other Big 5
14 superintendents were saying that they weren't
15 getting it back raised a red flag to me that
16 we need to look into that for New York City,
17 because the law is that that should be
18 happening.

19 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: That's what the
20 current law states? Okay, we're going to
21 look into that.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

23 So you heard some people talking about
24 congestion pricing. I happen to be a fan of

1 it. I think that you support it. Do you
2 have experience from what you're hearing
3 about the value to New York City of
4 congestion pricing?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Deputy Mayor Meera
6 Joshi is doing an analysis. She sits on the
7 MTA Board as well, and she's doing an
8 analysis. I mean, it's still fresh, you
9 know? So I think the jury is out on are we
10 reaching what we want. I think we're
11 obligated to raise that billion dollars each
12 year, and so we need to do an analysis, see
13 what the impact -- what's the impact on
14 environmental issues in other parts of the
15 city.

16 And so I think the jury is still out,
17 and we need to make sure that we deal with
18 traffic, we deal with congestion. It's an
19 economic issue as well as a health issue, and
20 we're going to continue to monitor it.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 The federal government has certainly
23 made noise already in this first month of the
24 new administration that they don't like the

1 idea of having to pay for public housing.
2 What's the contingency plan in your budget
3 for the City of New York if they stop sending
4 money for NYCHA?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, when you look,
6 Senator, at the fact that NYCHA has an
7 \$80 billion capital deficit -- \$80 billion --
8 I think that far too many levels of
9 government have walked away from NYCHA. We
10 all need to do more.

11 For the first time, the first deputy
12 mayor included in our housing budget -- NYCHA
13 is in part of our housing plan. And
14 everything from the success we've had up here
15 of getting the land trust passed, which we've
16 been voting on. We have to find creative
17 ways of closing that gap, and that is coming
18 from every level of government. We're going
19 to do our part on the city, but the federal
20 and state, we need to reinvest in public
21 housing again.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

23 You just announced a deal with the
24 United Nations for the UNDC bonding

1 \$500 million to redo U.N. One and Two, which
2 were city-owned buildings. Which were in my
3 district forever, but technically are now
4 Senator Gonzalez's district.

5 So we had made a deal with the
6 previous administration that those buildings
7 would get sold and a certain percentage of
8 the money from the sale of those buildings
9 would go towards the building out of the
10 East Promenade waterfront.

11 Now that it appears we're going to
12 raise -- bond \$500 million to redo the
13 buildings, I guess to continue the lease to
14 the U.N., are we ever going to make good on
15 the commitments for that East River Promenade
16 that was supposed to be paid for with
17 portions of the proceeds of the sale?

18 And one of the issues was the U.N. was
19 paying such a low rental amount that we were
20 never going to get real money out of it. So
21 I'm just curious, do we have a really good
22 deal now and there will be money that can go
23 towards the promenade? Because I know my
24 community's already saying what happens to

1 the deal we made.

2 And while many of us have changed
3 seats since then -- you were not the mayor --
4 I was the Senator, and I'm saying now I'm a
5 next-door Senator. A guy named Dan Garodnick
6 was the City Councilmember, a guy named
7 Brian Kavanaugh, now a Senator, was the
8 Assemblymember. So we negotiated this whole
9 thing as an MOU with City Hall. And I'm
10 curious whether that got factored into this
11 new announcement.

12 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
13 We'd be happy, Senator, to follow up to make
14 sure we're accomplishing as many goals as
15 possible, through and including investments
16 in public realm. And I think we have a
17 strong track record across the city on the
18 waterfront of making these types of
19 investments.

20 For this particular deal through UNDC,
21 it represents 2,000 union jobs and several
22 hundred thousand square feet of office space
23 that will be renewed and revitalized and
24 critical, not just for job creation but to

1 make sure that we continue to be a global hub
2 of commerce and the type of work that the UN
3 represents.

4 But I'd be more than happy to follow
5 up on what was represented in that MOU to
6 identify areas where we can look at those
7 commitments and make sure that we're honoring
8 them to the extent feasible.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, I
10 appreciate that. Thank you.

11 Last, it's silly to walk into 48
12 seconds with affordable housing, but we all
13 know how important it is. And recently it
14 seems there are a few buildings that even
15 have been going up in my district and then
16 little news stories come out that there will
17 be X number of affordable units available,
18 but they're not on the HPD website as
19 something people can apply for.

20 Did something change in the rules that
21 they don't have to do that anymore and they
22 can make their own deals for picking people?

23 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER: If
24 it's going through the lottery they should be

1 on our website, so I'd be happy to follow up
2 to make sure that there's no property that
3 has slipped through the cracks for some
4 reason.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. There's
6 one on 78th and First, because I looked and
7 it's not there.

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Nice area.

9 SENATOR KRUEGER: And I think there
10 were a few others.

11 All right, my time is up. Thank you
12 very much. Assembly?

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.
14 Assemblyman Tannousis.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN TANNOUSIS: Good
16 afternoon, Mr. Mayor.

17 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you?

18 ASSEMBLYMAN TANNOUSIS: Good, good.
19 How are you?

20 I want to talk to you today -- I want
21 to ask you today about the migrant shelters
22 on Staten Island. I was glad that one of the
23 shelters in Travis closed. But we do still
24 have emergency migrant shelters on

1 Staten Island, including one location, which
2 is in my district, Island Shores location,
3 along Father Capodanno. That location has
4 been the center of protests. The community
5 was up in arms when that shelter came about.
6 The community was upset about lack of notice,
7 about lack of communication between the
8 mayor's office and the local elected
9 officials, and there was very much a
10 bipartisan effort to show our discontent for
11 that location.

12 My question for you today, Mr. Mayor,
13 is when is that location going to close?
14 Notice I'm not asking you if that location is
15 going to close. My question is, when will
16 that location close, Mr. Mayor, and finally
17 bring peace to that neighborhood?

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And that's the goal.
19 We want to bring peace to the city. And as I
20 said earlier before your arrival,
21 Assemblyman, I have not found one elected
22 official that raised their hand and said,
23 Hey, put the shelter here, Eric. Not one.

24 I have to put it somewhere. And we

1 want to minimize the disruption to
2 communities. We want to minimize how we have
3 to keep people in shelters. We -- you know,
4 and you're right, adequate notice. We were
5 not getting notice when we were getting 4,000
6 people a week, 8,000 people every two weeks,
7 16,000 a month. No one was calling us to
8 say, Hey, expect that busload at 2 a.m. in
9 the morning.

10 We were mandated by the lawsuits from
11 the Legal Aid Society, within a certain
12 period of time we had to house people. And
13 this team was up to 4, 5 every morning doing
14 the best they can.

15 And so we want to close that location
16 as soon as possible. We've closed 33 sites.
17 No one thought we was going to close Floyd
18 Bennett Field -- it's closed. No one thought
19 we was going to close Randalls Island -- it's
20 closing. We are going to try to close as
21 many as possible.

22 And you know what, when we try to get
23 people out, Assemblyman, when we said you
24 have 30 days, this is not a lifetime

1 experience, people fought against us. But it
2 was successful. We got 180-something-
3 thousand people out, and we look forward to
4 the day that you and I stand in front of that
5 site because we closed it together, and we're
6 going to close it down.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN TANNOUSIS: Thank you,
8 Mr. Mayor. And I assure you that no one on
9 Staten Island was upset about giving
10 individuals 30 days to vacate the premises.

11 But please keep that location in mind,
12 and I'll be happy to work with your office to
13 ensure that these locations are closed.

14 Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Colton.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN COLTON: Good morning,
18 Mr. Mayor.

19 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you. How are
20 you, Assemblyman?

21 ASSEMBLYMAN COLTON: We finish this
22 early, possibly you'll be able to join us at
23 our Asian Lunar New Year celebration this
24 afternoon.

ASSEMBLYMAN COLTON: Before you became
you strongly criticized the existing
ss policy, shelter policy, as failing
l with the real problems of our
ss and creating a system of long-term
rs and exorbitant costs. Yet you seem
e greatly expanded that shelter policy.

The growing cost now for the city has to some four to \$6 billion a year, and say it's going to reach \$8 billion a This is all money that is diverted

1 from programs that would really help the
2 problems of homeless people. And it is also
3 connected with not providing proper services
4 to those with mental illness problems.

5 High-profile random attacks on the subways
6 and the streets have created a fear among
7 New Yorkers for using the subways and the
8 streets.

9 Why are we continuing to expand and to
10 build more city-run shelters when it is clear
11 this system fails to help homeless people?
12 And it fails to help neighborhoods and is not
13 supported by anyone, whether it be the
14 homeless people or by people in
15 neighborhoods. And when it diverts billions
16 of dollars that should be going to reduce
17 homelessness and deal with the homeless
18 problem, and not simply enrich the pockets of
19 wealthy developers and wealthy operators who
20 are paid -- the Department of Investigation
21 showed that they were paid exorbitant
22 salaries, the CEOs operating the city
23 homeless shelters.

24 Why are we not listening to the voices

1 of the vast numbers of New Yorkers telling us
2 this program is filled with corruption, with
3 nepotism, it does not deal with the needs of
4 homeless people, and it diverts billions of
5 dollars in a failed program which simply does
6 not work.

7 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: You said a lot.

8 (Time clock sounding.)

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: A three-minute
10 question garners a zero answer.

11 (Laughter.)

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
13 Gallahan.

14 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you doing,
15 Assemblyman?

16 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Thank you,
17 Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Mayor.

18 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you?

19 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: It is
20 afternoon.

21 I want to go back to the cannabis,
22 back when --

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Cannabis?

24 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Cannabis. I

1 want to talk about cannabis.

2 So back when we debated the bill a
3 couple of years ago, I was vehemently adamant
4 about funding our sheriffs, our cities, our
5 towns, and our New York City police to combat
6 black-market sales. Black-market sales in
7 every other state that enacted cannabis
8 legally, the average increase in black-market
9 sales is 138 percent.

10 There was nothing in the bill to
11 address that, nothing. There's nothing in
12 the Governor's budget to address that. I
13 commend you for what I heard earlier about
14 how you've attacked that market in New York
15 City and what you're doing to eradicate the
16 black market and increase our sales where we
17 get the tax money. Because Joe down the
18 street, contrary to popular belief, is not
19 paying the state a dime.

20 So my question is, what suggestions do
21 you have for us in the Legislature that we
22 can further provide you resources necessary
23 to continue what you're doing?

24 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Great -- great

1 question. And I want to -- Diane, you should
2 touch on that, because you're intimately
3 involved in that.

4 But one area that we're finding we're
5 having a problem with right now, these stores
6 are -- as much as you pass the law, they try
7 to get ahead of you. We just learned now we
8 cannot go in and do an inspection if it's
9 a -- if they have a hemp license. Which
10 makes no sense. If they have a hemp license
11 and are selling illegal cannabis, we cannot
12 go in and inspect them. The judge ruled that
13 if someone has a hemp license, my sheriff
14 can't go in and do inspections at all in the
15 store.

16 And so we may have to look at a
17 modification on how to deal with that. And
18 the Office of Cannabis management needs to
19 have a faster turnaround to let us know if a
20 person has a hemp license. They are
21 requiring us to return the product back to
22 the people. That's a real problem.

23 But Diane, you want to --

24 SENIOR MAYORAL ADVISOR SAVINO: Just

1 briefly on that, one thing that you guys can
2 do to help us is there is a flaw in the hemp
3 licensing law that the mayor touched on which
4 prevents us from going in and inspecting.
5 OCM also cannot go in and inspect those
6 localities that have a -- facilities that
7 have a hemp license.

8 Right now, though, the Ag & Markets,
9 which issues hemp licenses, have been issuing
10 temporary hemp licenses on -- just online,
11 without any background checks. So many of
12 the people that we closed down, with the
13 tools that you gave us last year, they're
14 smart -- they figured out that there's a flaw
15 in the law, and they're doing that.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We've been joined
17 by Assemblywoman Walker.

18 The next questioner is Assemblywoman
19 Jackson.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Thank you,
21 Chair. Hi, Mr. Mayor.

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How are you doing,
23 Assemblywoman?

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: All is well.

1 Okay, so I know statistically crime is
2 down. However, I'm in the South Bronx, so
3 I'm the 4-0, the 4-1, the 4-2, PSA 7, 44 and
4 48. They are all asking for more officers.
5 My seniors are asking for more officers.
6 They do not feel like they are supported
7 enough. So I'm going to state that.

8 However, my young people are asking
9 for jobs. They want more jobs. And I've
10 gone to a number of your hiring halls -- the
11 lines are out the door and around the block.
12 Our city wants to work. Our professionals
13 also want to work. And a lot of the jobs
14 inside are not necessarily for people who we
15 told to go and get an advanced degree and a
16 Ph.D. Those people are looking for work as
17 well.

18 So any suggestions on what we should
19 be doing in the budget to help all levels of
20 people with education with working.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: No, love that
22 question. And we brought down unemployment
23 in every demographic in the city. Black
24 unemployment was four times the rate of white

1 unemployment when I came into city. We
2 dropped Black and Hispanic unemployment by
3 20 percent.

4 As you stated, we've been doing these
5 hiring halls and I would love to sponsor more
6 in your district, because we have thousands
7 of vacancies in city government, good jobs,
8 school safety agents, correction officers --
9 that was mentioned earlier by the Assemblyman
10 about employing our schools -- our correction
11 officers. We are in a crisis for teachers
12 because of what we've done around class size.

13 So we need to get all these vacancies
14 that are available in city government, good
15 union-paying jobs, good salaries -- and the
16 private industry have joined us -- and get it
17 to the people that need a job.

18 FDM, talk about some of the great work
19 you're doing.

20 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:

21 Yes. In addition to what the mayor
22 mentioned, we also have done a lot into other
23 areas. One, really building out
24 apprenticeship opportunities, in particular

1 for early career New Yorkers, and it's an
2 opportunity to both earn and learn. And we
3 see them -- we work with the private sector
4 in a whole array of industries from
5 construction to tech and to life sciences --

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Okay, so let
7 me just pause, because I need to ask about
8 cannabis. And I'm going to have my office
9 reach out so we can --

10 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:
11 Perfect.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: -- figure out
13 a plan.

14 But cannabis, I've spoken with OCM. I
15 know that our sheriffs are able seize product
16 and to seize money. OCM is saying that
17 they're not getting reports from us as to how
18 much is being seized and where the money is.
19 So can you tell me why they're not answering
20 to OCM and where we can find how much funding
21 and product was seized?

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, that should
23 not happen. So let's find out -- I would
24 have the Deputy Mayor Parker reach out to OCM

1 and find out where the communication gap is.
2 That should not happen. We could give them
3 the stats and reports.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Okay. Because
5 there was a hearing also and they asked how
6 much money was seized, and no one had an
7 answer.

8 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, they'd better.
9 So let us look into that, okay?

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Okay.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

12 Assemblywoman Simon.

13 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: How you doing,
14 Assemblywoman?

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: (Mic problem.)

16 Oh, I'm sorry. How are you, sir?

17 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Hard to hear you up
18 there.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Good to see you.

20 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Oh, thank you. Good
21 seeing you as well.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I have a couple
23 of questions for you -- probably not the ones
24 you thought I would ask you. So I'm going to

1 ask you some other questions. Right?

2 You know, I think Mr. Epstein
3 mentioned before the disparities in the
4 number of units for supported housing, and
5 only 18 percent of those people who are
6 eligible have been able to get units.

7 So I just want to make sure that we
8 are looking at how we can fix this, how we
9 can make changes to that eligibility so that
10 people actually -- reduce the barriers to
11 actually getting that supported housing.

12 But my question is, number one,
13 New York City is currently doing a massive
14 water table study, and I would like your
15 commitment to authorize the addition to that
16 of a hydrology study in the Gowanus
17 watershed, which as you know is toxic, prone
18 to flooding, and the site of 8,000-plus new
19 housing units being put in.

20 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Someone -- one of my
21 water people tell me about that before I say
22 yes, because she's going to hold me to it.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: DEP doing a lot
24 of work there, you know?

1 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Let me have Rit
2 communicate with you, Rit Aggarwala, who's
3 the commissioner of DEP, and find out exactly
4 what I'm about to say yes to. Okay?

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay. I'm going
6 to hold you to it.

7 And then secondarily, the Brooklyn
8 House of Detention, as you know, it's about a
9 40-story building. We were supposed to have
10 about 160 therapeutic beds which are used not
11 only for people with mental illness but
12 chronic health conditions as well. And
13 that's been cut in half. And now when we
14 build out the four jails to replace Rikers,
15 we will have roughly half the therapeutic
16 beds systemwide.

17 How do we square that with this
18 concern that's been expressed about those
19 people struggling with mental illness?

20 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Great question.

21 Assemblywoman, the plan is flawed.
22 And I've stated this over and over again,
23 it's like, you know, no one wants to
24 acknowledge that it's a flawed plan because

1 we put the plan in place already.

2 The current jail population exceeds
3 what the four jails are going to do. The
4 price has doubled. We need a -- you can't
5 have 51 percent of the inmates having mental
6 health issues. We need a state-of-the-art
7 psychiatric facility. I think one of those
8 jails should do that for in- and outpatient
9 treatment, that we can give a real care that
10 we can be proud of.

11 And so right now when you look at the
12 space that we need, we look at how long
13 people stay on Rikers Island without getting
14 their time in court, that is what's feeding
15 this problem. Every aspect of the criminal
16 justice system must participate in a real
17 Rikers plan. And if we don't do that, we're
18 going to have a real crisis down the road.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: We already do.
20 And it's not getting better by reducing the
21 number of therapeutic beds. We need more of
22 them.

23 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: If there's any

1 place we need them, it's there. Thank you.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, I agree.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

4 Assemblywoman Walker.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Assemblywoman, how
6 are you?

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: I'm doing well.

8 But unlike my colleague, I'm going to
9 ask you exactly what you think I'm going to
10 ask you. And of course, Mr. Mayor, and to
11 all of your colleagues, a pleasant good
12 morning.

13 So I'm going to talk about discovery.
14 So you're a police officer and very good one,
15 or you were, but I'm sure once a police
16 officer, always a police officer. And if I
17 showed up on a crime scene and I told you
18 what was relevant -- don't look over here,
19 this is not relevant -- what would your
20 response be to that?

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: I would say don't
22 tell me what's relevant and what's not.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: So why do you
24 think, then, it should be up to the

1 prosecutors to tell the defense counsel what
2 it is is relevant as it relates to discovery?

3 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Well, I think
4 there's certain ways you could do it, but
5 that's why it's back up to you to look at it.
6 It could be an independent eye. They could
7 be coming in front of the judge and determine
8 what's relevant or not.

9 What we don't want to do is what we're
10 seeing with what the prosecutors have shared
11 with us. If you have everyone's -- for
12 example, everyone's body-worn camera, a
13 person who never even got out of the scene,
14 he was in a car all the time, and you didn't
15 get that body-worn camera and all of a sudden
16 the charge is dismissed because of that, that
17 is what I believe they're talking about.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Well, that is a
19 very good point that you make, because the
20 body-worn camera footage is in the possession
21 of the police department. And so do you
22 think that the police department has any
23 accountability here to some of these
24 dismissals that people have been talking

1 about?

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Without a doubt.
3 Everyone has accountability here. And I
4 think that to do a fair analysis of discovery
5 based on what the prosecutors are saying,
6 based on what they're saying to allow those
7 professionals to look and see exactly what we
8 need to do, I think that that's what we
9 should be using this legislative session to
10 do so.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: I appreciate
12 that, and I do believe there will be a
13 continued dialogue. But I don't believe that
14 that conversation can happen in a vacuum
15 without the police department sort of having
16 some skin in the game.

17 And so there's a lot of conversation
18 also we've been talking about with respect to
19 City of Yes. And we want to promote more
20 building. But can you talk to me a little
21 bit about how you would help us with reentry
22 housing? A lot of times supportive housing
23 is always -- it's always like a catch-22
24 between which one is going to get built. We

1 do need more supportive housing, but we also
2 need more reentry housing for people who are
3 transitioning out of Rikers Island and other
4 places.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: That's so important.
6 You've talked about that for quite some time,
7 and we are strong believers in reentry
8 housing. And wherever we could place those
9 projects -- and you have been welcoming to
10 placing projects in your Assembly district.
11 Far too many people are not welcoming in
12 doing that.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Please, bring
14 them on.

15 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Right. Right. And
16 so we -- I agree with you as we look at
17 supportive housing we have to focus on the
18 large number of people who have long prison
19 sentences, they're coming home, they need to
20 come home to a welcoming platform so they
21 don't become repeat offenders.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Thank you,
23 Mr. Mayor.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,

1 Assemblywoman.

2 And Mr. Mayor, I want to thank you for
3 your testimony today.

4 I guess I'll close it out. I really
5 don't have any pertinent questions, just a
6 few comments, and a question may hit me.

7 First, to correct a misstatement that
8 was made earlier, I know for a fact that more
9 than half of the wealth of the State of
10 New York comes from New York City. I also
11 know that more than half of the wealth of
12 New York City comes from south of
13 Canal Street.

14 (Laughter.)

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That's a fact.

16 Rikers Island, I don't know if
17 anything in the Governor's budget mentions
18 that. I know New York City's in the process
19 of closing down Rikers and opening community
20 jails like -- can you just tell me what's
21 going on with that?

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes. And, you know,
23 I said it over and over again and I will
24 continue to say the plan, Assemblyman, is a

1 flawed plan. And no one wants to acknowledge
2 that. They all know it's a flawed plan, but
3 no one wants to say it publicly. You cannot
4 close down Rikers, build four more jails.
5 That is not going to house the current
6 population that you have right now.

7 Double the price cost to build it.
8 We're not dealing with the psychiatric issues
9 many of the inmates are experiencing. We're
10 building four more smaller than Rikers. And
11 we need to be bold enough -- if we're going
12 to invest \$16 billion, we should be bold
13 enough to address all of the issues we are
14 facing.

15 We don't have so much a criminal -- a
16 crime problem, we have a mental health
17 problem. And we need to be focusing on how
18 do we address that mental health problem.
19 And this is a great opportunity to do so.
20 But the law requires, 2027, Rikers has to
21 close, cannot be used for a jail again. I
22 just think we need to go back to the table
23 and look at how we can do this correctly.
24 This is a golden opportunity to get it right.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

2 And someone had mentioned migrants.
3 What is the city's policy on housing
4 migrants, noncitizens, outside of New York
5 City?

6 And the reason I'm asking is because I
7 represent a district just north of the city,
8 and I had a few complaints {inaudible} from
9 senior citizens whose landlords refused to
10 renew their leases because New York City was
11 offering maybe 60 percent more in rent than
12 they were currently paying, and the landlord
13 wanted to increase their rent 60 percent or
14 not renew the lease because they were going
15 to house someone from outside of the country.
16 And that caused a little angst.

17 I mentioned it to someone on your
18 staff. I didn't get a real good answer. But
19 is there a set policy for how you do that? I
20 mean, I know you don't want to purposely
21 create homelessness someplace else, but it
22 seems that what's been happening -- I don't
23 know if it happens on Long Island or even up
24 here, in the Albany area, where I know that

1 migrants were being housed upstate.

2 Is there a policy where you try to
3 ensure that you do not create homelessness
4 for another group of individuals?

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: We took great
6 strides, the team took great strides in not
7 displacing residents. We used, for the most
8 part, hotels. And those who moved out of the
9 hotels who stay in the areas, they -- we took
10 great strides to make sure we were not
11 displacing the residents that were in the
12 area.

13 But many people returned to New York
14 City. Some people stayed in those
15 municipalities because they enjoy the
16 different life of being in those regions.
17 But we took great strides to not displace
18 long-term residents.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So there is at
20 least an attempt to do that. And if
21 landlords --

22 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yes.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: -- don't tell you
24 what's really happening, it's just not in

1 your control, you'll do what you have to do.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: And I'm not aware of
3 any landlords that are doing that.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: All right. And
5 this is my last question, it's about floods.

6 I was recently driving down the Henry
7 Hudson Parkway, and it had just finished
8 raining and the water was like lapping up
9 onto the highway almost. It seems that if
10 the river rises any, we're going to have
11 serious flooding. And I know downtown is at
12 the water table now.

13 Is there anything in this current
14 budget that would help you work toward any
15 flood mitigation for the future? Because
16 it's coming. And New York City's destined to
17 be -- at least Lower Manhattan's destined to
18 be underwater I think by 2030 or 2035. So
19 the time to start making corrections for that
20 is now.

21 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Yeah, FDM and her
22 team under DM Meera Joshi, we have -- we
23 acknowledge that climate change is real and
24 it's going to impact our city. And the

1 billion dollars investment of being a city
2 with so much coastal land, we know we have to
3 be prepared for that.

4 You want to talk about some of those
5 things we're doing?

6 FIRST DEP. MAYOR TORRES-SPRINGER:

7 Sure. We've been very focused, Assemblyman,
8 on making sure that we're doing everything
9 that we can on flood prevention. In our
10 preliminary capital budget, for instance,
11 just to name a few of those investments,
12 almost 300 million to make flood-proofing
13 upgrades to seven pump stations, mostly in
14 Queens; another 150 million to construct a
15 storm sewer system in Harlem; another
16 100 million for green infrastructure
17 projects; 300 million to upgrade the sanitary
18 sewer trunk in Jamaica; and a number of
19 others.

20 So we're very focused on this because
21 we know that with climate change must also
22 come the types of investments that protect
23 neighborhoods, people and entire families.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Well, that

1 concludes this section of this hearing.

2 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I want to thank
4 you, Mr. Mayor, and your staff.

5 NYC MAYOR ADAMS: Good to see you.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And we'll move on
7 now to the next group, called Panel A.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And as the mayor
9 leaves, please, everyone who wants to
10 continue conversations with him, whether
11 you're legislators or the press, outside in
12 the hallway, whichever direction he chooses
13 to go, not here in the room.

14 We need to keep this hearing going.

15 (Off the record.)

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, if
17 legislators will take their seats or take
18 their conversations with the leaving mayors
19 outside. Assemblymember Jacobson -- you
20 know, some people just don't follow
21 instructions.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember
23 Shimsky, please take a seat. Mayor Spano,
24 could you --

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Take the
2 conversations outside.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Welcome, Panel A.
4 Before we get started, just for the
5 media, could you each just quickly introduce
6 yourselves? And then I don't know what order
7 we're going to go. How about size matters?
8 We'll start out with Buffalo and go down to
9 Albany.

10 SENATOR KRUEGER: Is Buffalo here?

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I don't know. So
12 that means we start with Yonkers. You are
13 number three now, right?

14 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: (Mic off.)

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Your mic's not on,
16 Mike. No. Look for the green -- there you
17 go.

18 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Okay, gotcha.

19 Good afternoon, Madam Chair. Good
20 afternoon, Mr. Chair. To our honorable
21 legislators, it's good to be here today and
22 I'll try to be quick on my remarks. I know
23 that you have my testimony, so I'll leave it
24 to that. And again, let me just say a

1 special congratulations to Assemblyman
2 Pretlow, my good friend for a very long time,
3 on your ascension to this very important
4 committee.

5 Really simply, I'm here today to ask
6 for additional funding for education. I know
7 that surprises you. It's something that we
8 seem to do every year for the past 14 years.
9 And we talk about the school aid formula and
10 how it effects Yonkers. And when I talk
11 about it, sometimes I come across as if I'm
12 somehow, you know, talking about my
13 colleagues here that are sitting to my left,
14 to my right, as people who get everything and
15 we get nothing. That's not true. They get
16 everything they absolutely should, and more
17 they should get in terms of aid to education.

18 I'm here to talk about the plight of
19 my city and the fact that we need additional
20 funding for education. We have been able to
21 get help from you over the years in terms of
22 bullet aid and one-shots, and that's been a
23 big help. But it's not been really what
24 we've needed to kind of keep us going.

1 We asked for a Regional Cost Index,
2 and I know that that was something that was
3 talked about in the Rockefeller report pretty
4 intensively. And when you talk about this --
5 let me see if I have it right -- this CWIFT,
6 whatever it is you guys call it, whatever the
7 report called it, if that was allowed to be
8 implemented -- and it's not in the Governor's
9 budget, but if it was allowed to be
10 implemented, it would mean \$65 million in
11 additional funding to the City of Yonkers.
12 That tells you what that cost of living
13 really means. And if that doesn't prove the
14 point, just look at what we did with living
15 wage. When we passed a living wage and you
16 regionalized it in New York State, you said,
17 you know what, it costs more to live in
18 Long Island, it costs more to live in
19 New York City, it costs more to live in
20 Westchester County. And that's why the
21 regionals costs were higher there. It's why
22 what we implemented into law was higher in
23 terms of a living wage.

24 But while New York State recognizes in

1 school aid formula those same principles as
2 it applies to Manhattan -- I'm sorry, to
3 New York City and to Long Island, it does not
4 apply to Westchester County. And instead, I
5 have a regional cost that looks like cities
6 that are 100 miles north of me.

7 So it's been an issue, and it's been a
8 burden. The taxpayers of Yonkers pay more
9 per pupil to educate a child than my
10 colleagues sitting next to me, those cities
11 combined. And while we do that and while we
12 continue to raise the maintenance of
13 effort -- every single year we raise that
14 maintenance of effort for the -- in the City
15 of Yonkers. Because you know what, we will
16 never let our kids starve. And we get help
17 from you, and I appreciate that. But what we
18 need is something that is sustainable, that
19 is predictable, that gives us the dollars
20 that we need every single year.

21 You know, we're graduating our kids at
22 90 percent. We have the best graduation rate
23 of any big city in New York State. Barack
24 Obama just proclaimed Yonkers as a model city

1 for educating young Black men -- a model
2 city. Gave us an award, a nationwide award,
3 and we're proud of that. Why? Because we
4 know that we're not like previous
5 administrations that you've had to deal with,
6 that I had to deal with when I was in the
7 Legislature, who said to you, you know what,
8 Albany, you fix the problem. If you can't
9 fix the problem, shut the lights off on your
10 way out because they're your kids, not ours.

11 No, that's not what the taxpayers of
12 Yonkers say, nor will they ever say that.
13 They're our kids. And we will build on the
14 successes that we've had. And we'll continue
15 to make sure that Yonkers is a place where
16 our children will have that opportunity at
17 growth so they can live, they can work in the
18 community, and they can prosper.

19 So I'm asking for help. I'm asking
20 for more funding. I'm asking that you take a
21 look at the regional cost of Yonkers as it
22 pertains -- or at least in Westchester.
23 Because there is a glaring -- it's glaring,
24 it's right there, it says there needs to be

1 more dollars put into this city.

2 I have an impossible task of going
3 back to the taxpayers every year. I mean,
4 think about that. Even though we're in
5 Westchester County, you know, we're an urban
6 center, we are at -- we're still less than
7 the state's median income. And, you know, in
8 Yonkers you have -- you know, you have --
9 most of our kids live at or below the rate of
10 poverty.

11 So having all that, and having all of
12 that to deal with, we still, like I said, are
13 able to make it work and to have a great
14 graduation rate and to get acknowledgments.
15 Your investments in Yonkers have been good,
16 and we want to make sure that we continue to
17 see those investments grow and to make a
18 difference, especially in our kids and our
19 community. But it won't happen, like I said,
20 without your support.

21 So again, to the Senate and especially
22 Senator Stewart-Cousins, Senator Shelley
23 Mayer, that \$12 million bullet aid was huge
24 for us, continues to be huge for us. We hope

1 that that will continue to be in the budget.

2 We know that the Governor took last
3 year's AIM aid, it was a temporary measure,
4 and put it back in the budget. We took that
5 entire amount and moved it to the Board of
6 Education. We broke the tax cap and moved it
7 to the Board of Education. And we're still,
8 still struggling to make it happen.

9 And so I'm not going to speak on much
10 else because I know you'll have a lot of
11 questions. We can fill in the blanks and
12 everything else later. But I'm here to talk
13 about our need for additional aid to
14 education, something that is not a one-shot,
15 something that is real, meaningful, and
16 something that changes the formula. Because
17 every time we fully fund the formula, which
18 is great -- we have fully funded the formula
19 except the gap between what this city gets
20 and what other cities like us get grows
21 exponentially. So we might get 18 million,
22 but other cities get 40 million.

23 We have a district that is nearly
24 exactly the same size as Yonkers -- think

1 about this, nearly the same size in terms of
2 enrollment, but a billion dollars is spent on
3 education in that community. Nowhere near a
4 billion dollars worth of education dollars
5 spent in Yonkers, and a thousand more
6 teachers, 1,000 more teachers. And I
7 struggle -- we struggle with, you know,
8 music, art, sports, making sure that our kids
9 have enough psychologists. And yes, some
10 might say we pay our teachers a lot, and we
11 do. But they're dealing with an
12 infrastructure that is falling down around
13 them, even though we've made significant
14 impact over the past couple of years. And
15 with your help, we're building new schools.

16 We still have a ways to go, and that's
17 why I'm asking please look at this Regional
18 Cost Index and see if there's a way for
19 Yonkers to get treated more fairly and some
20 substantive change to the formula.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Who's next?

23 Don't all just jump in.

24 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: I guess I'll

1 jump in. Malik Evans, mayor of Rochester.
2 thank you, Chairwoman Krueger and
3 Chairman Pretlow. It's great to be back in
4 front of this committee again.

5 I'll just start by saying that we're
6 witnessing tremendous momentum in Rochester
7 with an accelerating pace of positive change
8 and each new improvement generating more
9 improvements. But I think it's important to
10 point out that serious financial challenges
11 in the years ahead threaten that momentum.
12 Our most significant financial concerns
13 include the declining sales tax revenues,
14 increasing pension and healthcare costs, and
15 of course the end of ARPA funding. And
16 what's more, while we were grateful last year
17 for the additional \$5 million we received
18 last year in Temporary Municipal Assistance,
19 Rochester's \$88.2 million allotment in AIM
20 aid continues to be lower per capita than our
21 peer cities. And on top of that, the
22 state-mandated efforts that we spend in
23 education is also a larger contribution than
24 our peer cities. And it's important for me

1 to note that Rochester, if we look at the top
2 five poor zip codes in New York State, three
3 of them are within the City of Rochester.

4 These are the conditions that drive
5 most if not all of our most pressing
6 challenges, including violent crime, low
7 employment, and decreased educational
8 outcomes. And these are conditions that
9 require the delivery of extraordinary levels
10 of critical services, even as we continue to
11 make strategic investments that attract
12 private development and fuel Rochester's
13 growth.

14 To confront these challenges and
15 perpetuate Rochester's forward momentum, we
16 respectfully ask for the following support.
17 The biggest one, and I'm sure it's no big
18 surprise, because every year I have testified
19 to this: AIM aid. First, we are once again
20 asking for Rochester's fair share of AIM
21 funding, with a baseline increase of
22 \$32.7 million, which would bring us to parity
23 with cities like Buffalo. We're not asking
24 for more, we're just asking for the exact

1 same amount per capita that every other city
2 gets that receives AIM aid.

3 The current disparity significantly
4 threatens our ability to provide the critical
5 services of our citizens that they depend on
6 to repair and replace aging infrastructure
7 and to continue the success that we started
8 with our ARPA funds, and to keep an estimated
9 \$20 million increase in pension and
10 healthcare costs.

11 Affordable housing and home ownership
12 is something that we are also focused on.
13 New York State is an important partner in our
14 housing programs, which help residents escape
15 the cycle of poverty and build generational
16 wealth and homeownership. So we seek a small
17 amount of dollars, only \$1.8 million in gap
18 funding per year for three years for nine
19 affordable housing projects that we have.

20 Also, to create homeownership, which
21 is the pathway to wealth in our community,
22 and help to build generational wealth, we're
23 seeking \$11.25 million for three years to
24 renovate homes in our community to resell

1 them to income-eligible homeowners and to
2 help existing homeowners stay in their homes,
3 we are seeking \$1.9 million a year for three
4 years to help with repair costs.

5 We have tremendous progress in
6 Rochester as it relates to public safety.
7 The Gun Involved Violence Elimination aid --
8 because of that GIVE aid, gun violence in
9 Rochester has declined by 50 percent since
10 the peak years of the pandemic. The state
11 support of the gun violence elimination
12 program has been critical to that success.
13 And to continue that progress so that we can
14 continue to drive down gun crime even lower,
15 we are seeking \$4.2 million in GIVE aid.
16 That's a \$1 million increase over last year.

17 Lastly, you cannot talk about public
18 safety without addressing pedestrian safety.
19 Rochester I believe is the only city outside
20 of New York City to take on the Vision Zero
21 initiative to eliminate traffic fatalities
22 through environmental design, enforcement and
23 education. Our ROC Vision Zero is not just a
24 goal -- it's a commitment to ensure that

1 every individual can move safely throughout
2 Rochester. And to move forward with this
3 commitment, we are seeking \$18 million for
4 projects including advancing our Bicycle
5 Spine network, implementing a 25-miles per
6 hour city speed limit, and improving
7 pedestrian priority zones.

8 Transformative construction projects
9 is something that we also have a focus on.
10 Rochester is in the midst of a physical
11 transformation that emphasizes quality of
12 life and environmental justice, and chief
13 among them is our ROC the Riverway waterfront
14 revitalization program as well as our Inner
15 Loop North Transformation program.

16 This progress has already generated
17 significant private-sector investment, most
18 notably the decision of Constellation Brands,
19 a Fortune 500 company, to move its
20 international headquarters to downtown
21 Rochester.

22 But we need to continue to move with
23 this momentum, so we are seeking funding for
24 four ROC the Riverway initiative programs --

1 the rehabilitation of the Vacuum Oil site
2 upon full remediation. That's a site that
3 was contaminated by folks that decided to
4 contaminate the neighborhood -- then, after
5 they got all the value, they decided to move.
6 This is a \$35 million project to restore the
7 shore. It occupies 15 acres along 4,000
8 linear feet of waterfront property at our
9 Genesee River.

10 We're also looking for funding for our
11 convention center and also our Blue Cross
12 Arena, where our AHL Rochester Amerks play.

13 But lastly I want to end by talking
14 about our Inner Loop transformation project.
15 The notorious power broker Robert Moses once
16 said "To operate in an overbuilt metropolis,
17 sometimes you have to hack your way with a
18 meat axe." And I think that this quote
19 perfectly illustrates the urban renewal
20 mindset that prompted the removal of hundreds
21 of homes, churches and businesses in Black
22 and brown neighborhoods in Rochester with the
23 Inner Loop Expressway. It's much easier to
24 aim your meat axe at those with no voice.

1 The Inner Loop transformation project
2 will restore these neighborhoods with
3 thriving commercial districts, green space
4 and housing, delivering much-needed
5 environmental justice. We still believe in
6 environmental justice in Rochester, no matter
7 what they say at the federal level.

8 With a footprint more than three times
9 the size of the Inner Loop East project,
10 which now serves as a national model for
11 reconnecting neighborhoods and generating new
12 investments, the Inner Loop North project has
13 the potential to surpass that success by
14 orders of magnitude.

15 So we are seeking an additional
16 \$125 million for new construction costs and
17 new elements identified in the scoping.

18 And as I said, witnessing -- as we
19 continue to witness this tremendous momentum
20 in Rochester, Monroe County, as a result of
21 our strategic investments in valuable
22 partnerships. I continue to ask for your
23 support. As fellow public servants, I urge
24 you to support these investments and join the

1 "We, Not Me" partnerships that are once again
2 turning Rochester into an economic driver for
3 the entire State of New York.

4 I thank you for your time, and I
5 welcome any questions that you may have.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
7 Mr. Mayor.

8 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Good
9 afternoon, everyone. I would like to thank
10 the New York State Legislature for the
11 opportunity to testify before the Joint
12 Legislative Budget Committee today.

13 To Senate Finance Chair Liz Krueger,
14 Assembly Ways and Means Chair Gary Pretlow,
15 Senate Local Government Chair Monica Martinez
16 and Assembly Local Government Chair Billy
17 Jones, and the rest of the committee members,
18 I thank you and I'm honored to be here today
19 in front of you as the mayor of the City of
20 Buffalo on behalf of our residents.

21 I also want to take a moment to
22 acknowledge and thank the Western New York
23 delegation -- in particular, Assembly
24 Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes -- for

1 the work they do on a daily basis championing
2 and advocating for the residents of the City
3 of Buffalo.

4 I want to applaud the Governor's focus
5 on the quality of life issues in her
6 Executive Budget proposal, and am thrilled to
7 see her commitment to issues such as economic
8 development, mental health issues, education
9 and affordability, as well as her strong
10 focus on public safety, an issue that impacts
11 negatively all the cities that are sitting up
12 here today.

13 I have been mayor for just a little
14 over a hundred days, but spent 13 years in
15 city government as a councilmember, council
16 president, and now as mayor. And I know the
17 challenges facing the City of Buffalo well.
18 But I'm not here today with my hand extended
19 looking for a handout -- I have my hand
20 extended looking for partners. I'm not here
21 today looking for New York State to rectify
22 the issues that Buffalo faces -- I'm looking
23 for New York State to provide the City of
24 Buffalo the tools to rectify them ourselves.

1 And although I'm very happy to see the
2 aforementioned issues being addressed within
3 the Governor's proposal, Buffalo's needs
4 extend well beyond what is being allocated.
5 And I'd like to touch on some of those issues
6 that were included in my expanded written
7 testimony.

8 First and foremost, the City of
9 Buffalo seeks to authorize the creation of
10 the Buffalo parking and mobility authority to
11 transfer ownership of four City of
12 Buffalo-owned-and-operated parking lots to
13 the authority, who can generate revenue and
14 invest in the capital needs of those parking
15 ramps while relieving the City of Buffalo of
16 those responsibilities and generating income
17 through a City of Buffalo and authority
18 ownership contract.

19 The City of Buffalo also seeks to
20 impose a 3 percent occupancy tax, also known
21 as a hotel or bed tax, paid for by travelers
22 staying in Buffalo who utilize our
23 infrastructure, our amenities, police and
24 fire services. And the proceeds of those tax

1 revenues would be reinvested in our tourism
2 and cultural assets to make Buffalo more
3 appealing to future tourism.

4 While Buffalo has benefited from the
5 recent temporary assistance to
6 municipalities, last year's \$5 million
7 increase, what we respectfully request is an
8 increase to AIM in general, and for it to be
9 linked to an inflationary index.

10 Prior to last year's temporary
11 increase, as we all know the AIM has not
12 increased since 2012. During that same
13 period of time, the City of Buffalo's fixed
14 costs have increased by \$130 million during
15 that same time period.

16 When we talk about capital needs, the
17 City of Buffalo is seeking to build a new
18 Department of Public Works campus and
19 resiliency center. Our current facility was
20 constructed in 1858. It is undersized and
21 inefficient. The physical conditions of the
22 facility pose a great risk to the safety of
23 the employees. A new consolidated location
24 would provide an efficient location for our

1 snow plowing, our sanitation services, paving
2 services, construction services, et cetera,
3 and reduce the maintenance and energy and
4 training costs associated now, while
5 maximizing productivity and efficiencies.

6 And the sale will be 10 separate
7 assets that currently house those operations
8 in different components. It would bring
9 revenue into the city as well as to put those
10 properties back on the tax rolls.

11 As I mentioned, the City of Buffalo is
12 not here today to ask for just a handout, we
13 are doing things to address our structural
14 budget issues internally as well. I've
15 requested my departments to come back with a
16 10 percent reduction in their operating
17 budgets, which were due just two days ago,
18 and that would result in a savings of nearly
19 \$30 million.

20 I've also taken a proactive approach
21 to revenue generation, and that will lead to
22 a reasonable increase in our property taxes
23 next year.

24 Again, I want to thank you all for

1 letting me testify today. I look forward to
2 any questions you may have.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
4 Mr. Mayor.

5 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Good afternoon.
6 Thank you, Chairpersons Krueger and Pretlow,
7 for the opportunity to discuss the issues
8 pertaining to the City of Albany. And
9 congratulations, Chairperson Pretlow, on your
10 being named the new chair of Ways and Means.

11 I want to thank the Senate Finance
12 Committee, the Assembly Ways and Means
13 Committee, our Capital Region delegation,
14 including Senator Fahy, Assemblymember Romero
15 and Assemblymember McDonald, who worked very
16 closely with me and our former, now-retired
17 Senator Neil Breslin.

18 We have now seen the Capital City
19 Funding for the City of Albany for the past
20 eight years, thanks to the cooperation, the
21 partnership that we've been able to have with
22 the Assembly, with the Senate. And for the
23 fourth year in a row, the current Governor
24 has placed Capital City Funding directly in

1 her budget and has made a commitment to
2 making it permanent.

3 And so I want to talk about what that
4 looks like. We have proposed an amendment to
5 Section 19-A. As you know, where we sit now
6 used to be a neighborhood. This was 90 acres
7 of homes, churches, schools; 9500 people
8 lived here, many of them people of color.
9 And when this property was taken by eminent
10 domain and those houses and schools and
11 churches and businesses were torn down, it
12 really changed the face of the city.

13 And this complex was built. It is an
14 incredible piece of architecture, it is
15 spectacular, but it also does not integrate
16 with our street grid and has really been an
17 impediment for a lot of our businesses. And
18 so it has created challenges.

19 And so in looking at the payments that
20 are coming to the city through 19-A, it's
21 time to make those permanent. And we are
22 asking that there be an annual increase that
23 would be in keeping with the tax cap. So if
24 the tax cap, whatever the amount of the tax

1 cap increases, that would be the amount that
2 our AIM aid would -- not our AIM aid, our
3 pilot payment would be.

4 And so I think that we have
5 demonstrated that we have been excellent
6 stewards of our taxpayer dollars. We have
7 balanced our budget every year. We went from
8 a structural deficit and no rainy day fund to
9 building back up our rainy day fund, and
10 working to ensure that we're providing
11 excellent services to those who live here and
12 visit here, including those who call Albany
13 home for half of the year.

14 And one of the challenges that that,
15 though, does create, is the large amount of
16 tax-exempt property that exists in the City
17 of Albany. And so you've heard me plead the
18 case. You've certainly listened and
19 responded. And so I want to say thank you.
20 And I would love to see, in this my final
21 year as mayor, for that to be made permanent
22 so the next mayor can come and ask you for
23 something else. But -- so there is proposed
24 legislation, and that is included in my

1 presentation.

2 The second thing that I want to talk
3 about, though, is the changing face of our
4 downtown. As we all know, the pandemic had a
5 tremendous impact on downtowns all across the
6 state. This is the corporate headquarters
7 for New York State government. You are our
8 largest employer. And so as we continue to
9 see now, multiple years out from the
10 pandemic, that hybrid work arrangements
11 continue, where on any given day only about
12 half of the people who work downtown are
13 actually sitting at their desks, it is time
14 for us to reimagine our downtown.

15 We have been working with the
16 Governor's office and with Empire State
17 Development to talk about the opportunities
18 for downtown and the things that we need to
19 be doing in order to create more vitality and
20 bring more people into our downtown. The
21 Governor has announced a commitment to spend
22 \$400 million, 200 million that the state
23 would control in this state complex,
24 including a significant improvement to the

1 New York State Museum, really making it the
2 world-class, top-notch attraction that it
3 should be. We are the Empire State.

4 And then also focusing \$200 million on
5 investments in our downtown within a mile of
6 this complex. The city has control, through
7 our economic development agency, of a
8 nine-acre parcel that is now ready for
9 redevelopment, and this provides an excellent
10 opportunity for us to do the things that
11 New York State needs to do -- build more
12 housing, create world-class attractions, and
13 ensure that we are doing all that we can to
14 keep our downtowns vibrant.

15 As the capital of this region, this is
16 the center for the region. And so as goes
17 the City of Albany, so goes the region. And
18 we have so much amazing investment that is
19 happening both at UAlbany, across the river
20 at RPI, up at Global Foundries, and even the
21 investments that are being made in Syracuse.
22 I gave my State of the City last week, and I
23 was talking about the Micron investment in
24 Syracuse. Because our residents need to

1 understand that we're talking about an entire
2 supply chain and jobs that will impact all of
3 upstate New York.

4 And so I'm hopeful that you will be
5 supportive of the investment that the
6 Governor is proposing, that you'll be
7 supportive of the state and her
8 administration being able to oversee and
9 control the renovations of the museum. It's
10 been a promise that has been made year after
11 year after year, and our residents of the
12 City of Albany have been waiting for that
13 promise to be delivered. And so we need to
14 ensure that that renovation goes forward.

15 And I think the final thing that I
16 want to stress is that as we look at AIM, it
17 is important, not only for the cities that
18 are sitting here but for all of the
19 municipalities that get AIM funding, to have
20 some ability to see the amount of our AIM
21 increase year after year. We know costs go
22 up every year. We are doing everything that
23 we can to be as effective and efficient as
24 possible. And we did see some relief as we

1 were coming out of the pandemic with some of
2 the other funding sources that were
3 available.

4 But let's face it. We know that those
5 funding sources are not going to be there for
6 us, at least for the next few years. You
7 know, we rely tremendously and we've all been
8 successful in accessing grants for some of
9 the things that we're looking to do around
10 traffic safety, around a lot of these
11 initiatives. But, you know, we know that
12 that's not going to be there for us
13 necessarily over the next four years.

14 And so it's important that as we look
15 to our workforces and as we look at the
16 demands on our city and the demands for
17 resources, that we have an understanding that
18 we are going to see that AIM -- just as
19 school aid goes up every year, to see that
20 incremental increase in AIM each year.

21 Again, I want to thank you for
22 increasing AIM last year. We're grateful for
23 the Governor to be continuing that in the
24 budget. And we'd like to see that created in

1 a way that allows us, as we create our
2 budgets often in an off-cycle from the state,
3 that we're able to ensure and know that that
4 funding is going to be there. It's going
5 directly into our communities. It's going
6 directly into our police departments, our
7 fire departments, filling potholes, being
8 able to plan to repave streets. And so it's
9 a critically important investment that you're
10 making. And it's our residents' taxpayer
11 dollars that are coming back to our
12 community. And believe me, we tell them
13 that, we want to be able to tout what you're
14 able to provide back in your communities that
15 you represent.

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
18 Madam Mayor.

19 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Good afternoon.
20 Thank you, Chair Pretlow, Chair Krueger, and
21 members of the legislative fiscal committee.

22 Three weeks ago I delivered my 2025
23 State of the City address. In my eighth and
24 final speech, I invoked the words of the

1 Athenian Oath in reporting Syracuse is "not
2 only not less, but greater, better and more
3 beautiful than it was transmitted to us."

4 The progress is the result of an ambitious
5 agenda established at the start of our
6 administration: Syracuse will be a growing
7 city that embraces diversity and creates
8 opportunity for all.

9 We believed a relentless focus on that
10 vision would position Syracuse for a
11 resurgence, and it has. That was the purpose
12 of the Syracuse Surge, our strategy for
13 inclusive growth in the new economy, and
14 Syracuse Build, our nationally recognized
15 construction careers training program. It
16 also inspired the Resurgent Neighborhoods
17 Initiative, our cooperative comprehensive
18 housing and community revitalization plan.

19 None of these successes would have
20 happened without the support of this
21 Legislature. You invested in them all. I am
22 particularly appreciative of our local
23 delegation, Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli,
24 Assemblywoman Pam Hunter, Assemblyman Al

1 Stirpe, Senator Rachel May -- who I see here,
2 hi, Senator -- and our new Senator Chris
3 Ryan, who's also here. Congrats again,
4 Senator Ryan.

5 With CHIPS and Science Act and Green
6 CHIPS funding locked in for the \$100 billion
7 Micron project, which Mayor Sheehan
8 mentioned, we see continued state partnership
9 for a new series of catalytic investments in
10 jobs, housing and infrastructure to ensure
11 the massive chip fab brings maximum benefit
12 to the City of Syracuse. Like local
13 governments across New York, we also seek the
14 state's help in building the city's own
15 fiscal stability. Capitalizing on New York's
16 semiconductor moment is essential to reduce
17 the unacceptably high poverty rate in
18 Syracuse, which as you heard is shared by my
19 colleagues in their communities as well.
20 We've made steady progress in recent years,
21 but we need to do more. We must do more.

22 I thank Governor Hochul for proposing
23 an expansion of the child tax credit, and I
24 urge the Legislature to enact this proposal.

1 In jobs and opportunity, the city will focus
2 on spurring new private investment within
3 neighborhood business corridors in commercial
4 districts. We will connect economically
5 distressed areas to workforce training and
6 employment centers.

7 In the area of affordable housing, I
8 have reported to the fiscal committees in
9 prior years on our Syracuse Housing Strategy,
10 an innovative multiyear plan to revitalize
11 the city's aging housing stock. New funds
12 requested for this project will assist
13 homeowners who currently do not qualify for
14 existing funding sources due to eligibility
15 restrictions.

16 Regarding public infrastructure, the
17 state has and continues to be our essential
18 partner in maintaining and upgrading our
19 roads, sewers and water systems. We will
20 deploy additional state support to complete
21 strategic infrastructure upgrades to support
22 new commercial and mixed-use development in
23 each quadrant of the city.

24 I'd be remiss if I didn't also

1 acknowledge your role in supporting the
2 Interstate 81 project, which I advocated for
3 in front of you for many years. That
4 \$2.25 billion project is now well underway.

5 With state help, we will also continue
6 to reduce the levels of lead in our drinking
7 water.

8 Regarding fiscal sustainability, I'm
9 pleased to report that all major indicators
10 of financial health show Syracuse is stronger
11 today than when I took office. In 2019,
12 Moody's and S&P upgraded the city's fiscal
13 outlook from negative to stable, and in 2022
14 S&P upgraded our credit rating from A to A+.

15 The reality is, though, we are still
16 facing a structural deficit, and to balance
17 the budget we will likely have to draw on our
18 reserves again this year. As long as we are
19 in that position, we haven't achieved fiscal
20 sustainability.

21 We continue to implement new sources
22 of local revenue. We are also grateful to
23 Governor Hochul and the Legislature for
24 authorizing temporary municipal assistance in

1 last year's budget, as my colleagues alluded
2 to. I'm pleased the temporary aid is again
3 in the Executive Budget. I urge the
4 Legislature to go the next step and
5 permanently adjust AIM aid more in keeping
6 with the actual costs New York's
7 municipalities face.

8 I would also like to address the
9 current uncertainty regarding federal funding
10 facing state and local governments. I join
11 with my fellow mayors in expressing deep
12 concern about recent federal actions to
13 impose a broad freeze on federal funding for
14 grants, loans and other essential programs.
15 As stated by the New York Conference of
16 Mayors, any interruptions to funding streams
17 that support daily city operations -- and, of
18 particular concern, our most vulnerable
19 residents -- would have a devastating impact
20 on Syracuse.

21 In closing, this is my last appearance
22 before the joint fiscal committees, and I
23 have been honored to appear at these
24 hearings. I reiterate my appreciation to the

1 Syracuse delegation and the full Legislature
2 for your steadfast backing. Thank you all.

3 SENATOR KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 On behalf of the Assembly, we're going
5 to start with Assembly Chair Burke,
6 10 minutes.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you,
8 Madam Chair.

9 Thank you all for being here. As the
10 new chair of Cities, I look forward to
11 getting to know you all and seeing how I can
12 use this role to benefit your communities.

13 Looking at -- I haven't had the
14 opportunity to fully explore all of your
15 budgets, but understanding that at least some
16 of you are operating at a structural deficit,
17 seeing that municipalities had a flood of
18 cash from ARP dollars, I'm curious to know
19 not just where we are now, but where we are
20 two, three, four years from now -- how we're
21 going to make sure we're operating
22 effectively and frankly not just coming to
23 the State of New York. We can't print money
24 like the federal government, so we don't know

1 what the next four years are going to look
2 like. I'm guessing, judging by the last
3 month, pretty chaotic.

4 So just want to hear your perspective
5 briefly if you're operating at -- you know,
6 at a deficit, how you plan to close that.
7 Certainly obviously you're here to ask for
8 state help. But more -- you know, what is
9 your plan? If you want to start with
10 Acting Mayor Scanlon.

11 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Thank you,
12 Assemblymember Burke. I appreciate the
13 question.

14 Like many of the other cities, we are
15 in structural deficit within our budget. But
16 again, as I mentioned during my testimony,
17 that we are taking steps to address it
18 internally first before coming to the State
19 of New York and asking for help.

20 I've instructed my departments to come
21 back with a 10 percent reduction within their
22 departments' spending, and that was due just
23 a couple of days ago. We'll get back to you
24 with that when I get back in town in Buffalo.

1 Also the fact that the City of
2 Buffalo's tax rate is the second-lowest
3 across the state has to be addressed. For
4 years our tax levy did not grow. Between the
5 years 2007 and 2020, there was virtually no
6 tax levy growth, the strategy of not
7 increasing taxes. And so we're woefully
8 behind on our property tax and what we can
9 bring in.

10 So we're going to address that, to do
11 reasonable property tax increases in the
12 future. But also within the City of Buffalo
13 our issue is not one of spending. Our budget
14 is not out of whack because of our
15 expenditures; it's more of a revenue issue.
16 You know, when we talked about our property
17 taxes, everyone at the table has talked about
18 AIM and the need for an increase in AIM.

19 But the other thing, we are very much
20 at a disadvantage, compared to some of the
21 other cities, with our sales tax sharing
22 agreement with Erie County. We receive
23 somewhere around 11 percent of that -- the
24 county's taxes, where some of the other

1 upstate cities receive 20, 25, 30 percent of
2 their county's sales tax. So we're at a
3 major disadvantage there.

4 Inflation is at 28 percent over the
5 last 10 years. Our revenues have only
6 increased 14 percent. So we have a revenue
7 issue. So we're looking, again -- while we
8 hold spending and reduce spending a little
9 bit, we need to bring more revenues into the
10 fold. And again, we're going to do that
11 through our property taxes and hopefully we
12 can negotiate a new sales tax agreement with
13 our county. And then, again, we'd love to
14 see an increase in AIM attached to some sort
15 of increase on a yearly basis.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Is that 10 percent
17 across the board? Is every department,
18 police and fire, are they all going to take a
19 10 percent haircut?

20 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: We asked them
21 to come back -- to go through the exercise of
22 looking at the 10 percent reduction. Police
23 probably we wouldn't be able to do that. I
24 think the police is 96.5 percent fixed costs.

1 I do want to look at where they're spending
2 money.

3 But again, if we can -- if we can get
4 to 10 percent across the board, as a whole
5 we're talking somewhere around 25 or
6 30 million dollars.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: That's a lot of
8 overtime, right? That's where a lot of that
9 money's coming from.

10 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Correct.
11 Police, fire overtime, we have a new police
12 commissioner, going to get some ideas on how
13 to reduce some of the police overtime. And
14 we've had conversations with our fire
15 commissioner as well on how to address that.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Good, thank you.

17 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: I would just
18 say in Rochester we --

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: No, no, no.

20 SENATOR KRUEGER: Oh, sorry. What?

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: No, we -- when we
22 say thank you, that means you're done. So --

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: I was done with
24 him.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That's a code word.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: We're going down
3 the line.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay.

5 SENATOR KRUEGER: You've got your 10
6 minutes, that's it. Thank you.

7 I want to announce that we have been
8 joined by Senator Shelley Mayer, Senator
9 Brouk, Senator May, Senator Fahy.

10 But our first questioner is our chair
11 and our new Senator, Chris Ryan.

12 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Thank you,
13 Madam Chair.

14 And thank you for being here for the
15 testimony. We appreciate your time.

16 And I'll echo Chairman Burke, looking
17 forward to working with you in the Cities 2
18 Committee. So some good times, good months
19 ahead, a good working relationship.

20 And thank you, I would be remiss if I
21 didn't recognize Mayor Walsh. Thank you for
22 your service. I didn't know the -- I wish I
23 knew the steadfast Ben before; we would have
24 been saying that for eight years. So we like

1 you.

2 I want to talk about three things.
3 Number one, housing; then touch a little bit
4 on concentrated childhood poverty and a
5 little bit of public safety.

6 So I think last year the panel voiced
7 the need for mixed-income rental housing
8 developments to help combat the high levels
9 of concentrated poverty. The \$50 million
10 capital funding is going to be a revolving
11 loan fund. Do you anticipate that being
12 impactful? And the second part to that
13 question is, is that enough?

14 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: I can start.

15 Thank you, Senator. As you know, we
16 have been working very hard on our housing
17 strategy with a specific focus on our -- what
18 we describe as our middle neighborhoods.
19 There are a lot of tools in the housing
20 toolkit for low-income affordable housing,
21 and that's critically important. And we take
22 advantage of those tools. But we have many
23 neighborhoods in the City of Syracuse that
24 have older housing stock, that have

1 working-class people with a good percentage
2 of owner-occupants that simply either can't
3 afford to make the necessary improvements to
4 their homes or are unwilling to because
5 they're not confident that the market will
6 return that investment back to them.

7 We feel while the state has taken
8 modest steps towards acknowledging the need
9 for support of these households, that that's
10 an area where we would like to see
11 significantly more investment from the state
12 in supporting homeowners who, again, are
13 trying to maintain their homes and keep up
14 with the market, but also as well on the
15 rental market, in ensuring that all of our
16 rental housing projects are mixed-income
17 projects. We don't want exclusively
18 low-income, we don't want exclusively luxury.
19 We want a mix of incomes. And again, that we
20 don't quite have the right tools in the
21 toolkit, so that's something we would like to
22 continue to work with you all on.

23 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: If I could add,
24 in the City of Albany our Common Council

1 passed an amendment to our inclusionary
2 zoning. We used to require that all new
3 market-rate apartments that were built, that
4 5 percent be set aside as affordable. They
5 changed that. They increased the percentage
6 that have to be set aside, and they decreased
7 the -- they have to be affordable to people
8 at 60 percent of area median income.

9 Since then we've had virtually no
10 market-rate housing built in the City of
11 Albany. I had cautioned the council against
12 it, I told them that this was not the right
13 way to approach it, and that we really needed
14 to work with the state to figure out how can
15 we create that tax incentive, right?

16 If somebody builds housing now that's
17 affordable to people at 60 percent of area
18 median income, you're looking at a project
19 that gets tax credits, whether it's LIHTC or
20 the 4 percent. And so figuring out how do we
21 provide those incentives within market-rate
22 housing. Because the biggest risk to the
23 City of Albany right now, quite candidly, is
24 for two years I've had no new significant

1 projects proposed to create market-rate
2 housing.

3 We do need housing for people who make
4 50, 60, 70, 80 thousand dollars a year, and
5 it's not being built. The only thing that's
6 being built right now in the City of Albany
7 are low-income tax credit housing, which
8 is -- you know, we need that, we need to
9 continue to build it. But it would be
10 wonderful to figure out a formula that allows
11 for tax credits in a market-rate -- otherwise
12 market-rate apartment.

13 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Thank you. And I
14 look forward to -- we'll follow up on that as
15 well.

16 The second question is regarding
17 public safety. I know that, you know, prior
18 to state government, in county government we
19 struggled with staffing shortages. And I
20 think that is also clearly evident in our
21 public safety. My predecessor had a bill
22 that I'm trying to advance which would raise
23 the threshold with retirees from 35 -- I want
24 to raise that. So I guess to you

1 specifically, I'll ask Mayor Evans, is that
2 something that you think would be a good
3 bill? Could we support that? And would
4 there be some cost savings?

5 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Yeah, I
6 absolutely would support that because that
7 allows you to make sure that you maintain
8 talent while at the same time making those
9 that may have been retired and want to come
10 back in and help out and alleviate some of
11 the stress on the system, it gives them a
12 greater incentive to want to be able to do
13 that.

14 But I think 35,000 is way too low. It
15 should at least be 50, 55,000 in order to
16 really attract and for it to make sense for
17 retirees to come back and relieve the system.

18 There's a staffing crisis in -- I
19 believe in most cities. And if we can --
20 could do that, I think that that change would
21 help out a lot of different areas across
22 departments in our cities.

23 (Pause; reaction from dais.)

24 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Real quick, I

1 perked up on that one because I really wanted
2 to be a part of that question. That is
3 great, that idea. Because when you think
4 about -- and the Governor was very helpful
5 with us in giving us some additional funding
6 that allowed us to help curb some gun
7 violence. I want to say thank you to
8 Governor Hochul on this budget, which I
9 didn't say before but I'll say now, stick it
10 in there real quick.

11 But that number should be as high as
12 70,000. I lose cops every day that are
13 going -- they're retiring, and they're
14 42 years old and 43 years old.

15 Frankly, guys, the -- with no
16 disrespect -- the best cops that you have are
17 the 40- and 50-something-year-old cops,
18 because, you know, they're not the young kids
19 anymore, they're usually married, they
20 usually have kids, they're somewhat secure.
21 And to have them leave and go off is just --
22 just doesn't work for our city and does a
23 disservice.

24 But I think that if we said, hey, you

1 know what, you can retire, but we need you
2 back sometimes. We need you back in case of
3 a crisis. We need you back for parades or
4 different events or if we know that there's
5 going to be some type of, you know, mass type
6 of demonstration or something, to have good
7 officers like that, right -- seasoned, smart,
8 and are willing to come back and be a part --
9 is good for our city.

10 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Thank you.

11 Last question. So we talked a lot --
12 I mean, obviously there's unfortunately
13 childhood poverty, a concentration of
14 childhood poverty. The question is -- I
15 don't know who wants to take it, but it's a
16 little bit of a difficult question. So the
17 Governor has initiated or wants to have a
18 \$300 or \$500 check, which could be up to
19 \$3 billion.

20 Do you -- does anybody want to answer
21 the question that they think that that money
22 might be better served combating childhood
23 poverty and concentrated poverty in our
24 cities than rebate checks?

1 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: I mean, it's a
2 start. And childhood poverty is big,
3 especially in the urban centers. We need
4 more support. I mean, I'm sure each and
5 every one of us sitting here was scared to
6 death by the potential of federal cuts that
7 were laid on us, potentially, that thank God
8 were pulled. But for Yonkers, just so you
9 know, that number was \$100 million. It
10 affected breakfast and -- school breakfast
11 programs, lunch programs. This would have
12 been an enormous shot at the -- at our kids
13 in our attempt to try and give our kids a
14 better life.

15 So, you know, the more we can put in,
16 the better I think we'll be in terms of
17 trying to create a better life for every --

18 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Well, I think
19 too, with my last minute here too, you know,
20 with the potential, we've already seen
21 federal funding cut. We had some -- you
22 know, we -- in the City of Syracuse refugee
23 resettlement program, we do a lot of that.
24 It's a great program. We've already seen

1 where some of that is -- the money has gone.
2 And we have already placed people,
3 specifically 90. Ninety are here and -- you
4 know, they're here, living. They're not able
5 to afford food. They have to pay rent. So
6 now the landlord is going to be short. So,
7 you know, we don't want to get into -- out
8 ahead of it, right, get over our skis because
9 we don't know what's going to happen. But
10 certainly it's -- we have to be mindful of
11 it. And as that goes, it's going to be
12 impactful, really impactful. And we're going
13 to have a difficult time.

14 Thank you.

15 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: I made a slight
16 error earlier, and I took away time from
17 Assemblyman Jones. So -- I mean, to Burke.
18 Timekeeper, could you put 7 minutes back on
19 the clock?

20 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you,
21 Mr. Chair. I won't say thank you at the end,
22 just to make sure.

23 So if we want to just continue that
24 conversation of, okay, the federal government

1 is --

2 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: I remember the
3 question. Do you want to start or --

4 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Well, I'll just
5 preface it. The federal government's
6 unstable, you know, the State of New York
7 can't print money. We're seeing a lot of
8 local municipalities operating in structural
9 deficits. What is your plan not just today,
10 not just to -- obviously to come here and ask
11 for increased AIM, which is a pretty constant
12 discussion. But what is your long-term plan
13 to get out of that structural deficit?

14 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Yeah, I mean,
15 one of the things that I've said in Rochester
16 is the cavalry isn't going to come in and
17 save us. We hope to partner with Albany and
18 that Albany will be able to help us. But we
19 knew that these ARPA dollars were just a
20 sugar high and they were not going to last
21 forever.

22 So we did not allocate those dollars
23 to ongoing operating expenses. We felt that
24 that would be foolhardy, so we did not do

1 that. So while we still have challenges,
2 yes, we're in a better position, but we are
3 still in need of increases in AIM aid. If we
4 don't get that, we have prioritized one, two,
5 three, what things we would be able to do.

6 And we put things in three buckets:
7 Things that we must do -- you've got to make
8 sure you have clean water -- things that are
9 nice to do -- yeah, we would like to have a
10 pickleball court, but that might not be the
11 number-one priority -- and things that we
12 just cannot and no longer do. And by doing
13 that, we've made sure that we make decisions
14 that are still in the best interests of our
15 citizens, but understanding that we may not
16 be getting a deluge of money.

17 I will say that the threat of losing
18 federal funding is very concerning, and we
19 don't have an answer yet on what we would do
20 there. For example, if someone said: Your
21 city is no longer going to get CDBG dollars,
22 what would happen? We don't know. I think
23 we need to be prepared for that if they
24 were -- if that was to be something that was

1 going to be proposed, obviously we would
2 fight that, on something like that.

3 But I think for us it's been
4 prioritizing to make sure that we have --
5 keep our finances stable. And all the rating
6 agencies have rated Rochester extremely high
7 in terms of our bond rating. We want to keep
8 it that way.

9 But we have to be honest here to say
10 that we -- it makes it harder when we
11 continue to see revenues decline and pension
12 costs, healthcare costs continue to go up.
13 So this is why you hear us constantly banging
14 the drum about the AIM aid.

15 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: You know,
16 Assemblyman, when the federal government cuts
17 or comes up with a mandate, it falls back on
18 you and then on us. And when you cut and
19 come up with a -- you know, like Raise the
20 Age, which had cost implications -- which we
21 all supported, but there are cost
22 implications to it -- again, it falls back on
23 us.

24 And, you know, when I look at our

1 healthcare, you know, Yonkers has a
2 \$1.5 billion budget. Almost 200 million goes
3 to healthcare. An individual plan on
4 healthcare, when I took office, was \$18,000
5 per family. It's now \$44,000 per family.

6 So, I mean, my answer to your question
7 is we're the last line. We have to make it
8 work. So when you say, well, what are you
9 going to do -- well, you know what, we'll
10 make tough choices. We'll break tax caps if
11 we have to, or if we can. And sometimes the
12 political will isn't there. And if not, then
13 we will make cuts to our services.

14 Usually what happens is, you know,
15 police, fire, sanitation, teachers, you try
16 to figure out which one you might want to
17 cut. You don't cut those that get cut last.
18 But what do you cut? We cut middle
19 management. Middle management disappears.
20 You cut parks. You cut anything that kind of
21 means anything to anybody. You know, the
22 whole social bankruptcy issues where kind of
23 this takes place. Because you cut all that
24 stuff first, and then of course you're left

1 with the bare-bones budget.

2 We have operated under this scare for
3 a very long time, and we have times we're
4 able to make it work, and times when we've
5 had to make some severe cuts. And times we
6 had to go to labor, our labor groups, and ask
7 them for some relief. But, you know, we all
8 know -- why? Well, we have Triborough. We
9 can't get changes in our contracts. Cannot
10 happen. We can ask them till we're blue in
11 the face, and you know what, and they sit
12 there like this {folding arms} and go, Nope,
13 not changing anything. You just figure out
14 what more you're going to give me, and I'll
15 tell you what I'm willing to accept.

16 And so, you know, it's a challenge. I
17 think it's a challenge for every one of us.
18 But it's a challenge I think that we've all
19 met, and we'll continue to meet it. My hope
20 is that, like I said, with additional
21 support, it won't be -- it won't be as
22 difficult.

23 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Thank you,
24 Assemblyman. Briefly, just to pick up on

1 Mayor Spano's point, I think we are doing
2 everything in our power.

3 The City of Syracuse's three largest
4 sources of revenue: First is sales tax,
5 which has been good, but we have no control
6 over it. Second is AIM funding, which up
7 until last year hadn't been increased in
8 about 15 years. The third is property taxes.
9 And we've had to increase property taxes on
10 our already tax-burdened residents multiple
11 times because that is the only one that we
12 control.

13 So between that and making difficult
14 cuts during the pandemic when we had to do
15 that, identifying new revenue sources,
16 whether it's the hotel room and occupancy
17 tax -- and I appreciate the support on that.
18 We are generating new revenue through
19 cannabis, which is helpful. But our options
20 are limited. And to Mayor Spano's point, if
21 we're unable to gain additional revenue, we
22 do have to make those difficult cuts.

23 So it's a partnership, and we're
24 willing to continue to partner with you all

1 to navigate those waters. But we're
2 operating with about a \$20 million structural
3 deficit and haven't figured out a way to make
4 it completely go away yet.

5 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Thank you.

6 And I think that the -- you know, I
7 agree with everything that my colleagues have
8 said. We're in a little bit better position.
9 We have been able to address our structural
10 deficit. We have a little bit of a rainy day
11 fund. But really our only lever is property
12 taxes, and we all know that that is something
13 that people are already feeling overburdened
14 by.

15 And I think that the concern that we
16 have is, you know, there are departments that
17 would go away. For example, if there is no
18 more CDBG and HUD funding, then the
19 department that is responsible for
20 administering that would no longer be there;
21 same with our workforce development. I think
22 this would be the worst time ever to
23 eliminate workforce development funds, but
24 that's been threatened.

1 But I think the other piece that is
2 concerning to me is, you know, if you say,
3 Well, we're no longer going to pay on
4 Section 8 vouchers, you now have thousands of
5 landlords across the state who are the ones
6 that aren't getting paid. And so it really
7 then throws into I think, you know, a huge
8 challenge for our housing stock and for the
9 viability of that.

10 So I think from an affordable housing
11 standpoint, that's something that the state
12 really needs to make sure that they're
13 looking at what those impacts would be and
14 how they could fill that void.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Jones?

17 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Good afternoon,
18 Mayors. I think we have the message: We
19 need more AIM -- AIM, AIM, AIM. School aid,
20 Mayor.

21 I was going to ask about housing, but
22 I believe Senator Ryan, my colleague, has
23 touched on that. And we're talking about
24 raising the threshold from, you know, 35,000

1 now, to that, trying to recruit talented
2 people to you. And I heard this at NYCOM
3 yesterday, civil service. I hear it from the
4 municipalities big and small, county
5 government, everywhere. And we're hearing
6 that there are issues there with hiring. I
7 know, I used to be in local government. It's
8 maybe a system that's kind of outgrown what
9 it started out to be.

10 What can we do to help you perhaps
11 change some of the civil service requirements
12 and, you know, to be able to attract that
13 talent that you need to run your cities and
14 municipalities? I hear it all the time. I
15 don't know -- we were just talking about
16 cutting. I hope we don't have to get to
17 cutting personnel. We want to hire the most
18 talented individuals out there.

19 So what are some suggestions? We hear
20 it all the time. I want to hear more
21 suggestions from you on how to fix this
22 antiquated system.

23 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Well, thank
24 you. And I do have to say we work very

1 closely with New York State Civil Service,
2 and they've been incredibly helpful. They
3 provide technical assistance. They've shown
4 flexibility. They've shown flexibility in
5 how often we test, because we have so few
6 people taking the police exam. It used to be
7 that a thousand, 1500 people would take the
8 police exam. I believe the last police exam
9 that we gave, maybe 110 people actually took
10 the exam. So we need to be able to do it
11 more often.

12 So I think looking at those, our
13 opportunities, I do think raising the amount
14 that a retiree can earn can help tremendously
15 with this interim. I think we have a lot of
16 people who maybe retired during COVID but now
17 have an appetite to come back. And that
18 would create a tremendous amount of relief,
19 particularly in our police department, but
20 there are other places where that help would
21 be tremendous as we kind of get through the
22 challenges that we have with filling
23 positions.

24 And so I think it really does need to

1 be locality -- not locality by locality, but
2 certainly like the issues that we see in
3 hiring here are very different. We're
4 competing with the state, which is
5 challenging, because you pay more, and so --
6 and by eliminating the test, we have people
7 who have made that jump over to different
8 agencies.

9 So my situation here is different than
10 what they may be seeing in Syracuse or
11 Rochester; I don't want to speak for them.

12 (Off the record.)

13 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Yeah, I said it
14 before. We talked about it.

15 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: I think what
16 we're seeing is almost like -- it's a
17 generational issue and people not as
18 interested in taking these civil service
19 positions on for one reason or another.
20 Where these were highly coveted positions in
21 decades past, they just don't seem like that
22 for some reason, one reason or another.

23 But when it comes to our -- it's not
24 just our police department, we see it in

1 other departments too, our department of
2 public works as well. I'm not able to
3 attract the high-quality candidates that we
4 want to. But when it comes to our police
5 department, Mayor Sheehan hit the nail on the
6 head. The reduction of the people just
7 taking the exam is extreme. You know, we're
8 talking 75 percent fewer people on the last
9 police exam compared to the traditional
10 number that we would experience.

11 So anything you could do as far as
12 increasing that threshold for retirees to
13 come back to work across the board in these
14 departments would be extremely helpful.

15 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: If I could just
16 add one very specific point in addition to
17 the retiree issue for recruiting new police
18 officers. There's a couple of pieces of
19 legislation that have been floating around
20 regarding the maximum age for police officers
21 to enter into the academy. Increasing that
22 or removing it altogether and just base it on
23 whether or not an individual has the ability
24 to meet the requirements would be helpful to

1 us.

2 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: I also think
3 that if we were able to kind of tap into some
4 of our local talent -- you know, I've been
5 pushing for a while now to get a few extra
6 points for our kids in our Yonkers School
7 District. Right? Kids who have gone through
8 the entire Yonkers school system from
9 kindergarten to 12th grade, giving them
10 maybe -- you know, not the same as veterans,
11 obviously, but one or two points on a test,
12 on a civil service exam. It would encourage
13 them to stay in the city and it would
14 encourage them to maybe become police
15 officers, firefighters or what have you.

16 And I really think that our schools
17 would take that and run with it because they
18 would teach to it. And they'd say, you know
19 what, you have an opportunity to stay in your
20 very own city and actually have a career and
21 raise your family here.

22 And it wouldn't take a lot. I know
23 that when we spoke about it, somebody came up
24 here with a proposal of five or six points.

1 I know that that's just unrealistic, but I
2 don't think you need much. One or two points
3 to our kids and, you know what, when you talk
4 about diversity in the workforce and you talk
5 about a school district like Yonkers, which
6 is, you know, 80 percent children that are
7 Black and brown children, you're really
8 giving a support to help make a difference in
9 the community.

10 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: I'll just say
11 in Rochester one of the things that we're
12 doing to try to fix this issue is we have a
13 career pathway to the public safety program
14 in which we engage kids in high school. And
15 when they're done, they can -- they're
16 offered a job in fire, 911, or EMS. So we've
17 done that because those are critical fields
18 in which we have lots of shortages in. So
19 state support for those types of programs I
20 think is absolutely critical because you're
21 creating the next generation of folks that
22 take those jobs. We do it in the school year
23 but also during the summer, and they're
24 taught how to take the civil service exam

1 and, more importantly, what it's like to work
2 in those jobs. And we've hired lots of folks
3 in 911 where we have a major shortage in fire
4 as well as our EMS folks have been able to do
5 that.

6 So I think we're going to have to be
7 innovative and creative because it's not like
8 it was 30 years ago where you had generations
9 of people wanting to be firefighters, police
10 officers and in other public safety fields.
11 In those fields, but you also have to do
12 that, I think, in other careers as well. You
13 know, environmental services, heavy equipment
14 operators, et cetera, all places where we
15 have seen major shortages in.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Is it -- is there
17 an issue with the test or getting people to
18 take the test?

19 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: For me I
20 think -- for us I think it's an issue with
21 getting people to actually take the test.
22 That's one issue. And then if there are any
23 barriers or types of things, they should
24 be -- how do you remove those barriers so

1 that way it's not in the way?

2 So for example, if it's an area where
3 they require a psychological exam, is that
4 necessary? Could that be removed, that --
5 I'm not saying I'm advocating for that for
6 police, but those are the types of things you
7 have to -- I think we have to be creative
8 about.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay. Thank you.

10 (Mics off; inaudible comments.)

11 SENATOR KRUEGER: Didn't want to make
12 that mistake twice in a row.

13 Next we have Senator May.

14 SENATOR MAY: Thank you. Greetings,
15 everyone.

16 I wanted to actually follow up on the
17 question about the police. One of the things
18 I heard from the Syracuse police chief a
19 couple of years ago was that people were
20 taking the test and it was taking nine months
21 or 12 months for them to get the results
22 back, and in the meantime they were going to
23 North Carolina and getting a job in a
24 police force.

1 Has that changed at all, Mayor Walsh?

2 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: So it's still
3 a challenge. I think that is at least in
4 part because we rely solely on
5 Onondaga County to administer civil service
6 in the city. So we have -- there have been
7 discussions about creating our own civil
8 service office in the city. But that is one
9 of the challenges, is making sure that
10 everyone is getting information at the same
11 time and quickly. But it is still a
12 challenge.

13 SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you. That
14 wasn't actually what I was going to ask
15 about, so -- but just wanted to follow up on
16 that.

17 So last year in the budget there was
18 \$50 million for Syracuse, Rochester and
19 Buffalo for child poverty initiatives. Is it
20 too soon to ask if any of those have shown
21 any results or if you've come up with any
22 great ideas that show promise?

23 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: I know in
24 Rochester, Monroe County, I will say it's too

1 soon. The important thing to point out about
2 those dollars is that they went to OTDA -- I
3 mean, through OTDA, which is not as easy as
4 us just getting direct funding. So I think
5 once our final plan is approved in Rochester,
6 I think we'll be able to more coherently be
7 able to pinpoint if there was great success
8 stories that could be replicated.

9 SENATOR MAY: Okay. I'll ask then
10 again next year.

11 And then Senator Ryan asked about the
12 revolving fund for housing, for building
13 affordable housing. I carry that bill. I
14 believe in it strongly. But I want to know,
15 what are the real barriers -- I know
16 financing is one of the barriers. But is it
17 workforce, is it permitting, is it the land?
18 What are the biggest barriers for you for
19 building affordable housing?

20 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: You know,
21 Senator, we -- we've -- in the past 10 years
22 we've built over 10,000 units of housing.
23 Even though our ordinance is 10 percent,
24 we've been actually going with 22 percent

1 affordable. And we've been doing it because
2 we've been partnering with nonprofits and
3 trying to kind of make it all work, getting
4 money from all of you, getting some
5 additional federal money, and kind of putting
6 it all together. Because we agree, we agree
7 in Yonkers that affordable housing is
8 important. We agree with the Governor that
9 it's something that we have to focus like a
10 laser on.

11 But it's not easy, though, because to
12 go back to what -- can I finish what I was
13 going to say, Senator?

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry.

15 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You'll have to
17 follow up again later.

18 Assemblymember Jacobson, three
19 minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: Thank you.
21 Thank you, Madam Chair.

22 Good to see you. Most of you I've
23 seen before, and I know what you're going
24 through.

1 I don't have a lot of time. So one of
2 my passions is replacing all lead
3 contaminated water lines. I represent two
4 cities, Newburgh and Poughkeepsie, who have a
5 significant number of lines to replace. I
6 don't have to tell you the problems with
7 lead, and I'm sure I don't have to tell you
8 of the deadline of 2034 by the EPA.

9 So what I would like to know is, are
10 each of your cities on track to meet that
11 2034 deadline? Where are you getting your
12 money from? Are there state programs
13 working? I know you've got an infusion of
14 cash in the last year or so from the federal
15 government with the Infrastructure Act, and
16 there's been that and you go through the
17 Department of Health to get approval. So I
18 want to know if the state -- the lead line
19 replacement program and other programs are
20 working and how you are doing. This is a
21 passion and I'll be doing other stuff in the
22 future on this. So go ahead.

23 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Yeah, I'll
24 just briefly say Rochester is on track for

1 2030. And we've cobbled together -- we use
2 ARPA funds, state funds and federal funds,
3 and we hope to meet our goal by 2030. And
4 we're still on track, and hopefully we'll
5 stay on track.

6 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: We are as well.
7 I think the big threat is that that federal
8 money that we have is reimbursable. So we're
9 doing the work, we're supposed to get
10 reimbursed, and there's a lot of uncertainty
11 with respect to that.

12 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: In Syracuse I
13 would say, again, yes, on track. We've got
14 at least 14,000 service lines. Next year
15 we're slated to replace about 3,000 of them,
16 and we want to stay at that clip. But the
17 federal funding, through the bipartisan
18 infrastructure law, is critical.

19 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: We're on track.
20 It's our goal obviously to make it all work.
21 We, thank God, don't have a huge issue in
22 Yonkers because I guess with the age of the
23 properties it's -- but we're on track.

24 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: I don't want

1 to tell you we're a hundred percent on track,
2 having just been there a couple of months.
3 But I will -- I can tell you that we will
4 work towards that a hundred percent. And
5 we've been cobbling together different pots
6 of money to do so -- ARPA money, things like
7 that.

8 But with the change in our sewer
9 authority some other places, we'll make sure
10 that we get there.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: That's good to
12 hear. Maybe I can get more money for
13 Newburgh and Poughkeepsie now.

14 (Laughter.)

15 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: About how many
16 lines do you have to replace? I'm just
17 curious. If you know the numbers. Do you
18 know the numbers or -- it's okay. It's not a
19 gotcha question, I just wondered.

20 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: I don't know.

21 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: I was putting
22 the glass that -- (indicating water pitcher).
23 I missed you in the ice, so.

24 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Since I

1 mentioned it once, I'll mention it again
2 because it's up there (indicating head). But
3 at least 14,000 lines we have currently that
4 need to be replaced. It's probably more. We
5 still have a number of unknowns that we're
6 looking at.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: Oops, I'm done.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brouk.

11 SENATOR BROUK: Thank you. And thank
12 you all, to all of our partners in local
13 government, for being here today.

14 My questions are going to be towards
15 my mayor, my constituent, Mayor Evans.

16 So thank you for your testimony and
17 thank you for all of your leadership in very
18 tumultuous times both globally, nationally,
19 and of course locally as well.

20 I wanted to talk about -- you know, I
21 literally was sitting here a second ago and
22 someone asked me, Why is the poverty so high
23 in Rochester? And I said, Well, how much
24 time do you have? There's a number of

1 reasons historically, right? But I think you
2 brought up a number of them. You know, you
3 look at the loss of major employers back in
4 the day; redlining, which has led to
5 incredible concentrated poverty that we see
6 in our community. And you talked about the
7 Inner Loop, which literally devastated
8 divided, really robust Black and brown
9 communities in Rochester that have yet to be
10 rebuilt.

11 And so, you know, we've talked a lot
12 about AIM funding. We worked with you to try
13 to improve some of the levels of AIM funding.
14 But I want to just make sure that we have the
15 correct context here. Can you remind us what
16 is the gap that you're trying to fill with
17 AIM funding to create some version of parity
18 with similar upstate cities?

19 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Yeah, I mean
20 the parity is \$32.7 million, and that's not
21 even asking for anything extra. That is just
22 asking per capita in terms of what every
23 other city gets. So if we got that, that
24 would at a minimum just create parity, and it

1 would allow us to address a lot of those
2 ingrained issues that you have just so
3 articulately mentioned.

4 SENATOR BROUK: So 32.7. And last
5 year what was the increase that you got in
6 AIM funding?

7 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Last year the
8 increase was \$5 million.

9 SENATOR BROUK: Five million, okay.
10 So that's a big gap that we're trying to
11 fill. And then obviously -- and that would
12 be ongoing funding, right? And that's the
13 idea here, to not have one-time funding.

14 But I do know that we were able to
15 benefit from some anti-poverty dollars. And
16 I know that you talked about some of the
17 programs that you've been able to bring
18 online. How much of those dollars, of those
19 25 million, have you actually seen to be able
20 to implement programs?

21 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: So, so far, as
22 you know, those dollars flow through the
23 county in the zip codes that are in the city.
24 And we are still working on our final plan,

1 getting approval from OTDA, because they
2 weren't direct dollars. But the goal is, is
3 that hopefully we will see impact in those
4 zip codes once those dollars are finally
5 released.

6 SENATOR BROUK: And in the final
7 30 seconds, is there anything that we can
8 look at in terms of adjusting how those
9 anti-poverty dollars are sent to communities
10 to make sure they get to you faster?

11 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: The best model
12 ever, that was ever invented, was ARPA. The
13 money comes directly to cities. We had an
14 independent evaluator that evaluated every
15 single dollar that we spent. We put out a
16 book that talked about how we spent every
17 dollar.

18 If you want to help local governments,
19 the best thing is to eliminate any red tape
20 and let the money go straight to cities. As
21 Joe Biden used to say: "Mayors know how to
22 spend money. They know how to get things
23 done." Give the money directly to us.

24 SENATOR BROUK: Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 And we've been joined by our
3 Assembly ranker, Ari Brown, for five minutes.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you,
5 Madam Chair. I've been involved with local
6 governments for two and a half decades; I
7 always every year had to hold my breath when
8 that medical bill would come in: How much is
9 it going to go up, or our contribution
10 towards state pension? Our little village
11 used to be 2500; now I'm spending about 300
12 grand a year. You never know.

13 So I ask any one of you, how'd
14 everybody do paying in funding for the
15 illegal immigration issue? How'd that affect
16 you this past few years? Put a dent in your
17 budget in any way?

18 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: You know what,
19 Assemblyman, it didn't. It wasn't
20 significant. Thank God. I mean, we in
21 Yonkers, because we are a neighbor to
22 New York City, received a migrant hotel. No
23 one called us, no one said, hey, we're
24 sending -- we're going to fill up a hotel in

1 your community and we're going to come north.
2 And it was kind of unfair. But at the end of
3 the day we in Yonkers are hospitable and we
4 took care of our guests. They were there, we
5 worked with the county, we worked with the
6 not-for-profits, and now they're gone.

7 I had very little issues in terms of
8 law enforcement issues. I had minimum impact
9 to my school district. And so, you know, it
10 turned out to be okay. But there was still
11 that angst in the beginning, if you remember,
12 and a lot of it was caused by really -- by
13 New York City's inability to communicate with
14 us what they had planned to do and instead
15 just laid it on us. And that was in no way
16 fair.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Did anybody
18 spend a hundred thousand, a couple of million
19 dollars, anything towards -- of your budget
20 towards this issue to mitigate the issue?

21 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: I mean, I think
22 if you look at maybe the time that we spent.
23 But no, I mean this was not a hit to our
24 budget. We worked with the community-based

1 organizations that worked with migrants in
2 our city already. We're a refugee
3 resettlement community. We are used to
4 having to ensure that families are getting
5 the support that they need and access to
6 healthcare that they need. A lot of that is
7 done through volunteers.

8 But we did work to coordinate to make
9 sure that those organizations had the
10 resources that they needed in order to be
11 able to ensure that the migrants that were
12 coming here had access to legal services and
13 that the services that they were supposed to
14 be receiving, they were actually receiving.

15 And so it was really more just
16 advocating. You know, it was our -- as we
17 look at public safety, we had an influx of
18 people who came into our community who were
19 probably most at risk of being taken
20 advantage of and preyed upon. And so we
21 really worked -- actually it was an entire
22 class at UAlbany that worked on strategies
23 for ensuring that migrants coming to our
24 community are not, you know, subjected to

1 either, you know, crime, scams, you know, all
2 of the things that they were vulnerable to.

3 So it was really just more an
4 involvement of personnel. You know, being on
5 calls. Police department. Just everybody
6 making sure that we knew what the needs were
7 and were able to coordinate that.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you,
9 Mayor. So I asked this question, it sounds
10 like similar communities to Long Island, many
11 middle-class, hardworking, everybody pays
12 their taxes, we struggle, you know, put our
13 kids through school and everything else like
14 that. The billions of dollars that the state
15 put towards last year's budget alone was
16 \$2.4 billion. You think if we divided that
17 up into five, you know, give you each a
18 billion dollars each, that would have helped
19 your community in any way? I mean, shouldn't
20 it go to the hardworking citizens of your
21 communities first and foremost so you don't
22 have to sweat it out, you know, during budget
23 time like we all have to do for our own
24 communities? Would that have made any

1 difference, a billion dollars each or half a
2 billion dollars each? Would that have helped
3 you?

4 You could say yes. They know the
5 answer.

6 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: If you're
7 proposing giving us all a billion each, thank
8 you, Assemblyman.

9 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: We'll take it.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: That's it.
11 Thank you all for being here today.

12 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Thank you,
13 Assemblyman.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, thank you.
15 Senator Pat Fahy.

16 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you, Chair.

17 Thank you, Mayors. Wonderful to see
18 each of you. And I, like my colleague a
19 moment ago, am going to direct my questions
20 to my mayor, and that is Mayor Sheehan.

21 I haven't always been on a committee
22 where I can ask questions, but this year I am
23 on a committee. And I know this will be your
24 last presentation, so thank you on a whole

1 host of levels. Thank you for your
2 tremendous advocacy heading the Conference of
3 Mayors last year to finally help, along with
4 the help of all of you, to move the needle on
5 AIM. That was -- lots of frustration on that
6 over my dozen years in service, so it's great
7 that we moved it. I hope we can move it
8 again.

9 I share the bias here with the mayor
10 of Albany, and that is probably no one is
11 more disadvantaged on that in terms of
12 upstate cities than the City of Albany, where
13 I also live. And thank you for the reminder
14 that 64 percent of the land in Albany is
15 tax-deductible.

16 Two questions. The biggest surprise,
17 but the most welcome one in the budget this
18 year for me was the \$400 million that the
19 Governor is proposing for -- it's like a
20 "it's our turn" of upstate cities in terms of
21 an investment with capital dollars.

22 Can you particularly talk about the
23 \$200 million part of that and what types of
24 projects you'd like to see, Mayor?

1 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Certainly. I
2 mean, we have a piece of property that is
3 prime for redevelopment. It's where the
4 Greyhound Bus Station currently is located.
5 It is a parcel that was accumulated --
6 originally there was going to be a convention
7 center there. The convention center moved.
8 And so it really has become an eyesore.

9 And we know that we need to make a
10 major investment there, but it also creates a
11 tremendous opportunity for creating taxable
12 property; housing, which is desperately
13 needed; and we'd love to see a new major
14 attraction in our downtown. Again, with the
15 office market being what it is, we also see
16 that funding being available to help with
17 more conversions.

18 We also did a significant number of
19 conversions of Class B and C office space to
20 housing. All of that housing is full. We
21 have a new neighborhood downtown. But we
22 could definitely use more housing units. And
23 so looking at more office conversions, given
24 the reality that we see now, which is that

1 most -- most workplaces are still hybrid. I
2 mean, the state being the largest one. But
3 many of our law firms and accounting firms
4 are as well.

5 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you for pointing
6 out the limitations of the inclusionary
7 zoning that I know is -- it's troubling me
8 that we haven't had any new major starts of
9 housing in Albany in the last couple of
10 years. I support the permanent pilot funding
11 as well.

12 In the last few seconds, can you talk
13 about the impact of any cuts on federal
14 funding such as CDBG grants?

15 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Yeah, I think
16 that we're very concerned. We have small
17 community-based organizations, but they do
18 tremendous work. And without these funds, it
19 really -- it takes some of the fabric of our
20 community away.

21 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you, Mayor.
22 Thank you again for -- thanks to each of you
23 for your advocacy and service.

24 Thank you, Chair.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
2 much.

3 Next we have Senator Jackson -- oh,
4 excuse me, Assemblymember Jackson.

5 (Laughter; comments off the record.)

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Thank you,
7 Chair.

8 I just want to say that I've spent
9 time in every last one of your cities. And
10 last night, Mayor Sheehan, I was actually at
11 the museum. My son loves the carousel.

12 But I have to say that the
13 Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester
14 is absolutely amazing, and I'm encouraging
15 everyone to go and visit both museums. We
16 have to increase funding for that museum to
17 make it just a beautiful place that everyone
18 wants to stop and go to.

19 And I just want to also say that in
20 Buffalo, during COVID, that was the only
21 space that my daughter and I went to visit
22 and spend time so we can be around
23 Niagara Falls, be out in the open.

24 Syracuse has the most amazing schools.

1 You all have amazing schools, educational --
2 sorry, colleges in your cities. And I'm just
3 wondering how you all are keeping those
4 students there to maybe work and be a part of
5 your -- the new residents there in your
6 cities. I'm also thinking about tourism.
7 How is that impacting your cities? Will that
8 help you all with the funding you all need?

9 Of course in Albany we'll make sure
10 that we do our part, but I also want to hear
11 about that. And thank you for the office
12 conversions. I think you have to increase
13 those. I was about to say that. Work from
14 home I don't think is decreasing, it's
15 actually increasing.

16 So if we can talk to like how you guys
17 are retaining your -- maybe students who are
18 coming to the schools in your cities.

19 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Assemblywoman,
20 you know, one of the things that you all did
21 was still the tax credit for films, and that
22 spurred on a movement of the film industry
23 into our state. Yonkers has actually done
24 really well there. We're going to have main

1 studios, potentially 22 studios in a
2 community that has 30 percent unemployment.

3 And we just partnered with Lionsgate
4 and Great Point Studios to build a new
5 high school. And the high school, it's going
6 to be from sixth grade -- actually, a middle
7 school to a high school -- to 12th grade.
8 And the children who are going to attend our
9 schools -- again, the children who are
10 predominantly Black and brown children in our
11 city, will be able to go to Robert Halmi
12 School, they're going to learn that industry.
13 And then they're going to be given, every
14 year, be given the opportunity to work in the
15 industry or move on to NYU, to Syracuse
16 University, Newhouse.

17 Again, this is a direct line to the
18 middle class for our kids. And it all
19 started with New York State giving us those
20 tax credits. So thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Gotcha.

22 And I spend the most time in Yonkers,
23 by the way, outside of the Bronx.

24 (Laughter.)

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: But any other
2 thoughts on what we should be doing to
3 increase tourism? Anybody, last 10 seconds?

4 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: I would say
5 just continue to market, market, market and
6 make sure that we tell our stories, that --
7 what each of our individual cities has to
8 offer for sure.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

11 Senator Jeremy Cooney.

12 SENATOR COONEY: (Mic off.) Thank
13 you, Chair.

14 Good afternoon, Mayors, always
15 wonderful to see you. And thank you for your
16 public service. I greatly appreciate it.

17 Mayor Evans, Happy Birthday.

18 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Thank you.

19 SENATOR COONEY: I know we need to
20 give you a piece of cake with 33 million
21 candles on it --

22 (Laughter.)

23 SENATOR COONEY: -- to make up for
24 AIM.

1 But I want to talk about your
2 aggressive and I think appropriate plan to
3 combat vehicular pedestrian and cyclist
4 injury and death occurring in the City of
5 Rochester. A lot of it was based upon
6 Vision Zero, which we've seen success across
7 the country. But as the chair of the
8 Transportation Committee, I find this
9 particularly compelling.

10 One item in particular I wanted to ask
11 you about, with the proposed Bus Rapid
12 Transit for Lake Avenue, which of course is
13 in my district. And we've seen a number of
14 unfortunate injuries and fatalities along
15 Lake Ave. How do you see this project
16 transforming our city? And what funding
17 necessary do you require?

18 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Yeah, I think
19 that we require obviously some serious
20 funding to be able to do this. But this
21 would transform our city because it would
22 transform the most dangerous corridor in our
23 city, where most of our pedestrian accidents
24 have happened. It is an area that I

1 sometimes refer to as a speedway. And in
2 fact, you know, there is a famous artist that
3 wrote a song about speeding down Lake Avenue,
4 Lou Gramm.

5 So it has that dubious distinction. I
6 think that that will allow people to use more
7 than cars. Cars are important for some
8 people to be able to use, but we want people
9 to have all types of transportation options.
10 And this project will allow us to be able to
11 do that. We believe that it will decrease
12 pedestrian fatalities that we have. You
13 know, these aren't accidents, these are
14 crashes that are happening. And it will help
15 not only with design but also give people the
16 ability to move about their day with other
17 forms of transportation options. And I think
18 that that is absolutely critical.

19 You know, we're proud to be one of the
20 few cities that have embraced this
21 Vision Zero concept and framework.
22 Pedestrian deaths since COVID have really
23 skyrocketed across the country and Rochester
24 has been no exception. So we believe that

1 this project will be transformational in
2 helping us to meet our Vision Zero goals of
3 having zero pedestrian deaths in the future.

4 SENATOR COONEY: Thank you, Mayor.

5 And I want to also thank you for your
6 support of expanding public transportation in
7 general. I know this is important to all of
8 your cities, but particularly as we see more
9 of these large employers and jobs coming
10 outside of our center cities into more rural
11 industrial spaces, how do we connect workers
12 who are in the city to these job
13 opportunities? You've supported my
14 \$5 million fund for a transit worker equity
15 fund which would work with RTS, in our
16 case -- but with Centro and FTA, CDTA, we
17 would make sure that all of these transit
18 authorities, non-MTA transit authorities,
19 have that opportunity.

20 Thank you, Chair.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Let's see. We have next
23 Assemblymember Conrad.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: Thank you,

1 Chairs.

2 Mayors, good to see you. I know all
3 of you are very disappointed about the
4 Buffalo Bills loss of the season. Except I
5 have to say, Mayor Sheehan, driving into town
6 I saw a Jets billboard. We'll talk later.

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: One of the -- I'm
9 completely sympathetic, having come from
10 local government, on the AIM issue. Whether
11 it's CHIPS, AIM, you know, the conversation
12 continues. And I won't belabor that question
13 of how we're going to pay for these things
14 going forward in the future.

15 I have got one question for
16 Mayor Scanlon; if there's time, one for the
17 rest.

18 Mayor Scanlon, in all of the inquiries
19 that I get to my office, there's one
20 consistent thing that has kind of what I
21 would say gone undiscussed. And in the City
22 of Buffalo there's an animal shelter, and we
23 get quite a few calls in my office about the
24 dilapidated conditions of the animal shelter.

1 We've got a lot of folks who are very
2 passionate about animals. They've gotten I
3 think nowhere at this point.

4 What's your thoughts? Are we doing
5 something on that? Where are we with the
6 animal shelter?

7 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Thank you,
8 Assemblymember. And some of us took that
9 Bills loss a little harder than the others.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: Yeah, I could
11 imagine.

12 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Yeah.

13 But thank you for the question. Yeah,
14 there's an issue there at the animal shelter
15 that's being rectified. We are in the final
16 stages of entering into a lease for a new
17 location that is adjacent to some city-owned
18 property which would provide some green space
19 for the animals as well.

20 I understand and I'm very sympathetic
21 to the concerns of people within the
22 community and the concerns and the issues
23 that have gone on at the animal shelter for
24 the past couple of years, really coming to

1 light this year. I was unaware of some of
2 the conditions that existed there. But they
3 have been -- they are being addressed, and we
4 are in the very final stages of a lease
5 entering into a new location.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: Okay, thank you.

7 And then to the rest of everyone here
8 on the panel, we just had our neighbors from
9 the north, Canada, in town talking about
10 potential tariffs. Is that anything that you
11 folks are looking at economically as impact
12 to your cities? I'll start with
13 Mayor Scanlon and go down the line.

14 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Yeah, as a
15 border city, it's a major concern, obviously.
16 Tourism, things of that nature, trading with
17 Canada, a major trade partner. It's -- some
18 of the things going on at the federal
19 government level, federal level, are very
20 concerning.

21 And we're looking at the -- you know,
22 we're here talking about different things
23 that impact us and, you know, sales tax is
24 one that impacts the City of Buffalo, and we

1 draw a tremendous number of tourists from
2 Southern Ontario and up towards Toronto
3 coming to Buffalo as well. So it could
4 impact us in a number of different ways. So
5 we're keeping a very close eye on it and
6 taking any precautions that we are building
7 into -- looking at our budget for any impacts
8 that might come in the future.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: Does it affect
10 anybody else directly?

11 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: I would add
12 similarly, tourism is a -- has a significant
13 potential impact.

14 But I also want to mention one related
15 to what we've been discussing: Lumber costs.
16 That could have a devastating effect on our
17 ability to build more housing.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN CONRAD: Good to know.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
21 Ranker Walczyk for five minutes.
22 Senator Walczyk.

23 SENATOR WALCZYK: Thanks so much,
24 Chairwoman.

1 Mayor Walsh, I can appreciate the
2 sentiment of the Athenian Oath in reporting
3 Syracuse is "not only not less, but greater,
4 better and more beautiful than it was
5 transmitted to us." What an awesome mission,
6 and right in line with the state's mission of
7 Excelsior, ever upward. And right in your
8 namesake of Syracuse. A beautiful sentiment
9 and aligns with some of the questions that I
10 have for some of the things that you have for
11 a brighter future for Syracuse.

12 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Sure.

13 SENATOR WALCZYK: Can you talk about
14 tourism in Syracuse and what that looks like
15 in the future for us?

16 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: So one of -- we
17 have a lot of things that bring in tourism,
18 whether it's our natural resources, our large
19 institutions -- of course Syracuse
20 University's there.

21 And one thing that I want to mention
22 relative to a need in Syracuse is hotel
23 rooms. So as -- the good news is we've seen
24 a number of properties converted from older

1 hotel space to residential, which we need.
2 But it's left us a hole of about nearly
3 600 hotel rooms in the City of Syracuse. So
4 we are working aggressively to try to get new
5 hotel product online.

6 But beyond that, you know, I think no
7 different than any other community. Tourism
8 is an important aspect of our local economy.

9 SENATOR WALCZYK: That was actually a
10 perfect segue, because my next question was
11 actually about hotels. Because you sit at
12 the confluence of 81 and 90, grew up on the
13 Erie Canal, and have always been that
14 corridor of commerce and tourism. The state
15 has invested in a lot of things to bring
16 tourism to the region. And then you have
17 your Oncenter downtown.

18 But if you're underbuilt for hotels,
19 it's really difficult to do that. So what do
20 we have in the hopper, and how can the state
21 be a good partner in that mission?

22 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Great question.

23 So we have -- we just recently
24 announced a new hotel project, Onondaga

1 Hotel, right downtown just a few blocks from
2 the Oncenter. County Executive McMahon has
3 an RFP out for county land for a hotel.

4 So the pipeline is starting to build.
5 And one of the things that I would encourage
6 the state to think about is when it comes to
7 deploying economic development resources,
8 grant dollars to projects, I think sometimes
9 we fall back on more traditional, antiquated
10 definitions of what defines economic
11 development. And also doesn't necessarily
12 account for the unique aspects in particular
13 communities or unique dynamics that may exist
14 in Syracuse but don't exist in Albany.

15 So we've been having conversations
16 with the state, particularly Empire State
17 Development, about how important it is to
18 assist us in supporting hotel projects
19 because it does have that ripple effect. So
20 it's something that I'd like to see more
21 willingness on the part of Empire State
22 Development to support us in those efforts.

23 SENATOR WALCZYK: Okay. So primarily
24 when we're looking at the budget for hotel

1 development in Syracuse, we should be looking
2 at Empire State Development?

3 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: So yeah, like
4 most projects, it's hard to make them pencil
5 out. And so, again, understanding -- and
6 ESD's been a great partner. They've made
7 significant investments in Syracuse. But
8 that's a particular area where we've been
9 having recent discussions where, you know, a
10 couple of million dollars could put the
11 project over the top and bring not only
12 property on the tax rolls, bring both
13 construction jobs and permanent --
14 accessible, permanent jobs.

15 SENATOR WALCZYK: Kind of as you
16 mentioned, hotels were converted to housing
17 to fill that need for housing. And in your
18 testimony you said a plan for housing and
19 community revitalization. What does that
20 look like for Syracuse?

21 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Boy. Okay,
22 one -- about a minute to talk about it.

23 It's multifaceted. So, you know, we
24 are building more new single-family

1 owner-occupied homes than have been built in
2 decades. I would give a shout out to HCR and
3 specifically the state's AHOP program, which
4 has been really just a great new tool in our
5 toolkit.

6 So we're building a lot of new
7 owner-occupied housing. We're building a lot
8 of rental housing. We have a number of LIHTC
9 projects in the pipeline. The state's been a
10 big supporter of an old state developmental
11 center that we're converting to new housing.
12 So it's hitting at different income levels,
13 mixed-income, owner-occupied and rental. You
14 know, it's an all-of-the-above strategy.

15 SENATOR WALCZYK: Thanks very much.

16 I'll turn back the last 20 seconds of
17 my time and just say Go, Bills!

18 (Laughter.)

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 Assemblymember Ravina.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN RIVERA: Rivera.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Excuse me. I'm
23 just trying to read someone else's
24 handwriting.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN RIVERA: Hi. Thank you.

2 So I just want to start by saying I
3 have been a visitor in all of your cities and
4 from someone that comes from local
5 government, I know that you guys have tough,
6 tough, tough jobs. And it's difficult to
7 find support and often difficult to find
8 practicality in the world of expectations
9 that are sometimes unfair. So it's not easy
10 to take on the task of leading a city, but I
11 commend everybody for making that sacrifice.

12 This question is for my mayor,
13 Mayor Scanlon. You know, recently I was able
14 to go visit Rochester and I met with folks
15 there that I've been working on the rental
16 inspection issue for many years. Rochester
17 really seems to have figured out the right
18 way to do it. They have invested resources
19 towards it, and it's clearly a measurable
20 success that they've had. In not just
21 determining where lead has poisoned children
22 but also going down to the granular of
23 specific homes where it's a prevalent
24 problem.

1 In the conversations that I've had
2 with council members and with folks back
3 home, it's been a consistent concern, where
4 we are with the rental inspection program for
5 the City of Buffalo. And it seems like, one,
6 we're not investing in that program enough.
7 And it also seems as though the results that
8 we're getting from that program is not really
9 showing us much results. I don't know if
10 it's a matter of the equipment we're using,
11 the amount of personnel that we have, or sort
12 of the back-and-forth between the city
13 feeling that the country has a bigger role.

14 But at the end of the day we have a
15 clear problem where we are, and I say this as
16 a parent that's raising a daughter in a
17 high-lead zip code that concerns me every
18 day. And it's also something that I believe
19 in here in this body, where I carry multiple
20 pieces of legislation around lead.

21 I honestly think that, you know -- and
22 I'm not putting it on you as if it's all your
23 fault, certainly, because this is an issue of
24 the prior administration and the last

1 50 years' worth of administration that's at
2 fault. But we aren't doing enough on this.
3 And the resources that we provide, whether it
4 be through the state or really any entity,
5 towards the city, it doesn't seem to be going
6 to this issue that I believe we can eradicate
7 in a generation.

8 So I say all that to say that, you
9 know, do you anticipate using any funding
10 that you've discussed needing or wanting
11 towards this issue?

12 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Yeah, I think
13 you touched on the issue that has been
14 plaguing the PRI program, is the pointing of
15 fingers between the city and the county for a
16 number of years.

17 I think we've moved past that, and I
18 have a good partner in our county executive
19 now. Two years ago I sponsored legislation
20 that doubled the fee associated with the
21 rental registration fee, which brought an
22 additional million dollars into our budget
23 which paid for additional inspectors. The
24 problem is they're just finishing up with all

1 their training. They'll be out in the field
2 soon. And I think we'll be able to hit those
3 goals in the near future.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 I'm going to go to an additional
6 Assemblymember, Assemblymember Sayegh. Not
7 here. Then let's try Assemblywoman Shimsky.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: Thank you so
9 much, Madam Chair.

10 And thank you to all of you for being
11 here and helping to guide us as we find our
12 way through the priorities.

13 My big issue is generally capital and
14 infrastructure spending. And we often talk
15 about new initiatives, but one of the big
16 problems that so many local governments are
17 facing is that maintenance on various systems
18 has not been able to be kept up with for a
19 long time, and there are really serious
20 problems as a result. I mean, you're talking
21 about building structures, building systems,
22 roads and bridges, parks, clean water,
23 wastewater.

24 What do you see as the particular

1 infrastructure maintenance issues that are
2 most concerning your municipalities at this
3 point?

4 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: You know,
5 Assemblywoman, we could just run through the
6 list. I mean, obviously schools. I have at
7 least a billion dollars in needs in terms of
8 what infrastructure needs we have for the
9 schools. We have a tremendous amount of
10 needs. We haven't touched our library
11 system nor our libraries in a long time. We
12 were able to take advantage recently of the
13 lower rates when they were lower to rebuild
14 many of our parks.

15 But it works like this. For every
16 \$30 million I borrow, that I have to raise
17 property taxes 1 percent. You all gave us a
18 2 percent tax cap. You know, that makes our
19 life a little difficult because the
20 infrastructure doesn't go outside the tax
21 cap. And if it did, it might actually help
22 us a little bit. That we'd recognize that
23 maybe if we have to borrow money for a
24 project that is significant for our

1 community, that maybe that should be outside
2 the tax cap, we'll just start it out there.

3 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: I think from
4 our point, a similar -- the biggest issue
5 we're facing on the capital front is the
6 elimination of the Joint Schools Construction
7 Board and the impact that has on our ability
8 to maintain our buildings within the local
9 public school system and our other
10 infrastructure needs.

11 This year we passed the largest
12 capital budget in the city's history -- 55
13 million of that was the city of Buffalo's
14 public schools. So moving forward, we'd love
15 to see the Joint Schools Construction Board
16 reinstituted so the Buffalo public schools
17 aren't coming and gobbling up a lot of our
18 capital budget needs or the assets that we
19 have at our disposal. So I think that's the
20 big issue that we're facing.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I
22 don't think you can use the 8 seconds.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: You can have
24 it back, Madam Chair.

1 (Laughter.)

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you,
3 Assemblywoman.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: And thank you.

5 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Thanks,
6 Assemblywoman.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off) --
8 migrants being sent by bus or arrangements
9 made with hotels.

10 So for the record, my family were
11 undocumented; none of my family had paperwork
12 when we got here. We probably -- we didn't
13 have a dime as far as I know from my family
14 history. We were fleeing pogroms and the
15 Nazis in Eastern Europe. And yet pretty
16 quickly we turned things around for ourselves
17 and became contributing members of the
18 American society, and I even got to be a
19 Senator.

20 So people have asked about the costs
21 for you. And we know that there are costs.
22 But we also know from research that very
23 quickly it turns around to be another story
24 where immigrants actually end up being

1 contributors both from a tax perspective and
2 new employees and starting new businesses.

3 So I'm curious, have your cities
4 actually seen advantages as you have new
5 people moving into your communities?

6 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Well, certainly
7 within the City of Albany we had employers
8 who were asking me if I could get buses of
9 migrants to come to our community because of
10 the need in our workforce.

11 When we saw a significant reduction in
12 the number of refugees who were allowed to
13 legally come into this country under the
14 refugee resettlement program, it had an
15 impact on our hospitals, on our restaurants,
16 on many of our employers. And we were only
17 just starting to recover from that under the
18 Biden administration, and so there still is a
19 very significant need for labor.

20 I mean, this area would not have grown
21 if it were not for immigration. We want
22 immigrants to be here and to be able to work
23 legally. We want to ensure that those who
24 are protecting our border are doing their

1 jobs. But when we have folks who are here in
2 our community, our experience has been that
3 we are able to see them in a very short
4 period of time do things like open
5 businesses. You know, we have an
6 international school here because we have
7 many refugees who come here, so we have a
8 school that's focused on new language
9 learners, and then they move out of that
10 school and into our regular school district.

11 And so we have an entire group of
12 community-based organizations have really
13 developed around supporting, helping people
14 to become very successful. And I think we
15 have to ensure that we continue to be
16 welcoming as we see our population aging and
17 people retiring and the need to replenish our
18 workforce.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 Other mayors?

21 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Yeah, I'll
22 chime in. Everything that Mayor Sheehan
23 said, completely agree. We are a proud
24 refugee resettlement and immigrant community

1 in Syracuse. There are over 80 languages
2 spoken in the Syracuse City School District.

3 Our population, our city population
4 grew in the last census for the first time in
5 70 years. That would not have happened
6 without refugee resettlement. We're very
7 concerned about a slowdown of resettlement
8 under the current administration. So we're a
9 proud welcoming community and intend to stay
10 that way.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Senator, you
13 know what, Yonkers is that type of immigrant
14 community. I'm the grandson of Italian
15 immigrants. And that's always been a good
16 thing. And we've always, as any urban center
17 has, we've always been -- took our fair share
18 and then some. And that was never an issue.

19 My issue is when New York City decided
20 to impose its will on a much smaller
21 community. Their impact on Yonkers could
22 have really had a -- could have had a
23 devastating effect on our Board of Education
24 budget. It was a budget-buster. And so --

1 and it was done so without real -- without
2 even a consultation with us. That's when we
3 had the issue. Up until then, we're willing
4 to be partners and we'll partner any which
5 way we can, and share. And we have. That's
6 been our -- that's been our past.

7 But I think in the future, though, we
8 should be looking -- communities shouldn't
9 have things just thrown on them.

10 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Obviously
11 Rochester is a refugee resettlement
12 community. We've been one for decades.
13 These refugees are now business owners,
14 they're now homeowners, they contribute to
15 the tax base and to revenue in our city.

16 But I should also point out a lot of
17 them played by the rules. They wait for
18 years to get a pathway to citizenship. So
19 we're very concerned about how refugees will
20 be treated in the future, but we're also
21 concerned about the organizations that are
22 supporting these refugees and helping them
23 resettle and acclimate and assimilate into
24 our community.

1 But I think that they are a part of
2 the economic development lifeline that you
3 have in cities. They come here with skills,
4 they come here with love of family, and they
5 end up loving America. And that is the case
6 in Rochester with our refugee resettlement
7 program, and I hope that we can find a way to
8 make sure that they can continue to
9 contribute to the vibrancy of all of our
10 cities, and all of the cities across New York
11 State.

12 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Thank you,
13 Senator. You know, Buffalo is a very
14 welcoming city and our diversity is quite
15 frankly our strength. And much like my
16 counterparts here, we welcome new Americans
17 to our city.

18 Just like Syracuse, our immigrant
19 population, our new Americans, led to our
20 first population increase in over seven
21 years. The last census was the first
22 population increase we had, and these are new
23 Americans who are contributing to our tax
24 base, opening businesses, things of that

1 nature. And that's no different than how
2 things have taken place in our cities or
3 other cities across the country as long as
4 this country's been around.

5 So we welcome them and look forward to
6 partnering with the agencies that help to
7 assimilate them and adjust to their new lives
8 here in America.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 So I'll just ask you each, but just
11 your one answer.

12 So here in Albany we are looking at
13 the state budget through a lens of how much
14 are we going to lose from the federal
15 government. And we're all reading the
16 newspapers every day. You're all smart
17 mayors of significant-sized towns. You know
18 what's going on in Washington. What's your
19 number-one biggest worry, from your budget
20 perspective, if things that we're hearing
21 coming out of Washington are true?

22 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Our block
23 grant, if that were frozen and not allocated
24 to the City of Buffalo, would be extremely

1 detrimental. We have one of the larger CDBG
2 allocations in the country, and the amount of
3 organizations and users that receive that
4 funding would be traumatically impacted. So
5 that's probably the largest.

6 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: CDBG, but I
7 can't forget about federal highway dollars.
8 I mean, those are critical, critical dollars
9 to make sure that you keep the infrastructure
10 strong in your cities.

11 So CDBG and federal highway concern me
12 greatly.

13 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: We just
14 identified by going through our budgets,
15 about a hundred million dollars. It would
16 really be an attack on the core of everything
17 that we do in our cities. I don't know --
18 there wouldn't be a way to recover, in my
19 opinion, unless someone disagrees with me.

20 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: Certainly CDBG.
21 I think more broadly, just the uncertainty of
22 everything. We have significant projects
23 already underway or about to be underway with
24 significant federal support. I mentioned

1 Interstate 81, 2.25 billion. We don't have
2 any reason to believe that that funding dries
3 up or stalls. But that uncertainty creates
4 anxiety.

5 Similarly with the Micron project.
6 Again, the deal's inked, signed, moving
7 forward. But that uncertainty, again, it
8 undermines our ability to advance as a
9 community.

10 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: And I think all
11 of those things and the money that we've
12 already spent. So reimbursements that are --
13 we're contracted for, we've spent the money,
14 we're supposed to spend it over a period of
15 years. If for some reason that cash doesn't
16 come in, that will have a pretty immediate
17 impact and we'll have to make some very
18 difficult decisions.

19 So, you know, in addition to being
20 concerned about future projects and
21 investments that we are looking to make, it's
22 the dollars that we've already spent and that
23 we're contractually obligated to pay out, and
24 not getting reimbursed for those.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I'm
2 going to give back my minute 20 seconds.

3 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Senator, before
4 you do that, can I just say thank you. It
5 has been a pleasure to be testifying here to
6 your committee all these years, and I
7 appreciate the hard questions and it's been
8 great. I'm sad that this is my last one.
9 But thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Since this is
11 your last one, I certainly wish you the best
12 going forward.

13 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So thank you,
15 Mayor Sheehan.

16 I'm returning it to the Assembly. We
17 are done with Senators.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We certainly are.

19 Okay --

20 (Laughter.)

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I beg your
22 pardon.

23 (Laughter.)

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You notice how he

1 just wanders off for a while and now --

2 (Laughter.)

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Dais.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Hi. We're going to
5 be brief questions and answers, I guess,
6 only -- I have three minutes, not 10.

7 So Buffalo, despite the team that
8 plays there -- I'm a Jets fan,
9 unfortunately -- I had the honor to work for
10 Joe Burns, who is running the Buffalo Stadium
11 project. How are we doing on the MBE and WBE
12 numbers for that stadium? Briefly.

13 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Yeah. Thank
14 you. And it's a tough existence,
15 Assemblymember, as a Jets fan lately.

16 (Laughter.)

17 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Things are
18 going very well. And you have a tremendous
19 partner here in state government and Senator
20 April Baskin, who, when at the Erie County
21 Legislature, fought tirelessly to incorporate
22 a community benefits agreement within that
23 stadium process. And those goals were
24 implemented because of her hard work.

1 So I think things are very much on
2 track there.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Thank you.

4 So construction's a big concern for
5 me. I believe building infrastructure is the
6 way we move New York forward. So just very
7 briefly, across to all of you, for your major
8 projects do you do lump-sum projects? Do you
9 have progressive design-build?

10 How do you bid out your construction
11 projects?

12 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: So I'll start
13 on the big scale, and it's a State DOT
14 project. The 81 project had very aggressive
15 local hiring provisions which DOT is doing
16 really well meeting.

17 On the city front, you know, that is
18 an area where we've spending a lot of time
19 looking at our procurement process, and what
20 we've been determining is where we can chunk
21 up projects into smaller amounts -- so I'll
22 give you an example. We have a municipal
23 sidewalk program where we reconstruct miles
24 of sidewalks every year, and what we're

1 finding is some of our smaller contractors,
2 including MWBE contractors, just aren't able
3 to take on the big chunks. But going into
4 the next year, we're looking to break those
5 up into smaller -- and make them more
6 accessible.

7 So I'm not sure if that's what you
8 were getting at, but that's an area where we
9 think that there's room for improvement, and
10 we're working towards that.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Understood.

12 Go ahead.

13 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: Yeah, and
14 we're working with several contractors, along
15 with our Department of Public Works.

16 A lot of times some of the MWBEs might
17 not meet thresholds or goals to have them
18 included in bids, so we're trying to create
19 some carveouts for some of those
20 organizations to get their foot in the door
21 so they can build and become permanent people
22 who can build on these contracts.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Mayor Spano.

24 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: We just built a

1 school and we monitor that very, very
2 closely. We've stayed consistent with all of
3 our goals and we'll continue to do that.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Thank you. Judge
5 Tolbert's a good friend of mine back in the
6 day. I know you know Judge Tolbert very
7 well.

8 I'm sorry, Mayor, I apologize.

9 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: No, I was
10 going to say the same in Rochester.
11 Absolutely, those are very important things.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Thank you. I
13 just -- infrastructure's going to be key. I
14 think especially for the smaller
15 municipalities or the smaller cities, we've
16 got to make sure that your electrical systems
17 are upgraded, transmission lines, sewer,
18 power, lead and water pipes. We've got to
19 make sure we put a focus on it.

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
22 González-Rojas.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
24 you. If I can just turn this on. There we

1 go.

2 Thank you to all our mayors that are
3 here today. And I want to first thank you
4 all for your incredible work on both refugee
5 resettlements and supporting our asylum
6 seekers.

7 I want to note for the record that a
8 majority of the people that have arrived here
9 are not illegal, they're not even
10 undocumented. They're here with legal status
11 awaiting their asylee cases. So thank you
12 for welcoming them and ensuring that they're
13 integrated into our communities. I really
14 appreciate your comments earlier.

15 My question is for Mayor Evans. I
16 know in Rochester the Asthma and Allergy
17 Foundation of America noted that Rochester
18 jumped from 10th to 2nd in terms of the
19 "Asthma Capital."

20 And I know that inhalers are often
21 cost-prohibitive for families. I actually
22 have a bill that would eliminate that cost to
23 consumers. Last year in our budget we passed
24 a bill that would eliminate the cost for

1 insulin, and we're modeling my bill off of
2 that. So it's something we were able to
3 include in the budget.

4 I'm curious if that's a proposal you
5 would support. And I'm curious what -- why
6 do you think that asthma rates have increased
7 so much in your city?

8 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Yeah, I think
9 in terms of the asthma rates and the
10 increase, I think we don't know. But I think
11 there are some environmental factors that
12 might be playing a role there, but I think we
13 need to dig in deeper with that.

14 But in terms of supporting a bill, we
15 would absolutely support that because really
16 that is a life-or-death device that someone
17 needs to have with them. If someone does not
18 have that asthma pump when they need it, I
19 mean, they won't be around long.

20 So anything that we can do to lower
21 barriers to people having access to that pump
22 is something that we would be very, very
23 supportive of.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Great.

1 Thank you so much.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That is it? Oh.

3 Well, Mayors, I want to thank you.

4 I'll just -- I don't have any real questions.
5 I want to congratulate you all on what you
6 do. You have a job that I don't envy any of
7 you, as I know how difficult it is trying to,
8 you know, manage a large city. And you have
9 I guess four of the largest -- five of the
10 largest, I guess, cities not counting
11 New York City.

12 And Mr. Mayor Spano, I want to
13 congratulate you on everything you've done.
14 You've really turned the city around. You
15 had mentioned something in your testimony
16 about former administrations that disavowed
17 themselves of the children of the City of
18 Yonkers, saying "They're not my children,
19 they're their children. Let the state take
20 care of them." And you flipped that around
21 wonderfully, and that is changing. And
22 everything is moving in the right direction,
23 and I can see it now.

24 I do have a question, though, on

1 charter schools. I've asked this question of
2 different groups; I keep getting different
3 answers. You all have charter schools in
4 your cities, I imagine. And you only have
5 one or -- you have two? Just one. Okay.
6 Mount Vernon has two now, and it was really
7 killing them.

8 Anyway, when a parent puts their child
9 in a charter school and the charter school
10 chooses not to educate that child, when the
11 child originally goes, the district -- you --
12 pay the charter school whatever the tuition
13 is, and then a month and a half later they
14 say, This is a hard-to-teach child, it's a
15 handicap -- whatever it is, we all know they
16 cherry-pick -- and they send the child back,
17 do they send the money back with that child
18 or do they keep the money and send you back
19 the kid?

20 You can start wherever -- this is all
21 of you --

22 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: I've heard this
23 question before, so I kind of like cheated.
24 We ask -- I'm sorry, what we do is we stop

1 paying for that child. So they get
2 incremental payments. If that child's no
3 longer there, they don't get the money. And
4 then the state does not reimburse us.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You don't pay the
6 entire amount up front. And I think some say
7 yes, they do --

8 (Overtalk.)

9 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Right. Again,
10 we don't get reimbursed -- what I am saying,
11 we don't get reimbursed either. So we don't
12 get reimbursed from New York State, we stop
13 paying the charter.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And is that true
15 for all of you?

16 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Well, I'm not
17 sure in terms of Rochester. I spent -- I got
18 all my gray hair from spending time on the
19 school board years ago, but I'm not sure
20 if -- how it works with --

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: But is the
22 Rochester School District a dependent
23 district?

24 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Independent

1 district.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: It's independent?

3 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Independent.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You have a separate
5 school tax?

6 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: What was that?

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You have a separate
8 school tax, you're not part of the Big 5
9 where the city pays all of the bills and --

10 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: Oh, yeah, we
11 send \$119.1 million to the school district
12 every year.

13 But in terms of charters taking money
14 back and getting the dollars back from
15 charters if a kid leaves a charter school to
16 then go back to a district school, I'm not
17 sure about the mechanism in terms of taking
18 those dollars back or how that stops.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay.

20 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: In Buffalo I'm
21 not certain how that plays out either.
22 Again, if a child goes for a short period of
23 time and then returns to the Buffalo Public
24 Schools, I'm not sure if that money -- if

1 we're paying up front or clawed back or what
2 that is. If it's similar to Yonkers where
3 they're paying incrementally, I'm not certain
4 about it.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So you don't know
6 whether that goes back either.

7 BUFFALO MAYOR SCANLON: I do not.

8 SYRACUSE MAYOR WALSH: I'll say in
9 Syracuse what you had indicated is what the
10 Syracuse City School District suggests is the
11 case in Syracuse, is at least for that school
12 year, that money is not -- that funding is
13 not recaptured.

14 I don't know the specific mechanisms,
15 but that is absolutely a concern that they
16 consistently raise at the Syracuse City
17 School District.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. And
19 Mayor Sheehan, I know you have an independent
20 school district --

21 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: We have an
22 independent school district.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: -- so you wouldn't
24 be in charge of that.

1 ALBANY MAYOR SHEEHAN: No. I mean, I
2 have heard that as well, and I know that
3 there -- you know, there are issues with
4 respect to the timing of those payments
5 within the school district. But I can't give
6 you the specifics. I can certainly get that
7 from our school superintendent, though.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. And since
9 we're on the subject of schools, my colleague
10 Senator Krueger asked you all about the
11 effects of that's happening in Washington,
12 D.C., and none of you mentioned that the --
13 today, just today, the president did an
14 executive order to shut down the education
15 department, which means that there could be
16 no money coming for education. I don't know
17 how this is going to work, but crazy things
18 are happening.

19 But if the education goes down, I
20 think the whole state's going to collapse.
21 Because not only do the cities depend on
22 money from the feds, but so does the state.

23 And, you know, block grant money,
24 that's really small potatoes to your overall

1 budget. But I think so much else goes into
2 every community from the federal government,
3 whether you see it directly or not, whether
4 it's Medicaid or Medicare or road repairs,
5 education, money that goes to the police
6 department for equipment -- there's all kinds
7 of things that I think we're going to be
8 adversely affected with.

9 And I don't know how we get out of it.
10 I think, you know, the entire country can
11 fold up under this, so ...

12 But anyway, I don't want to start
13 rambling because I'll start talking politics
14 and there will be somebody --

15 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: If I might add,
16 Assemblyman --

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: -- throw something
18 at me.

19 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: If I might add,
20 you know, so it was -- you know, there's
21 going to be tariffs on China and Canada and
22 Mexico where there were no tariffs. And then
23 there's going to be cuts to our federal aid
24 and then there were no cuts.

1 So where we end up is, you know -- I
2 could lose -- I think we could all lose sleep
3 every single night on this thing. So I think
4 for our -- for my constituency, I try to keep
5 the anxiety down by not showing too much
6 anxiety, even though inside it's kind of
7 tough, and try to -- and then advocate as
8 much as we can. As soon as I knew those
9 federal cuts were coming, I made a list
10 available to my congressional delegation and
11 said, This is how it's going to affect us and
12 how it's going to affect us in a big way.
13 And I got to -- I was making sure that we
14 were going to get to every one of those
15 groups so that they could advocate on our
16 behalf. Then it was pulled.

17 But we have to continue to do I think
18 in order for us to see our way through this
19 time --

20 ROCHESTER MAYOR EVANS: And with
21 education, one of the big concerns is Title I
22 I mean, this Title I dollars comes from the
23 federal government to some of the most needy
24 school districts. So if you blew up the

1 Education Department, the effect on
2 particularly high-needs districts like
3 Rochester and other ones around the state,
4 you know, I don't know how you would -- I
5 mean, a lot of -- most of the funds come from
6 the state. But for programs like Title I,
7 school meals -- I mean, how would you make
8 that up? Would it go somewhere else?

9 So I think --

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: It would be next to
11 impossible to make up, I think. I think the
12 management style is to throw everything
13 against the wall and see what sticks.

14 YONKERS MAYOR SPANO: Chair, we could
15 never possibly make it up. It's just -- it's
16 not there. We couldn't raise taxes to make
17 it up. It's just not there.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I think we can
19 confiscate our federal income taxes and send
20 them to the state and make us --

21 (Laughter.)

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I got accused of
23 treason when I said that. I'm just letting
24 you know. Be careful.

1 (Laughter.)

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. Well, as
3 we're hanging together here, we'll hang
4 together for treason, okay?

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Fair enough.

6 (Laughter.)

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Anyway, I thank you
8 all.

9 Again, that concludes this section of
10 the hearing, and I will call up Panel B. As
11 everyone has been admonished, if you want to
12 speak to any of these mayors, please do so
13 outside while the new panel is taking their
14 seats.

15 Thank you very much.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
17 much.

18 (Off the record.)

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Yeah. Thank you.

20 Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.
21 This is Panel B of our legislative hearing.

22 For the media, could you just all
23 state your name and title before you start
24 your testimony? The clock won't start until

1 you finish doing that. Start at the left or
2 the right.

3 EXEC. DPY. COMPTROLLER BRINDISI: I'm
4 Francesco Brindisi, executive deputy
5 comptroller for budget and finance.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.)

7 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Brad Lander,
8 New York City Comptroller.

9 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Councilman
10 Brannan, chair of the Council's Finance
11 Committee. I'm testifying on behalf of
12 Speaker Adrienne Adams.

13 MS. EDWARDS: Tanisha Edwards, CFO and
14 deputy chief of staff to New York City
15 Council Speaker Adrienne Adams.

16 MR. LEE: Richard Lee, City Council
17 Finance Director.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you all.

19 So I guess, Comptroller, you'll go
20 first.

21 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Thank you
22 very much, Chair Pretlow, Chair Krueger,
23 members of the Senate Finance and Assembly
24 Ways and Means committees. It's an honor to

1 testify before you today. I'm New York City
2 Comptroller Brad Lander. Grateful for the
3 opportunity to discuss the New York State
4 Executive Budget for FY '26, and especially
5 of course its impact on New York City.

6 New York City is on a path of stable,
7 if moderate, economic growth -- although we
8 lag behind the U.S., and most of that growth
9 is concentrated in healthcare and social
10 assistance. Job growth is flat elsewhere.
11 Tourism has rebounded to levels last seen
12 more than five years ago, with both Broadway
13 attendance and hotel occupancy back up to
14 pre-pandemic highs. That's the good news.

15 On the other hand -- and, Chair
16 Pretlow, I really appreciate how you ended
17 the last panel -- we face extremely serious
18 new challenges and uncertainty stemming
19 largely from Washington, with threats from
20 Trump's tariffs, deportations, and especially
21 federal freezes and cuts.

22 My office has been doing what we can
23 to prepare for and respond to those
24 challenges. We've published several reports

1 on what's at risk. We're working with
2 nonprofit partners who are starting to face
3 lockouts from their federal funding sources.
4 But we need to be doing a lot more on this.

5 And given that Mayor Adams is AWOL in
6 responding to the budget threats proposed by
7 Trump cuts and freezes, and that all of us,
8 including the mayors on the prior panel,
9 really face these threats at the state level,
10 municipal level, and nonprofit service
11 providers, I want to propose a joint
12 city/state emergency task force to really
13 evaluate the impacts in realtime, because if
14 we do get locked out of our education
15 funding, our school lunch funding, our public
16 health funding, the risks are grave and we
17 need a coordinated response.

18 Attorney General James has stepped up
19 in an encouraging way and brought the lawsuit
20 to make sure we would not yet see that money
21 frozen. But we can't be reactive and on the
22 fly, and that is where we are right now.

23 Back to the key issues in this year's
24 budget. Affordability of course remains the

1 most pressing and persistent issue for many
2 New Yorkers. Childcare costs ballooning,
3 rents at historic highs, and the wages of
4 working and middle-class families just not
5 keeping pace.

6 Governor Hochul's focus on these
7 issues in the Executive Budget is positive:
8 expanding the child tax credit, cutting taxes
9 for the middle class, launching the paid
10 prenatal leave initiative, the BABY benefit,
11 expanding tuition assistance at SUNY and
12 CUNY -- and I hope the Legislature will build
13 on those proposals.

14 Still, the crushing cost of childcare
15 remains for so many families the most serious
16 one. While I was thrilled to see the
17 Governor's support for putting New York on
18 the path to universal childcare through
19 presumptive eligibility, there is a lot more
20 to do. So I hope the Legislature will push
21 more ambitiously to confront the scale of the
22 childcare crisis to increase funding toward
23 expanding universal childcare, per the
24 New Yorkers United for Child Care campaign.

1 Another critical challenge facing
2 New York City is of course mental health and
3 homelessness, with horrific recent incidents
4 of violence causing attention to an
5 underlying crisis. I support the Governor's
6 efforts, as well as legislation by
7 Senator Hoylman-Sigal and Assemblymember
8 Lasher to increase flexibility to connect
9 New Yorkers in crisis to involuntary care
10 when necessary. But we should be clear:
11 involuntary commitment alone will not solve
12 this crisis. When people come out of
13 hospitals and right back to the street, we
14 must do better at connecting them to housing
15 and services.

16 Last month I released a comprehensive
17 plan to end street homelessness for people
18 with serious mental illness. For too long,
19 our city has operated really on a
20 housing-last model, whether people are coming
21 out of hospital or coming out of Rikers, we
22 don't connect them to supportive housing,
23 even when we know they need it and we know
24 they're eligible.

1 One critical thing the state could do
2 is fund the Housing Access Voucher Program.
3 Half of those vouchers would be dedicated to
4 getting homeless families connected to
5 permanent housing. New York City can fund
6 the services that wrap around. That model
7 works 70 to 90 percent of the time.

8 I think it's disappointing that all
9 the conversation is about involuntary
10 hospitalization and none of the conversation
11 is about the housing resources that are what
12 are ultimately needed to help people get off
13 the street and into stable housing and
14 services. So I hope you guys will better
15 balance that conversation and help New York
16 City where we urgently need it.

17 Transportation and safe streets are
18 also at the heart of making New York City a
19 safer and more livable city. I thank the
20 Governor and some folks like Senator Krueger
21 who were strong allies in pushing for the
22 congestion pricing program, which is having
23 good success in its first month of operation.
24 And data published by the MTA shows the

1 program is already reducing traffic, speeding
2 up buses, and boosting transit.

3 But of course there's much more to do.
4 The MTA must show New Yorkers that it is
5 actually spending that money -- gesundheit,
6 Assemblymember Epstein -- that it's spending
7 those resources effectively on signal
8 modernization, on elevators, on platform
9 barriers for safety, on new station gates.
10 And of course there's work to do to fill the
11 \$35 billion in the capital plan in a way that
12 doesn't put the burden unfairly on the
13 taxpayers of the City of New York.

14 I heard some questions earlier on
15 this, but the Legislature can help also to
16 address the rise of e-bikes and mopeds, one
17 of the most profound changes in New York's
18 transportation landscape and one I hear about
19 all the time. I support the Governor's
20 proposal to reclassify ultra-heavy Class 3
21 e-bikes as mopeds, and hope also that the
22 state will pass Senate Bill 7860 to double
23 fines against retailers selling illegal
24 mopeds.

1 I'm also a big fan of Senator
2 Gounardes's bill to hold dangerous drivers
3 accountable for reckless driving in new and
4 creative ways, including the speed limiters.

5 And finally, at this grave moment, as
6 I started talking about, the city and the
7 state can and must come together to protect
8 New Yorkers in the wake of threats that we
9 all face together. Budget risks that seemed
10 hypothetical just a few weeks back now appear
11 grave. When the proposed federal freeze was
12 rolled back, thanks in large part to the
13 rapid legal action by our Attorney General
14 Letitia James, with a state coalition of
15 other attorneys general, it seemed like maybe
16 that would be a brief reprieve.

17 But now it appears that control of the
18 federal payment system has been granted to
19 this non-agency DOGE, led by Elon Musk, and
20 their potential risks of canceling payments,
21 freezing payments, stalling payments that are
22 what largely fund our schools, our public
23 hospitals, our housing, our school lunch
24 money proposes an equally serious or even

1 greater risk to the budget of the state, the
2 budget of New York City and other cities, and
3 nonprofit human service and healthcare
4 providers.

5 Yesterday we learned that Lutheran
6 Social Services has seen their federal money
7 frozen because one element of their
8 programming is to provide support to
9 immigrants.

10 Of course a lot of this will be
11 rumors. We won't know what's true unless we
12 work together to diligently collect that
13 information and be clear on what's actually
14 going on. And I really hope that that is
15 what we'll do. Our office has stepped up to
16 do that as best we can, but we could use your
17 help there.

18 Oh, I missed my education section,
19 sorry. I'll do it quickly.

20 We remain very grateful for the
21 increase in Foundation Aid in recent years.
22 At the same time, the Governor's revised
23 Foundation Aid approach must be tailored
24 further to make sure that schools can cover

1 the real costs of a sound, basic education in
2 2025. That means increased weights for
3 students in temporary housing, special
4 education and English language learners, and
5 a few other things as well.

6 You required by law that the
7 comptroller's office certify -- indicate
8 whether we can or can't certify that the
9 city's financial plan includes sufficient
10 funding to comply with the state class size
11 law. And this year we sent you a letter a
12 few weeks ago that we are unable to certify
13 that. We estimate that the operating expense
14 gap ranges between 168 million and
15 214 million next year, growing to
16 1.28 billion by fiscal '28. That's money
17 that is not currently in the city's budget
18 that is needed to comply with the class size
19 law.

20 Let's see. I support the Governor's
21 proposal also for getting cellphones out of
22 our classrooms to address the distraction and
23 mental health issues our students are facing.
24 As I mentioned, I really like this idea of

1 supporting CUNY students and SUNY students
2 who commit to be teachers or nurses or social
3 workers. Love to see that age down, because
4 we have real gaps in the city, especially in
5 teachers and social workers. And this seems
6 like a good model.

7 And let's see. I have in my testimony
8 some things about climate change, but I'm
9 happy to do those in response to questions or
10 talk to you about them further. Senator
11 Krueger, I really appreciated your comments
12 about immigrants. You know, before 1924,
13 when our relatives came, there were no
14 documentation requirements so of course folks
15 were undocumented. We've documented in
16 New York City just how critical immigrants
17 are to the thriving economy that we have --
18 something like \$62 billion a year of economic
19 value. So we have a lot more to do to make
20 sure we stand up and keep it the greatest
21 immigrant city the world has ever known. So
22 I urge you to support the New York for All
23 and Access to Representation acts.

24 And as my time expires, I will just

1 say one thing that boggled my mind in the
2 mayor's testimony was to hear him again say
3 this will be the year when he comes to you
4 with a proposal for property tax reform. In
5 December of 2022, Councilmember Borelli,
6 Councilmember Riley and I went to him and he
7 promised --

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
9 Mr. Comptroller.

10 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Thank you
11 very much, Chair. I look forward to a
12 question about property tax reform.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Good
15 afternoon, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow and
16 Ranking Minority Member Ra and all members of
17 the Senate Finance, Assembly Ways and Means,
18 and Cities committees.

19 I'm Councilmember Justin Brannan. I'm
20 chair of the council's Finance Committee.
21 Thank you for providing me the opportunity to
22 provide testimony on behalf of
23 Speaker Adrienne Adams and the New York
24 City Council related to Governor Kathy

1 Hochul's Executive Budget for state fiscal
2 year '25-'26.

3 I also want to thank Senate
4 Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and
5 Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie.

6 My oral testimony today will touch
7 upon several areas of priorities and the
8 impact of proposals in the Executive Budget
9 on New York City. The full written testimony
10 of Speaker Adams has been submitted and
11 includes more complete, detailed priorities.

12 Our governments share the goal to
13 improve the lives of New Yorkers, and there
14 are several impending challenges that require
15 our strong partnership to confront, including
16 the uncertainty from Washington, D.C. One
17 continuing area of concern is the shifting
18 share of costs between the city and state for
19 key programs and services. Over the past few
20 years, several state budget changes have
21 shifted new costs onto the city. The
22 Governor's Executive Budget is proposing to
23 permanently extend the city's increased
24 contribution of 80 percent of the net

1 paratransit operating expenses of the MTA.
2 This cost shift was scheduled to sunset this
3 year, and its extension would cost the city
4 \$165 million annually.

5 The council urges the state to
6 maintain the initial intent of this change to
7 sunset, rather than making it permanent.

8 We also understand there is a
9 \$33.5 billion gap in the MTA's capital plan
10 which must be addressed, despite the
11 increased capital commitment from the city.
12 We urge the key state of good repair and ADA
13 accessibility upgrades be preserved as you
14 seek to close this funding gap.

15 Additionally, the Governor is
16 proposing to discontinue the state's ICP
17 payments to New York City's public hospitals.
18 This action would reduce payments to our
19 hospital system by \$56.7 million annually,
20 which would negatively impact its ability to
21 provide healthcare services to those who are
22 most in need. We urge the state to reverse
23 course and continue the state's ICP payments
24 to our city's public hospitals.

1 On the issue of Medicaid, the council
2 requests the state to reverse its recent
3 policy that takes localities' savings from
4 the FMAP, the Federal Medicaid Assistance
5 Percentage, which started in 2024. These
6 funds had previously been left with
7 respective local governments, and New York
8 City had the greatest portion of this funding
9 due to its population. Each year this costs
10 the city \$343 million lost to the state.

11 Finally, given the significant
12 increase in homelessness within the city and
13 across the state, we urge the state to lift
14 the cap on its contribution to adult shelter
15 costs and increase its support for sheltering
16 homeless individuals. The state contributes
17 approximately \$172 million to the city, which
18 is less than 5 percent of the budget for the
19 city's Department of Homeless Services, and
20 we need greater support.

21 There are several other priorities for
22 the city within the state budget which can
23 help support our success and continued
24 strength as a contributing economic engine of

1 the state.

2 It is our government's responsibility
3 to provide all students with access to a
4 high-quality education. Our students are
5 still struggling to recover from historic
6 levels of learning loss caused by the
7 pandemic. The Governor's proposed Executive
8 Budget aligns with many of the city's
9 priorities, including universal free
10 breakfast and lunch that New York City has
11 been implementing for years, and an expansion
12 of early college credit opportunities for
13 high school students. There are additional
14 challenges required to help meet the
15 educational needs of the city's children and
16 families.

17 Governor Hochul's proposed changes to
18 the Foundation Aid formula provide an initial
19 start to its improvement. We share the
20 belief that the Foundation Aid formula must
21 be updated, but the currently proposed
22 changes are incomplete and would result in
23 New York City schools missing out on an
24 additional \$350 million it would have

1 received under the current Foundation Aid
2 formula.

3 We support the proposed replacement of
4 the free and reduced-price lunch variable
5 with a funding weight that considers a
6 broader group of students who are
7 economically disadvantaged.

8 However, we urge other changes by the
9 Governor and the State Legislature to ensure
10 the Foundation Aid formula is updated in a
11 way that accurately captures the significant
12 needs of New York City students. These
13 include replacing the outdated unsuccessful
14 school district model as the base of the
15 formula, updating the regional cost index to
16 account for cost differences in different
17 parts of the state, adding weights for
18 students in temporary housing and foster
19 care, students with disabilities, English
20 language learners, and using differentiated
21 weights for different concentrations of
22 poverty in communities.

23 Another priority for this council is
24 supporting our city's early childhood

1 education system, which is critical to the
2 development of our youngest New Yorkers and
3 the stability and future of our workforce.
4 The prohibitive cost of childcare is
5 impacting our local economy and forcing
6 working families to leave our state. Early
7 childhood education is one of the best
8 investments we can make to support working
9 families, our economy and the future of
10 New York.

11 State education funding that flows to
12 the city largely does not include funds for
13 children enrolled in 3-K and pre-K programs.
14 While the state contributes a portion of the
15 cost of pre-K through a separate funding
16 stream, this amount has not changed since
17 FY 2019, and the city has been paying for 3-K
18 almost entirely on its own since the
19 expiration of federal stimulus funds at the
20 end of FY '24.

21 The council urges the state to
22 increase its commitment towards early
23 childhood education to protect our city's 3-K
24 program that working families depend on and

1 to better support pre-K.

2 New York City, like the nation, is in
3 the midst of maternal and mental health
4 crises that require investments into
5 solutions at a greater scale. Governor
6 Hochul and the State Legislature have made
7 these issues a priority, and the council
8 wants to continue collaborating with our
9 state partners to address the gaps in care.

10 New York City needs approximately
11 500 forensic psychiatric beds to serve those
12 in need of services who are not currently
13 receiving them and left in the city's jail
14 system that is ill equipped to serve them.
15 The de facto use of jails for New Yorkers
16 with mental health issues is exacerbating our
17 city's mental health crisis, and we need the
18 state's support to expand access to mental
19 health courts programming, mobile response
20 teams, and other important solutions.

21 While significant focus has been
22 placed on responding to challenges in the
23 subway system -- which is necessary -- more
24 attention is needed on the underlying

1 problems that lead to these issues. A
2 concerted effort by the state and city to
3 increase access to a more holistic set of
4 mental health programs is critical.

5 Finally, the issue of affordable
6 housing remains a top priority for the health
7 of our city. The council urges the state to
8 fulfill its commitment to advance the work of
9 a Mitchell-Lama action group envisioned by
10 the council to focus on addressing
11 developments' billions of dollars in deferred
12 maintenance and capital improvements.

13 We also cannot forget about the needs
14 of NYCHA, which has nearly \$80 billion of
15 capital repair needs. The state should work
16 collaboratively with the city and NYCHA to
17 unlock the over \$500 million that's remaining
18 in the state funding that's yet to be spent
19 to address critical outstanding maintenance
20 issues.

21 We know that the changes in the
22 federal government can have an outsized
23 negative impact on our state and city that
24 will require increased support and stronger

1 collaboration to protect New Yorkers, whether
2 through affordable housing, immigrant legal
3 services, public health or public transit.

4 Thank you for allowing me to testify
5 today on behalf of the New York City Council.
6 We look forward to continuing our work, with
7 you as our partners, to advance a budget that
8 supports equitably everyone across our city
9 and state.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

12 Assemblyman Jones.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Yes, thank you for
14 being here.

15 I'm going to go back to an earlier
16 question that I asked the mayor. As you
17 know, we appropriated \$2.4 billion in last
18 year's budget to pay for -- to help with the
19 migrant crisis in New York City. So the
20 understanding that I got from the mayor or
21 his staff was that that money has all been
22 spent, but we have just not -- they have not
23 been -- I'm a little confused there. They
24 have not been reimbursed for it? I didn't

1 quite get the answer on that.

2 And number two, I would ask about a
3 lot of the services were contracted out,
4 probably most, through vendors, various
5 vendors. You being the comptroller, do you
6 approve those vendors? And how does that
7 process go?

8 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Thank you,
9 Assemblymember Jones.

10 And I actually share a lot of your
11 frustration here, and we listened to some of
12 that answer earlier and we've actually just
13 tried to chart out what City Hall said we
14 were going to spend and what we did spend,
15 which shifted dramatically over time.

16 You know, I do hope the Legislature
17 will still allocate some additional money to
18 New York City, because we are going to spend
19 money next year on shelter and services for
20 asylum seekers. But I don't blame you for
21 feeling like you don't have clear answers
22 from City Hall about how much has actually
23 been spent. Last year we actually wound up
24 writing down nearly a half-billion dollars we

1 claimed had been spent in the prior year on
2 asylum seekers and then couldn't fully
3 document where those services have gone.

4 I'll give you one example. So
5 unfortunately, you know, we have called over
6 and over again for that to be done through
7 RFPs that are transparent, but instead it's
8 almost all been done through no-bid emergency
9 contracts -- the largest of them, a
10 \$432 million contract to a company called
11 DocGo that had no experience providing
12 shelter or services for asylum seekers.

13 We tried to block that contract when
14 the mayor moved forward with it over our
15 objection. We made clear we were going to
16 audit it from the very get-go. When we put
17 that audit forward, they could not document
18 about 80 percent of the invoices -- you know,
19 the costs that we had paid to the vendor.

20 That one we got canceled, and actually
21 a chunk of it got transferred to the Jewish
22 Family Services of Western New York, who are
23 doing a much better job with outcomes and
24 reporting.

1 So we're working hard to provide all
2 that documentation, such as we can. I
3 understand the Legislature's frustration with
4 clarity about New York City. So give us more
5 conditions. Require documentation. Require
6 outcomes. Require bidding on the contracts.
7 All of which we should be doing. But please
8 keep providing the money because we are going
9 to spend a lot of it next year, and getting
10 30 percent of it from the -- 36 percent of it
11 from the state is an important --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Is it accurate to
13 say that the money's been spent but the state
14 hasn't reimbursed the city for that yet, all
15 that 2.4 billion? Just asking for a friend.

16 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I mean, it's
17 a hard question to answer because -- well,
18 Francesco?

19 EXEC. DPY. COMPTROLLER BRINDISI: So
20 we heard of those numbers. It's a little
21 complicated for us to understand where the
22 agencies are in terms of spending. And where
23 they are in terms of billing the state and
24 how the reimbursement is playing out.

1 authorized emergency procurement because so
2 many people were coming and we said you can
3 suspend traditional bidding processes. And
4 we revoked that a year later because they --
5 we didn't feel they were -- we felt like they
6 were abusing it. So for that first year a
7 lot of emergency contracts were approved that
8 we had green-lighted.

9 Now, you know, we did reject that
10 DocGo contract and we were able to get that
11 one canceled. We have rejected several
12 others. But in a lot of cases for shelters,
13 for example, they'll go ahead and sign the
14 contracts, start operating the shelter, and
15 the contract only gets to us for registration
16 six, eight or 10 months later after it's
17 already in operation -- you know, when our
18 registering it or not registering it is
19 essentially moot.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay, thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator John Liu.

23 SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

24 Welcome, 45.

1 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Good to see
2 you, 43.

3 SENATOR LIU: And 46?

4 (Laughter; inaudible comments.)

5 SENATOR LIU: I'm not going to say
6 anything any further. But you know what, I'm
7 going to ask the both of our illustrious
8 officials here, our Comptroller and our
9 Finance chair, on behalf of the Speaker.

10 You know, last year I thought the city
11 took a pretty dangerous if not simply
12 inadvisable precedent of dipping into TFA
13 financing, which from the get-go was only
14 supposed to be for real bad emergencies.
15 Like the near-bankruptcy of the city in the
16 '70s, and 9/11. But last year, you know, the
17 city took on a significant amount of
18 additional debt or potential debt, and now
19 this year they want yet another \$3 billion
20 of, again, what was supposed to be a
21 true-emergency financing source.

22 So my two questions are, number one,
23 how close are we to the statutory debt
24 ceiling based on the property tax revenues?

1 And number two, you both testified that you
2 are in favor of granting another \$3 billion
3 financing proposal. On what basis? Okay --

4 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I did not --
5 we have not supported the additional
6 \$3 billion request.

7 SENATOR LIU: Okay. So my question to
8 you, Comptroller Lander, is do you support
9 the administration's -- the mayoral
10 administration's request for an additional
11 \$3 billion financing under TFA?

12 And for our Finance chair, why do you
13 support it?

14 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: So I'm going
15 to turn this over -- Francesco has done the
16 deepest dive of anyone on the city's debt
17 capacity.

18 And, you know, at this time we are not
19 supporting the additional \$3 billion
20 increase. It seems pretty clear that a deal
21 was just made that the city would agree to
22 put \$3 billion into the MTA if a \$3 billion
23 increase in the debt capacity was limited.
24 We have analyzed that in the future we may

1 get close to the debt capacity limit or we
2 may get close to the 15 percent in annual
3 spending on debt service, neither of which we
4 can do. But at this moment we have some
5 room.

6 SENATOR LIU: Well, let's give
7 Councilman Brannan some room.

8 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: We supported
9 it last year. The 3 billion was provided
10 because we were increasing our commitment to
11 the MTA capital by 3 billion.

12 I think I'd use this opportunity to
13 make a plug for property tax reform because I
14 think that would certainly help. New York
15 City's debt limit is 10 percent of the city's
16 total market value, so reform would certainly
17 help address our debt limit.

18 But I think we're in good shape now.
19 And I don't think we -- I don't think we need
20 it this time.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
22 Assembly.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.
24 Assemblyman Brown.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you,
2 Chairman.

3 Thank you for being here, Comptroller.
4 Just to springboard off of what my colleague
5 Assemblyman Jones was asking, how was the
6 New York City program to distribute debit
7 cards to the migrants stopped in November
8 2024? What was the reason?

9 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I mean,
10 that's a decision that the mayor and the
11 administration made. We never saw an
12 evaluation of that program.

13 The idea was that it would save money,
14 that by spending -- giving people the ability
15 to actually control their spending, we would
16 do less than we were spending on large
17 contracts. We thought that was an
18 interesting idea, but we have not seen an
19 evaluation to know whether it worked or
20 didn't work.

21 That contract also should have been
22 bid out because it's an interesting idea, but
23 if you bid it out you would have gotten
24 competitive proposals.

1 3 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: So what you're
2 saying is the comptroller's office didn't
3 approve or pull the program back in any which
4 way, shape or form? They didn't bring it
5 before you, they just did it and bypassed the
6 comptroller's office?

7 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: When they
8 started that program we granted prior
9 authorization for emergency procurement for
10 them to do it. But when they ended it, they
11 didn't need to come to us for approval to end
12 it.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Did the
14 Department of Investigation probe into this
15 program that led to its shutdown?

16 | NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I don't know.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Did Tim
18 Pearson have any role in selecting this
19 contract, to your --

20 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: (Shaking
21 head.) I don't know the answer --

22 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: No idea, okay.

23 New York State continues to say that
24 they're going to reimburse New York City

1 \$4.3 billion for New York City immigrant
2 programs such as shelter, National Guard,
3 legal services, so on and so forth. How
4 much -- my colleague was asking how much has
5 been reimbursed so far.

6 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: (Shaking
7 head.) I don't know the answer to that.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: No idea?

9 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: (Shaking
10 head.)

11 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: You're the
12 comptroller's office. Who else can I ask but
13 the comptroller's office?

14 The reason why I bring this up is some
15 of my esteemed colleagues -- and we're all
16 friends, whether we agree or disagree. I
17 take a little umbrage to the point of, well,
18 these migrants and this issue is the same.
19 My family -- my mother and grandmother
20 escaped the Holocaust. They came in through
21 Ellis Island. They did it the right way. I
22 don't think the comparison is the same with
23 what's happening now.

24 And the fact that New York City is

1 spending monies that they don't have. And
2 not able to know how we've been even
3 reimbursed, I have to ask the comptroller:
4 Why don't you know? I say that with respect
5 to you. Why don't you know? You're the
6 comptroller.

7 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: And I
8 appreciate the question. I just think two
9 different things are true. I mean, on the
10 one hand the Adams administration has
11 mismanaged many of these contracts. And the
12 fact that they can't provide you or me
13 clarity about what they have submitted for
14 reimbursement and been reimbursed on is a
15 reasonable, you know, area of frustration.

16 At the same time, we have spent a good
17 deal more than 2.4 or 2.5 billion dollars on
18 shelter and services for asylum seekers --
19 not nearly as effectively as we should. We
20 haven't tracked outcomes, who are getting
21 jobs, who are moving out of shelters into
22 stable housing.

23 But I do believe providing that is
24 a -- keeping people from sleeping on the

1 streets to me is a commitment New York City
2 makes. And so many of these people want to
3 work that if we can help them get work
4 authorization and connect to jobs, they'll be
5 contributing to our economy. And I do think
6 that is a wise thing to do.

7 But you have to do it effectively, and
8 it's appropriate for the Legislature to say
9 to City Hall: We're only going to reimburse
10 you if you show us what you spent and what
11 the outcomes were.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: As we can see,
13 that actually didn't happen. Most of them
14 didn't contribute in the ways you're saying.
15 I'm not saying they're bad people, but they
16 obviously didn't for a number of reasons we
17 can go into.

18 But you're saying you're not part of
19 the Adams administration? I know you're
20 voted in independently. But you're saying
21 you're completely devoid of that
22 administration, is that what you just
23 mentioned?

24 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I mean, the

1 comptroller's an independently elected
2 office. I'm a proud member of New York City
3 government, but I am not part of the Adams
4 administration.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Okay. Thank
6 you, and thank you all for being here.

7 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off.)

9 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you, Madam
10 Chair.

11 And it is good to see you. Thanks for
12 coming.

13 Mr. Comptroller -- and my colleagues
14 from the Assembly had asked this question.
15 There seems to be some confusion between what
16 we may have heard earlier from the testimony
17 of the Adams administration, from the mayor
18 specifically, and then on the counting of the
19 monies being spent allocated by Albany in
20 this year's budget. There does not seem to
21 be a dedicated funding stream like there has
22 been in the past.

23 So with the confusion people become
24 skeptical, of course. We do too. You sound

1 like you may be also -- I'm not putting words
2 in your mouth, of course.

3 So when it comes -- obviously the
4 money seems to be cloudy on what has been
5 spent in the city so far on the services for
6 migrants and what would be reimbursed, who is
7 actually tracking that. And that's a
8 question too that we should have here at the
9 state level. But what about like the
10 numbers, right? We've heard that the numbers
11 have dropped, which is a good thing. Who is
12 tracking that?

13 So in other words, if you have money
14 that's allocated but may not have been drawn
15 down, based on the numbers that are under the
16 care of New York City, who looks at that and
17 who verifies those numbers to make sure that
18 those are accurate to go against the bottom
19 line and what the state provided?

20 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: So the
21 mayor's Office of Asylum Seeker Operations is
22 who's tracking those numbers. They give them
23 to us on a -- on a weekly basis. We actually
24 put them out. We're the only ones putting

1 them out publicly in our monthly report. We
2 are largely relying on the numbers that they
3 give us.

4 They did -- there was a place where
5 they were substantially underreporting and
6 they -- you know, we went back and forth with
7 them. That got corrected. We provided the
8 correction to the public.

9 SENATOR ROLISON: Because I think I
10 heard today 46,000 may have been the number
11 that was used, you know, currently under
12 care. Obviously well under 100,000 or
13 whatever the number was at the peak.

14 But I guess it goes to how -- and you
15 only have certain responsibilities, and I
16 understand that, of course. How would the
17 general public feel or be able to feel better
18 that those are the numbers, those numbers are
19 right, this is the amount of money that needs
20 to be allocated and/or spent? Is there a
21 better way, or are we just sort of stuck in
22 your responsibilities based on your
23 jurisdiction within that arena?

24 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Well, look, I

1 think this could actually be a very good
2 opportunity for the Legislature. We are --
3 New York City in the next fiscal year is
4 going to spend, you know, my guess is order
5 of magnitude two and a half billion dollars
6 on shelter and services for asylum seekers.
7 The principle that a third of that should
8 come from the state seems very reasonable to
9 me, and I think it would be reasonable that
10 it be half. But let's say a third.

11 But to demand more accountability
12 before you would dispose of it -- let me
13 know, like what numbers you would be
14 interested to see, what outcomes you would be
15 interested to see. Not just it got spent on
16 shelter and food, but how many people got
17 work authorizations, got jobs, moved -- you
18 know, moved out of shelter. That would be
19 great to provide the aid, but condition it.

20 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

22 Assemblyman Dais.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Good morning. Or
24 afternoon, I am so sorry.

1 As you said in your answers here, you
2 know, you are a separately elected official.
3 You're the comptroller, chairman of the
4 Finance, so please answer questions in that
5 narrow aspect, right? Not -- you know, I say
6 that because it's easy to say, oh, the mayor
7 could do this. I want to know what you guys
8 can do.

9 So, one, construction infrastructure I
10 care deeply about, getting New York City
11 where we need to go. We've been doing
12 reviews of alternative delivery, you know,
13 design-build. What can you do from your
14 capacity to make sure our construction and
15 infrastructure projects are being on time and
16 we're doing good financial analysis of our
17 projects?

18 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: This happens
19 to be a passion of both Chair Brannan and
20 mine. As a long-time {inaudible} I allocated
21 a lot of money in the council, and we're
22 frustrated with how long it took and went
23 over budget.

24 I got this through legislation,

1 created a capital projects tracking system
2 exactly for this. That's part of what led me
3 last year to support the alternative
4 delivery, and I'm grateful that the
5 Legislature provided the city with a little
6 additional running room on progressive
7 design-build and alternative delivery. And
8 we plan to do some oversight to see how
9 effectively those tools are being utilized.

10 I invite people to check out the
11 city's capital projects tracker. This is an
12 area where we can do better to save money and
13 improve on the timeliness of city capital
14 projects. And you are right that it is
15 critical.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Thank you.

17 Chairman?

18 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN:

19 Assemblymember, I would say I think there's a
20 lot of silos in our government and we could
21 do a lot better with sharing of best
22 practices. There's some departments, some
23 agencies in our city that do a great job at
24 this stuff, and some that don't. And why

1 they're not speaking to each other is a
2 mechanism of bureaucracy that we need to
3 really shatter through.

4 Certainly working with DDC with
5 design-build, I'd like to see that across the
6 board. I'd love to see that for really more
7 Parks Department projects, for more DOT
8 projects. You know, if School Construction
9 Authority can build a school, you know, in a
10 year, then why can't everybody else? Why
11 does it take four years to build a
12 playground?

13 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Agreed.

14 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: All these
15 agencies are getting better. You know, I
16 sometimes joke with my parents that I hope
17 the playground is built by the time their kid
18 is off to Yale. But it's -- I'm barely
19 kidding, as these things take so long.

20 I think transparency and
21 accountability help because it helps push it
22 along. But I think there needs to be more
23 sharing of best practices. Because some
24 agencies are getting this right.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: I apologize,
2 because I only have 37 seconds. Another big
3 issue in the Bronx -- outside of we have too
4 many shelters and too much supportive housing
5 projects -- payments towards childcare
6 programs have been extremely delayed. Some
7 of our nonprofits are possibly going under.

8 What can we do, briefly, to help
9 expedite that?

10 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I'll look
11 forward to sending you the report we did on
12 what could speed up procurement in New York
13 City. We actually have our annual contracts
14 report coming out this week. You know, our
15 office, we have a deadline, the charter
16 mandates that the comptroller register
17 contracts within 30 days. We're the only one
18 with a time limit. I have called for all the
19 other agencies to have a time limit as well.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Thank you. Let's
21 talk more about it.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

23 Senator?

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Senator Roxanne Persaud.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

3 Great seeing both -- all of you.

4 My question is to both of you,
5 following up on what you said. What specific
6 ideas would you both have to remove the silos
7 and to improve transparency and collaboration
8 across agencies? How do you improve it?

9 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: I've been
10 surprised; there are just some agencies that
11 are doing things better than others. And
12 it's perplexing that city government's been
13 around for a little while now and we haven't
14 been able to all get in a room and figure
15 this out.

16 I think we're getting better. I
17 think, you know, when it comes to even what
18 the Assemblymember mentioned with nonprofit
19 payments, there are some agencies that, you
20 know, nonprofits get paid on time. And
21 there's others that it just -- these guys
22 wait forever.

23 We would let you know -- and the
24 council has implemented a task force, you

1 know, to work with our early childhood
2 providers to figure out -- you know, to get
3 everybody in a room and figure out what's
4 working, what's not working. I think we need
5 to do more of that.

6 But ultimately we need a dance partner
7 across the hall at City Hall. Right? Again,
8 going back to payments delayed, you know,
9 when the mayor was first elected he cleared
10 out -- working with the comptroller's office,
11 they cleared out like five, \$6 billion of
12 payments right away. It's clear that that
13 can be done. The comptroller's office does
14 it. But the cursor is blinking on the
15 mayor's side, and there needs to be -- we
16 have too much government ADD, where they
17 focus on it for 10 minutes and then they go
18 on to something else. You have to stay
19 focused on that. Because if you can do it
20 right once --

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: If I could just cut
22 you a second, because I want to get the
23 comptroller's answer.

24 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Yeah, I'm

1 sorry.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: Because I want you
3 to give me a specific way that you would
4 change that.

5 You know, we know that there's lots of
6 bureaucracy. How do we break it down, and
7 what specifically would you implement to
8 change it, the way it's currently being done?
9 Both of you.

10 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Yeah, I mean,
11 I'll give you one example. And it goes to
12 this issue of street homelessness for people
13 with serious mental illness.

14 We did an audit of the city's
15 intensive mobile treatment program, and what
16 we found was they stopped tracking recidivism
17 because Department of Correction wouldn't
18 give Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
19 the numbers. Like when we say people are
20 falling through the cracks, this was like
21 literally.

22 And, you know, what it will take is
23 City Hall saying, We have a shared goal here,
24 we want a by-name list of the --

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: So you would create
2 a system to integrate all of their
3 information so they are sharing everything --

4 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: An
5 outcomes-based system. The goal in this case
6 is to get people off the street and into
7 stable housing and services, reduce
8 recidivism, increase public safety, and not
9 keep people in all their silos, knowing how
10 many days they had a person in this or that
11 program.

12 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: I think
13 that's right. I think it goes back to
14 sharing of best practices. But legislating
15 it or making -- you know, more than just task
16 force, right? It's got to be done across the
17 board.

18 But again, it needs the buy-in from
19 the executive's side, right? And it needs
20 that because we can only do so much on our
21 side of City Hall, and we do. But ultimately
22 we need buy-in from the mayor.

23 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you
24 both.

1 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

3 Assembly.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
5 Jackson.

6 (Laughter.)

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Hello,
8 Comptroller. I want to say thank you for all
9 the audits and reports that we've been
10 receiving via email in realtime.

11 How do you decide what city agencies
12 you're going to audit? My office did have a
13 meeting with your office, we talked about
14 ACS, child support, different things. Some
15 of the data was maybe six years old, things
16 like that.

17 So how do you decide what order you're
18 going to audit city agencies?

19 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Great
20 question. So the charter assigns us the
21 responsibility to audit every city agency at
22 least once every four years. That's really
23 the charter mandate.

24 And beyond that, it's up to us where

1 we -- so we get tips from people who say,
2 Look at this program or this contract, we
3 think there's waste there. Sometimes we
4 invite people in. So I created a NYCHA
5 resident audit committee and surveyed a
6 thousand NYCHA residents to say, What do you
7 want us to audit? And that led to the two
8 most recent NYCHA audits.

9 We just released one at ACS where we
10 really focused on abuse and neglect, because
11 that seemed like the, you know, highest
12 priority. And we welcome feedback.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: So it goes
14 from the charter and then to what people may
15 recommend to your office?

16 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: And what --
17 yeah, where we get tips, what people
18 recommend, you know, what we think is
19 important. Sometimes we'll follow up an
20 audit that was done previously.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: So then I'll
22 do a check-in about some other things I want
23 to see an audit --

24 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Great. We

1 love feedback ideas. Honestly, yeah, that's
2 how we get our best --

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: And though I
4 love to see you, Chair Brannan, where is our
5 Speaker Adrienne Adams? Why is she not here?

6 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: She had other
7 events back in the district that she had to
8 go back to.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: More important
10 than us? No. Okay.

11 (Laughter.)

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: So just
13 thinking about 3-K, how much do you think the
14 state should invest in the city 3-K program?
15 And Early Intervention, which is just as
16 important.

17 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: So currently
18 right now the state is not earmarking any
19 money specifically for 3-K. Right? And
20 since 2019, for pre-K the state has stayed
21 flat at about \$551 million a year. So it's
22 Tin Cup Day, and we're here to ask for -- you
23 know, we'll take whatever you can give us,
24 basically. But we need a lot.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Need a lot.

2 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Well, let's
3 have a statewide 3-K program. I mean, this
4 is not New York City asking New York State
5 for money, these are New Yorkers saying let's
6 have 3-K provided statewide, including in
7 New York City.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Gotcha.

9 And then on the Mitchell-Lama part and
10 this Mitchell-Lama Action Group, we already
11 know that the Mitchell-Lamas are suffering.
12 They need capital money. They need support.
13 Why do we need an action group to tell us
14 that we need money? We need it. Like what
15 is the point of this?

16 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: We agree. A
17 lot of it comes from some of the
18 jurisdictional sort of, you know, untangling
19 all of that between city and state.

20 But a lot of it too comes down to we
21 want to keep public housing public. And I
22 think making sure that we've got the right
23 stakeholders in the room to figure out what's
24 needed most is important to us. I

1 understand, I want to just see the thing get
2 done. I don't need another task force.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Is there a
4 fiscal responsibility to this group, or no?

5 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: No.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: Okay. Thank
7 you.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
10 Senator Sanders.

11 SENATOR SANDERS: Thank you. Thank
12 you. Good afternoon, all. Good afternoon.
13 When I heard you were here, I rushed down.

14 As you probably know, I have been
15 working on the issues of MWBE for one or two
16 minutes, one or two years. And there is a
17 role that the comptroller and the banks, that
18 you can do. And I'm trying to find out your
19 ideas of how are we going to increase MWBE
20 participation. And I know that you have --
21 Mr. City Comptroller, you have done an
22 amazing report. But one of the best ways of
23 increasing participation is to use the
24 banking system that works with them, yet

1 neither the city nor the state does
2 significant monies to the minority banks.

3 I'll stop there and see if you have
4 any ideas on how to make it better.

5 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Well, first
6 let me just say how proud I am of what we've
7 done with the main resource we have, which is
8 investment managers for our pension funds.

9 The assets under management of the
10 New York City pension funds to Black, Latino,
11 Asian and women managers has grown 36 percent
12 during my tenure, from \$17 billion to
13 \$23 billion. And those managers outperform
14 their benchmarks by 5 percent. So we are,
15 you know, diversifying the managers in our
16 portfolio and achieving great returns as a
17 result. Last year we saved taxpayers
18 \$1.8 billion.

19 And Black asset managers are the
20 largest portion of that, and we can get you
21 all the details. We've really made great
22 strides during my tenure.

23 Banking is harder because there was
24 the court ruling against the city's

1 Responsible Banking Act, which has
2 constrained our capacities to put
3 requirements on the places we deposit our
4 money. You know, we would love to find
5 opportunities to sort of support a wider
6 array of credit unions and minority-owned
7 banks, and hopefully we can find some ways to
8 work together, you and I and the State
9 Comptroller, and if we need to come to the
10 Legislature for additional legislative
11 flexibility.

12 And our annual MWBE report for city
13 contracting is coming out in the next couple
14 of weeks.

15 SENATOR SANDERS: I eagerly await it.

16 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Senator,
17 thank you for the question.

18 I would say the -- I think City Hall
19 has set laudable goals for MWBEs, but I think
20 obviously there's still a lot of challenges
21 that these folks are facing. I'd like to see
22 the creation of a fund to help close that
23 wealth and -- the capital and credit gap for
24 the MWBEs, which would be an interesting

1 idea. But the council does not have any
2 official position except we need to do more.

3 SENATOR SANDERS: Well, I'm looking
4 forward to speaking with you more.

5 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Right on.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

8 Assemblyman Epstein.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you.

10 Thank you all for being here today.

11 I just want to talk more about kind of
12 this mental health crisis we have in the
13 city. And I know the mayor earlier said that
14 they're doing -- I just don't feel like we're
15 doing enough. Like why are we not putting
16 more supportive housing beds online? What's
17 the comptroller -- you know, from the
18 council, what's -- why are -- where's the
19 gap?

20 And then I want to talk, if we can,
21 another minute on kind of Rikers discharging.

22 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Well, I'll
23 get to one thing that actually really
24 connects the dots between those. Because

1 Mayor Adams came into office with a plan for
2 360 outposted therapeutic beds to be at H+H
3 facilities for people who are in DOC custody
4 but need hospitalization, either for mental
5 health or physical health.

6 And for two years they stalled that
7 and didn't move forward on it. There was a
8 fight between H+H and Correction and it
9 didn't go anywhere. Finally the ones at
10 Bellevue are underway, the first hundred, but
11 they're -- not one single one of them is
12 open. And the Lippman Commission recommends
13 another 1500 of those as part of the plan --

14 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: So, Brad, why
15 are we not doing it? Why are we not doing
16 it?

17 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I mean, a
18 failure of mayoral leadership on those 360
19 outposted beds. It's really as simple as
20 that.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: And Justin, just
22 on the council side, what role are you
23 playing to make sure this happens?

24 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: I mean, in

1 our budget priorities this year for the
2 state, we support the Governor's proposal to
3 create the 100 new forensic inpatient
4 psychiatric beds in New York City. But we
5 need at least 500. And that's going to be
6 part of our -- that is -- those are part of
7 our priorities this year.

8 You know, we've been pushing for a
9 holistic approach since day one, of proven --
10 you know, from trauma recovery centers --
11 which is very important to Speaker Adams.
12 Over the last three years we've established
13 the first trauma recovery centers in the
14 state. It works. So I think we need to
15 invest in what's working.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Yeah, and I
17 also -- I mean, this Rikers example of this
18 guy who killed two people in my district,
19 Ramon Rivera, you know, went to Rikers,
20 serious mental health issues. Rikers
21 releases him just to the Bellevue men's
22 shelter in my district. He gets no support.
23 He goes missing, and we don't do anything
24 about it. And we are surprised, a month

1 later, after being released, that he kills
2 three New Yorkers.

3 And that's why people are feeling
4 unsafe. So where's our requirement to make
5 sure there's real discharge planning from
6 Rikers to make sure that people, when they're
7 coming back to our community, have the
8 support that they need without falling
9 through the system again?

10 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I mean, in
11 this report that I mentioned, Safer for All,
12 we look specifically at these BradH
13 requirements. When someone with serious
14 mental illness is at Rikers and released,
15 we're obligated to see whether they're
16 eligible for supportive housing, and yet
17 we're not obligated to get them supportive
18 housing even if they're eligible. And so
19 it's fewer than 15 percent of people who need
20 supportive housing that get it, and most of
21 the rest wind up right back on the street and
22 can in some cases become a danger to others,
23 just like what happened in your district.

24 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: The council

1 has increased discretionary funding for -- by
2 \$2 million for discharge programs. So we're
3 doing everything we can.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Right. Thank
5 you both.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

7 Senator?

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi. I think
9 we're up to me. I usually like to bat
10 cleanup so that all the good questions have
11 been taken already.

12 So both of you, thank you so much for
13 your testimony and for your commitment to the
14 city. I'm so glad to see you both, the City
15 Council and the Comptroller, talking about
16 getting it right when it comes to homeless
17 mentally ill people who can be a danger to
18 themselves and others.

19 And again, both of you highlighting we
20 already pick people up. We take them to
21 emergency rooms. They're let out the side
22 door at the end of the day, and we've
23 accomplished nothing. And that we need the
24 beds. And tomorrow will be the mental health

1 day, and that's going to be a lot of
2 discussion.

3 I wanted to point out I really
4 appreciate your proposal that you put out
5 separately, Comptroller, and look forward to
6 working with you on that.

7 And then the City Council, you
8 highlighted an important different issue
9 that's parallel. You talk about the need for
10 forensic beds, which is not necessarily for
11 people who are on the streets and mentally
12 ill, but people who have actually been put in
13 Rikers and a court has determined they are
14 not fit to stand trial. So the state has an
15 obligation to place them in an appropriate
16 setting until they are fit to stand trial.

17 But you estimate we need 500 beds. Is
18 that based on what you see as New York City's
19 projected number?

20 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Yes. Yes.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because, one,
22 that's actually sort of shocking that's so
23 large. And two, I'm not sure that the
24 Governor's proposal -- it talks about FTEs

1 for more people for state psychiatric
2 hospitals, which I'm sure they need, but I
3 appreciate New York City is saying, We alone
4 would need 500 of these forensic beds.

5 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: Correct.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because I don't
7 think anybody's thinking about that.

8 I also appreciate that the council is
9 talking about questioning why the mayor wants
10 to extend the REAP and the RACE tax breaks.
11 Because for years, I haven't thought we
12 needed it anymore. And it actually skews the
13 economics of where businesses set up within
14 the City of New York. I often talk about, I
15 don't know, sort of races to the bottom
16 between counties or states, and then we have
17 boroughs set up to have races to the bottom.

18 So I know where you are. I'm just
19 curious, Comptroller, do you also share that
20 opinion about these tax credits, tax
21 exemptions?

22 EXEC. DPY. COMPTROLLER BRINDISI:

23 These type of tax breaks are -- in other
24 places are called enterprise zones or

1 something like that. They have -- research
2 has shown they do not really generate any
3 significant amount of economic activity.

4 And I do believe the City Council
5 studied this in the past through IBO and
6 reached a similar conclusion.

7 Lower Manhattan REAP is not -- is
8 expiring, but there is the creation of this
9 new RACE pilot program that is limited in
10 amount and time. And, you know, these are
11 just tax breaks that are factored into
12 prices, eventually, and that just, you know,
13 increase land prices typically.

14 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Francesco
15 represents the comptroller's office on
16 several of the EDC subsidiaries and is
17 frequently the only one to vote no on
18 granting a break to a building or an
19 applicant. So we have a higher bar of
20 scrutiny for what we think we should be
21 providing.

22 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN:
23 Assemblymember Bores brought to my attention
24 the REAP renewal, and I -- we didn't even --

1 we never asked for that. I don't know -- the
2 mayor obviously stuck it in there or got it
3 put in there, but we didn't ask for that.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, thank you.
5 That's very helpful.

6 So it's sort of amazing because it's
7 this late in the day and nobody seemed to
8 bring up the potential impact on the City of
9 New York of all the cuts we expect from the
10 federal government on sustainability, on
11 environmental protections, on energy costs.
12 And even this Governor did not move forward
13 with the cap-and-expend regulations that law
14 requires, that I sincerely expected we would
15 see at least 4 billion new revenue which
16 would have to go towards these things. Which
17 also impacts the city.

18 So I'm interested in both of your
19 perspectives on where you think we're going
20 or what's going to be happening. Because the
21 city has an enormous sustainability set of
22 goals, and it has to. People forget, we're
23 like floating out there on the water. Some
24 of us are on islands.

1 So what does this all mean from your
2 perspectives?

3 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: I really
4 appreciate your leadership here. I mean, to
5 watch Los Angeles burning and then kind of
6 just forget it and turn our attention to this
7 federal chaos.

8 And, you know, the administration is
9 likely to eliminate the Inflation Reduction
10 Act. We actually helped with an application
11 to the Solar for All program with NYSERDA
12 that would be 3,000 rooftop solar panels in
13 New York City -- create a ton of good jobs,
14 help lower costs for low- and moderate-income
15 homeowners, very likely to be eliminated.
16 And there's so many things like that.

17 So first I share, you know, your point
18 of view that the Governor's decision to end
19 the -- pause the cap-and-invest program is a
20 mistake. I'm glad for the commitment of a
21 billion dollars over five years to climate
22 initiatives, but that is not a replacement
23 for cap-and-invest. I hope that you'll
24 support the New York HEAT program to reduce

1 energy costs, the expansion of the New York
2 residential solar tax credit, and the TEMP
3 Act to protect workers from extreme heat.

4 But cities and states are going to
5 have to step up over the next four years and
6 do more. So the Superfund Act is a great
7 step forward. Our public solar proposal I
8 think can be a model for cities around the
9 country for what you can do without federal
10 funding. But yeah, the climate crisis is not
11 coming, it's already here. And, you know,
12 what we saw in Los Angeles, what we've seen
13 here, we just have to do more to get ready.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And Justin, I'll
15 expand the question for you, because the
16 City Council had already passed its own laws
17 about electric buildings and had targets that
18 are even earlier than the state's laws.

19 With all these other changes, what
20 does that mean from your perspective for the
21 city being able to meet its targets?

22 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN: I think
23 we're -- I think part of the concern right
24 now is that we're on our own to do a deep

1 dive into all of this stuff, because I don't
2 see any -- I don't see any appetite or any
3 urgency on the mayor's side to figure out
4 what all these cuts would mean.

5 The DEP alone, the Department of
6 Environmental Protection, we'd see about a
7 \$35 million cut. But we also saw, you know,
8 back towards the end of last year when
9 Prospect Park was on fire and we had a
10 November budget mod where the mayor could
11 have put in some more money for our
12 Parks Department, and he gave us nothing.

13 So it's very, very concerning and it's
14 something that we're probably going to spend
15 the next couple of months, as we're
16 negotiating this budget, figuring what the
17 impacts would be.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And I guess
19 just -- I don't want to take up the whole
20 10 minutes, but I want to applaud you for the
21 proposal for an emergency task force to look
22 at all these issues between the city and
23 state. Because it's almost an endless list
24 of things we might have to confront. And as

1 a state legislator, frankly, I don't have my
2 arms around all the hypotheticals that could
3 be coming down at us. And I don't think
4 anyone else does.

5 But I do think it's critical we all
6 keep working together and actually understand
7 and explain to the public if Washington does
8 X, we will need to respond -- the cities, the
9 states, the counties -- and we're going to
10 need a model to work quickly and deftly --
11 deftly? That's not the right word -- to try
12 to come up with responses. Other than my
13 good friend Gary Pretlow's proposal we just
14 stop sending money to Washington, and then
15 we'll have plenty for everyone.

16 (Laughter.)

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And I don't think
18 it's a terrible idea, but he and I will be
19 going to prison for treason, and your
20 emergency task force will be even more
21 important.

22 So I really do think -- you know, I'm
23 never not so big -- that big on like, Oh,
24 start another commission, start another task

1 force. But I actually think on these topics,
2 you know, that this is critical and that the
3 state is coordinating with our local
4 governments and with the biggest local
5 government we have, our City Council and our
6 comptroller and our mayor, so that we can
7 come up with the best possible ideas.
8 Because I suspect we'll all be talking about
9 this far more frequently than once a year at
10 budget hearings.

11 So I thank you very much for being
12 here, and I think I am the last Senator.
13 Right? Okay, so Assembly.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
15 González-Rojas.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
17 you so much. I always appreciate the way you
18 say my name, Chair.

19 (Laughter.)

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
21 you. My question is for Comptroller Lander.
22 Thank you for all your work.

23 We didn't speak too much on healthcare
24 today despite some mental health

1 conversations, but I do want to address the
2 fact that in 2019 Governor Cuomo reduced the
3 amount of funds that go to New York City
4 through the Article VI funding, which is, you
5 know, invest in our mandatory healthcare that
6 we're required to provide to all New Yorkers.
7 And all the counties across the state get
8 36 percent of coverage, and New York City
9 only gets 20 percent.

10 Can you talk about what that
11 implication is to New York City?

12 I'd love to hear from you as well,
13 Chair Brannan, on the impact on budgeting and
14 how to address some of the gaps that we're
15 facing in our health system.

16 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Yeah, I mean,
17 you're exactly right about how much less
18 New York City gets and has gotten since that
19 change during the Cuomo administration.

20 I don't know if we know what it would
21 be -- 60 million annually.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Sixty
23 million.

24 NYC COUNCILMAN BRANNAN:

1 Assemblywoman, we agree with you. I think
2 since 2019 we've been not getting \$60 million
3 a year for something as critical as that.
4 So, you know, that is another -- well, I
5 think one of our biggest concerns that we're
6 speaking about today for the council is the
7 cost shifts that -- the cost shifts in the
8 past were manageable but with the increasing
9 uncertainty from Washington, something like
10 this is just not going to be manageable. And
11 this is not something that we can afford to
12 just cut.

13 And that's what exacerbates
14 everything. Close to -- if you round off,
15 10 percent of our city's budget is from
16 federal funding. That's a very, very scary
17 place for us to be in. Where, you know,
18 something like Article VI in the past, we
19 absorbed it, now I don't know what we'd be
20 able to -- you know, it's really scary.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: I know.
22 I'd certainly be advocating for more equity
23 in this budget.

24 Back to Comptroller Lander, I

1 represent NYCHA Woodside Houses. I recently
2 had to go look at a rat situation there. I
3 know your office issued a report on the
4 privatization of NYCHA and the outcome of
5 RAD. Can you talk about, in the last
6 30 seconds, the impact of RAD on public
7 housing residents in New York City?

8 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Yeah, so we
9 did this audit of what eviction rates are in
10 RAD/PACT developments and found that they're
11 about five times traditional Section 9.
12 Still, I mean, they're very, very low in
13 traditional NYCHA, so five times that is
14 still low, but significantly higher. And
15 quite different in different RAD/PACT
16 developments.

17 So we made a series of recommendations
18 for better oversight. And I really think
19 NYCHA residents should have a vote on the
20 future of their homes, whether that's the
21 trust, Section 9 or RAD/PACT, which they
22 don't now have.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Okay.
24 Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
2 Simon.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Hi. Good
4 afternoon. Good to see you both up here, and
5 the rest of you as well.

6 I have a very quick question for you,
7 Comptroller Lander. I know you put out this
8 large report on homelessness and housing
9 first. I wanted to know who was your -- who
10 gave you expert advice on the involuntary
11 commitment issues and psych?

12 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: We talked to
13 a lot, yes. I mean, I'd love to follow up.
14 We talked to a lot of people about that, some
15 clinicians --

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Like who?

17 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Hmm?

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Like who?

19 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Well, we
20 talked to some H+H -- I can get all the whole
21 list for you from Celeste Hornbach, who led
22 on the report, and Nadia {ph} herself, who is
23 a former mental health worker.

24 But, you know, we talked to H+H

1 clinicians, to some psychiatric nurse
2 practitioners. I could get you the list of
3 individuals as we talked about it --

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I'd love to see
5 a list of who you've spoken with. Thank you.

6 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Happy to do
7 that, yeah. And good luck in your chairing
8 on this challenging initiative this year.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

10 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I will say
11 the flexibility that we think is warranted,
12 as we described in the report, is not as
13 expansive as what, for example, the mayor has
14 proposed. It's about some additional
15 flexibility on who can recommend and what is
16 looked at in making the determination.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: So just to share
18 my concern that the use of the language like
19 "flexibility" really minimizes the incredible
20 deprivation of liberty that an involuntary
21 commitment constitutes. And I'm a little
22 concerned that everybody's become an armchair
23 psychiatrist. So --

24 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Let me be

1 more specific, then, because I mean in the
2 time of my testimony I just said that --

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I wouldn't use
4 the word "strengthen" either. It's
5 expanding.

6 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: The
7 flexibility that I specifically believe is
8 warranted is to allow psychiatric nurse
9 practitioners to be one of the two clinicians
10 that assesses whether a person should be
11 involuntarily committed, and that there
12 should be a requirement to look at somebody's
13 whole history rather than just the most
14 recent incident.

15 Obviously other people might mean
16 something much more expansive by that, and I
17 appreciate your advice to be more precise in
18 my language.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I'd be happy to
20 give you much more advice later on. Thank
21 you.

22 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: I look
23 forward to it.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I only have

1 three minutes here, so okay.

2 (Laughter.)

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is that it?

4 Well, Mr. Comptroller, I didn't want
5 to open up a door for you, but it's something
6 you had started earlier that I thought was --
7 I'm curious about. Where is New York City in
8 relation to its maximum taxing ability?

9 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: In
10 relationship to its maximum taxing ability?

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Yeah. Like -- like
12 cities have a capacity, a taxing capacity as
13 to how much you -- how much taxes you can
14 raise, what percentage of total property
15 value. My assumption is that New York City's
16 nowhere near its maximum, but I'm asking you.

17 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Well, so --
18 yeah, Francesco looks like he has a more
19 precise answer to this question.

20 I think the challenge for us is that
21 what the city can raise is its property tax
22 rate, and the property tax system is so
23 inequitable and random and erratic currently
24 that it's not politically practical to do.

1 And that until we have comprehensive property
2 tax reform that would make it fair and
3 rational, you can't appropriately adjust it.
4 And that's why we need the mayor to come to
5 the Legislature with a comprehensive and
6 rational proposal for comprehensive property
7 tax reform.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You'll probably say
9 you need a reval, and then classify various
10 properties in different classes because
11 they'll be taxed at a different rate.

12 You know, the city that I represent
13 hasn't done a reval since 1890, I believe.
14 And the theory is is that the people who are
15 hurt are your best voters, your seniors and
16 whatever. Because, you know, it's usually a
17 third of the individuals, taxes go up; a
18 third, people's taxes go down; and a third
19 stay the same. You know, the ones that go up
20 are usually the older residents, been in
21 their homes the longest, and are your senior
22 citizens who can least afford an increase.
23 So that's what the conundrum is.

24 Now, I represent a block in

1 Westchester that is part of a block in the
2 Bronx. It's called 5th Avenue in Mount
3 Vernon, and it's 233rd Street I think in the
4 Bronx. And half of the block is
5 Mount Vernon, half of the block is the Bronx.
6 Carl has one-half, I have the other half.
7 The taxes on Carl's half are \$4,000 a year,
8 and the taxes on my half are \$14,000 a year.
9 Same house, same block, same neighborhood,
10 same everything, but there's a \$10,000 a year
11 difference in taxes.

12 I think that New York City can fix all
13 of its problems if it did something about the
14 extremely low taxes in some cases. But
15 that's why I wanted to know what the capacity
16 was, how much you had in --

17 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: So, I mean,
18 I'm in a neighborhood which is significantly
19 undertaxed. I'm in a home which is
20 significantly undertaxed. And I've come to
21 the Legislature before with a model for
22 adjustment.

23 Of course you have to protect your
24 seniors and people on fixed income. You can

1 do deferral until sale or reset on sale.

2 There are a set of ways to protect people and
3 to achieve a more equitable system. And I'm
4 a big supporter of it.

5 And Francesco, did you want to give
6 a -- so, I mean, I agree with you that
7 there's more -- you know, if we had an
8 equitable system there's a lot more we could
9 do. My neighbors and I should pay more in
10 property taxes. We are undertaxed relative
11 to the values of our homes. But you have to
12 do it carefully so that you protect seniors
13 and people on fixed incomes.

14 And it has to be fair. People have to
15 understand that everyone is paying 1 percent
16 of the value of their homes in property
17 taxes. Which is about where we would be -- I
18 know that 2 percent is the cap in other
19 jurisdictions. We're, on average, a little
20 below 1. Having everyone at 1 would be a lot
21 fairer than where we are and would give us an
22 opportunity over time. You know, I think
23 even with a value-neutral readjustment we
24 would be in a lot better place than we are

1 now, and with something that would allow us
2 room for growth in the future.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Great. Thank you
4 very much. Panel, thank you.

5 NYC COMPTROLLER LANDER: Thank you,
6 Chairman.

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Appreciate your
8 testimony.

9 We're now calling Panel C.

10 (Off the record.)

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Good afternoon,
12 everyone.

13 For the record, could you just state
14 your names and titles for the media? And
15 then we'll start -- we're going to do ladies
16 first? However you guys want to start.

17 MS. VAN EPPS: Good afternoon,
18 everyone. I am Barbara Van Epps. I am the
19 executive director of the New York State
20 Conference of Mayors.

21 Chairpersons Pretlow and Krueger and
22 other distinguished members, I just want
23 to --

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I just want to --

1 I'm sorry, I just want to do the
2 introductions, and then you can -- just do
3 the introductions so they'll know who to put
4 up on the board.

5 MS. VAN EPPS: Oh, I'm sorry.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And then you can
7 start your testimony.

8 MS. VAN EPPS: I'm sorry.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. That's okay.

10 MR. KOETZLE: Hi, I'm Chris Koetzle.
11 I'm the executive director of the Association
12 of Towns of New York State.

13 MR. ACQUARIO: Good afternoon. I'm
14 Steven Acquario, the executive director of
15 the New York State Association of Counties.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Welcome all.

17 Okay, go right back to --

18 MS. VAN EPPS: Round two.

19 Chairpersons Pretlow and Krueger and
20 other distinguished members of the Senate and
21 the Assembly, thank you for allowing me, on
22 behalf of the 576 members, city and village
23 members of the New York State Conference of
24 Mayors, to express our views regarding the

1 '25-'26 Executive Budget.

2 First, I have to extend my sincere
3 gratitude on behalf of our entire membership
4 for your willingness to provide cities and
5 villages and the towns with our first
6 increase in unrestricted aid in 15 years as
7 part of the current year's state budget. I
8 just had 200 of my members in town over the
9 last couple of days, and they clearly believe
10 that this has renewed their faith in the
11 possibility of a true state-local
12 partnership.

13 So we really very much appreciate
14 that, and I think that's very important to
15 send that message to our members.

16 We deeply appreciate your willingness
17 to invest in the strength and the vitality of
18 our local communities. But at the same time,
19 while they were in town, I also heard from
20 the mayors from our bigger cities to our
21 smallest villages say that they still need
22 more support. After 15 years of stagnant
23 funding, 50 million, while very helpful, is
24 simply not enough to address the short- and

1 long-term challenges they are facing. We are
2 hopeful that we can build upon your
3 generosity, this momentum, and your
4 acknowledgment that local governments really
5 are important -- and the fact that we really
6 want to partner with you to make this state
7 more affordable and safe.

8 So we're hoping we can count on you to
9 look at the aid formula, to look at
10 unrestricted aid, and possibly tie it to an
11 inflationary index so we can get dependable
12 increases on an ongoing basis moving forward.

13 With respect to transportation
14 funding, we were very pleased that the
15 Executive Budget maintains CHIPS funding and
16 the other ancillary transportation programs
17 at the current-year levels. However, we also
18 heard from our members that annual local
19 highway infrastructure needs continue to far
20 outpace the resources that are currently
21 available.

22 Given the rising costs of labor and
23 materials, combined with the extreme weather
24 events we are facing here in New York State,

1 this situation is creating a perfect storm
2 for the deterioration of our roads, bridges
3 and highways. Without additional support, we
4 risk further damage to this critical
5 infrastructure, putting both safety and
6 effectiveness at risk.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Barbara, I just
8 need to hold you off -- one second.

9 Were you told three minutes each?
10 What were you told when you signed up to
11 testify? You were told 10? Okay.

12 MS. VAN EPPS: I'm watching my time,
13 but --

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, no, they gave
15 you 10, and I was just double checking.

16 MS. VAN EPPS: Yes. Yes, they did.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Then
18 please keep going, and I'm sorry for the
19 interruption. There was a little confusion
20 up here.

21 MS. VAN EPPS: While we're talking
22 about transportation, however, I need to make
23 a plug for the 37 cities who are part of the
24 state's arterial maintenance program, where

1 these cities maintain the state arterials
2 that pass through their cities.

3 They are being reimbursed in 1987
4 rates -- which, as you can only imagine, is
5 well below what it is costing them to do this
6 job. A proposed inflationary adjustment from
7 85 cents per square yard to \$2.47 would cost
8 the state \$20 million and would be a huge
9 benefit to both the state and those cities.

10 With respect to water and sewer
11 infrastructure, you have heard me talk about
12 this before. Something that NYCOM has been
13 focusing on for several years is the SWAP
14 program, or what we refer to as CHIPS for
15 water and sewer. While we certainly support
16 the Clean Water Infrastructure Act and the
17 money that the state has allocated, including
18 the 500 million that the Governor added this
19 year, we hear time and time again from our
20 members that accessing this funding is
21 difficult and also sometimes expensive.

22 And it's not available for the
23 upgrades or preventative maintenance that
24 they need for day-to-day operations, it's

1 more available to those large-scale capital
2 programs. This is why we have long supported
3 establishing an annual funding stream that
4 can be used by all cities and villages to
5 supplement both their water and sewer
6 infrastructure with preventative maintenance
7 and the undertaking of smaller capital
8 projects where they don't need that
9 significant grant money.

10 Let me be clear, we are not suggesting
11 that you do away with the grants. What we
12 want is to use the backlog from that grant
13 money that has not yet gone out the door to
14 supplement the grants, and this shift in
15 resources would help ensure that large-scale
16 capital projects continue to be funded but
17 the day-to-day operational needs are also
18 met.

19 In terms of emergency medical
20 services, this is another area our members
21 are very concerned about. This crisis,
22 which is statewide, has been exacerbated by a
23 shortage of personnel, insufficient financial
24 resources, and a lack of data to accurately

1 pinpoint the areas where the greatest
2 challenges lie or the gaps in service.

3 We support the Governor's program to
4 designate EMS as an essential service. We
5 are also open to a more regional approach to
6 EMS. But however we go about this, whether
7 it's regionally or otherwise, we have to have
8 input and decision-making by all levels of
9 local government, and we must ensure our home
10 rule is preserved in the process.

11 With respect to housing, which I know
12 you heard a lot about from the big cities
13 today, we are happy to see that the
14 Governor's continuing to focus on an approach
15 that focuses on the carrots instead of the
16 sticks, with things like state funding
17 infrastructure, the expansion of housing tax
18 credits, the revolving loan fund, all things
19 that we support.

20 We also appreciate the fact that
21 there's interest in providing technical
22 assistance to those communities that want to
23 become Pro-Housing certified. We think this
24 is important. We support that, and we know

1 some of our communities have had trouble with
2 that process.

3 We want to also just thank the
4 Legislature and the Governor for coming
5 together on the short-term rental legislation
6 that you agreed upon and will soon be
7 effective. We think it is going to provide
8 our members with the data they need to
9 understand the scope of the short-term
10 rentals and the impacts on housing.

11 In terms of workforce challenges,
12 NYCOM supports the Executive Budget's
13 proposals to amend the Civil Service Law by
14 eliminating mandatory maximum age limits for
15 police officers in cities, villages, towns
16 and counties. However, this is one small
17 step in addressing the broader shortage of
18 qualified workers that municipalities across
19 the state are facing.

20 More needs to be done. We've talked
21 about this earlier today: Reforming Civil
22 Service Law, raising the cap on earnings for
23 public-sector employees, looking at residency
24 requirements and things of that nature.

1 And finally, and I know you've heard
2 this earlier today from all of our big-city
3 members, we want to quickly mention the
4 consternation among our membership about
5 what's happening at the federal level and
6 what's happening in D.C. When we discussed
7 it at our meeting this was not a partisan
8 issue, but genuine concern over the loss of
9 federal funding and what the impacts will be
10 on our communities and their residents.

11 We hope that we can count on the
12 State Legislature to help us navigate these
13 new directives and priorities, and we hope
14 that we can count on you to leverage your
15 relationships with members of Congress to
16 convey our message, which I have to believe
17 is the same message that you all have as
18 well. We all have a lot to lose, and we want
19 to partner with you to advocate for our
20 communities and for our state.

21 Thank you again for the opportunity to
22 appear in front of you today, and I look
23 forward to any questions you might have.

24 MR. KOETZLE: (Mic issues.) There we

1 go.

2 Thank you, thank you. Good afternoon,
3 all. Thank you for allowing me to be here.

4 My name is Christopher Koetzle. I am
5 the new executive director of the Association
6 of Towns. I started last May, so I'm new at
7 this, and I want to thank my colleagues for
8 helping me get acclimated. And I appreciate
9 all the work and leadership you've provided
10 to me over these last couple of months.

11 I'm very pleased to be here to speak
12 on the part of NYAOT. NYAOT provides
13 training, education, advocacy, and support to
14 933 towns across the state representing
15 9.1 million New Yorkers. NYAOT does this
16 through a variety of means: Conferences and
17 webinars, on-the-ground engagement, insurance
18 programs like NYMIR and the Comp Alliance,
19 and of course through its advocacy efforts.

20 I want to talk about, just a moment,
21 as my new leadership began in May of this
22 past year, it is my dedication and commitment
23 that we work together in partnership with the
24 Legislature in a very vigorous way to make

1 sure that we're protecting, defending, and
2 helping our towns across this state. In many
3 ways towns are very similar to what you're
4 going to hear today from the counties and the
5 cities and the villages, but in other ways
6 towns are very different and unique, and I
7 want to talk about that a little bit here
8 today.

9 First, I do want to acknowledge the
10 Executive Budget. Governor Hochul's
11 Executive Budget -- under a difficult
12 financial situation, I understand -- does
13 maintain key funding issues, levels, for
14 local governments. Barb mentioned some of
15 these, Steve will as well -- AIM, CHIPS,
16 clean water and other infrastructure programs
17 were important to be maintained in the
18 Executive Budget, and we are thankful and
19 supportive of that.

20 However, there are targeted investment
21 needs, and reforms are needed. In
22 particular, today I would like to speak on
23 just four issues -- there are others, but
24 just four issues for today: Strengthening

1 AIM funding; investing in transportation,
2 water and sewer infrastructure; addressing
3 the municipal workforce crisis -- and it is a
4 crisis; and ensuring proper funding for
5 ambulance services.

6 So first, on AIM, we do appreciate, as
7 Barb talked about, the \$50 million in
8 temporary assistance being included in the
9 Governor's budget. That is critical. But I
10 do want to put it in context. That if we
11 consider since 2011, and we consider
12 inflation, local governments have lost
13 \$1.4 billion in AIM funding due to inflation.

14 So we would ask that, yes, maintain
15 the 50 million, please, but increase funding
16 for AIM and tie it to a COLA. The cost for
17 towns does not stop because our AIM funding
18 and our revenues stop. We're facing historic
19 inflation like everybody else, and we need
20 increases in our support that are tied to
21 inflation.

22 I do want to call out real quick --
23 the formula needs to be reviewed for AIM. It
24 unfairly hampers towns, and I'll give you one

1 example.

2 The Town of Amherst has a population
3 of 130,000 people, and it receives \$660,000
4 in AIM, while the City of Albany, which has a
5 population of about 100,000 people -- 30,000
6 less -- receives AIM at nearly \$13 million.
7 It's a tremendous disparity, and it hampers
8 the towns terribly.

9 On infrastructure, I want to take a
10 moment to talk about the importance of
11 transportation and in particular water
12 infrastructure. These are the backbone of
13 the state's economy and the state's public
14 health. CHIPS, as Barb mentioned, is an
15 important support mechanism for our
16 communities, and we appreciate the continued
17 support for all the programs -- BridgeNY,
18 Pave-NY, Pave Our Potholes, all of those.

19 I do want to point out the towns
20 maintain 63 percent of the state's roads;
21 63 percent of the state's roads are
22 maintained by towns. And towns spend
23 \$1.8 billion annually on transportation and
24 related expenses, twice what towns spend on

1 public safety.

2 CHIPS funding is not keeping pace with
3 the actual cost that towns have to incur to
4 ensure that roads are safe. An increased
5 CHIPS and dedicated CHIPS increases with
6 COLAs create a better long-term plan and
7 opportunity for towns to invest in those
8 roads.

9 Sewer and water infrastructure is
10 equally as important, and we are pleased that
11 the Governor has put \$500 million for clean
12 water infrastructure in the Executive Budget.
13 But it's grant-based funding. And here's the
14 thing about grant-based funding: There are
15 winners and there are losers. And I'm going
16 to say today -- and I believe everyone on
17 this panel agrees -- nobody, nobody should
18 have to compete for clean water. We need
19 dedicated funding to make sure that every New
20 York erhas access to clean water.

21 Grant programs make winners and they
22 make losers, and some people will have access
23 and some people will not. We need dedicated
24 funding for that. PFOS or PFAS are certainly

1 now a new source that towns will have to deal
2 with and clean up out of the system that they
3 did not place there, but they are forced to
4 clean up. And that's going to be very
5 expensive, and we can get into that some
6 more.

7 Also with water infrastructure,
8 affordable housing is predicated on
9 infrastructure. Most towns don't have
10 infrastructure. My Town of Glenville, where
11 I was the town supervisor for 15 years, more
12 than half our town doesn't have water and
13 sewer. We can't put affordable housing where
14 there's no water and there's no sewer, and so
15 there again we need dedicated funding for
16 that.

17 Workforce development, as Barb talked
18 about, is another key challenge. We are
19 having a hard time keeping up with
20 wageflation in the municipal governments. We
21 can't raise wages like the private sector
22 can, and we are asking for help there. Barb
23 talked about the civil service reforms. We
24 need civil service reforms. We're asking for

1 CDL requirements -- sorry, reimbursements for
2 state, local CDL drivers. We're asking to
3 tinker a little bit with the tax cap to
4 exclude wage increases so municipal
5 governments can equal private-sector wages
6 without breaking the tax cap, and removing
7 the salary cap for retirees reentering the
8 public workplace.

9 I have more, but because I'm new at
10 this, I'm long, and I'm going to make sure I
11 stop on my time. So I'm going to go over the
12 ambulance service.

13 Barb was absolutely correct when she
14 talked about the need for ambulance service.
15 It's an essential need for our communities.
16 I will just be quick on this. The mandate
17 that the Governor has put in the budget does
18 not provide funding, and that is very
19 difficult for local governments, particularly
20 towns.

21 Towns spent \$142 million on ambulance
22 services in 2023, an 18 percent increase in
23 just five years. The taxpayer can't afford
24 that, and it will hit the tax cap hard in

1 these towns that will be forced to then
2 provide these services. So we need to find
3 access -- or support for that.

4 I'm going to close with suggesting a
5 few things that are critically important to
6 my members and to our association.

7 If we all want affordable housing in
8 the State of New York, then we need to make
9 state investments in infrastructure, no
10 question about it.

11 If we all want to make New York more
12 affordable for all New Yorkers, then we have
13 to bring down property taxes in local
14 government. And that's only attainable
15 through help from the state, either in
16 mandate relief or in more direct aid.

17 And if we want clean water for all
18 New Yorkers, which I know we all do, then we
19 must invest in our water systems. In the
20 towns, many of them are aging, they're
21 60 years old, they're failing, and they need
22 deferred maintenance.

23 But now, in order to increase that
24 system so we can support all these

1 initiatives, we need more. The
2 Executive Budget includes positive steps,
3 but tangible funding increases and targeted
4 reforms are needed.

5 Towns are the foundation of our state.
6 Every dollar invested in a town is invested
7 in the State of New York. Every dollar
8 invested in infrastructure is invested in
9 your infrastructure. It builds on our
10 economy. It provides better services. It
11 makes stronger communities, and it will be a
12 sustainable future for all New Yorkers,
13 making it affordable for all New Yorkers.

14 I look forward to our work together.
15 I appreciate you allowing me to be here this
16 afternoon, and I'm looking forward to what's
17 next. Thank you.

18 MR. ACQUARIO: Thank you, Senators,
19 Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, to the chairs
20 of the Local Government Committee,
21 Assemblymember Jones, Assemblymember Monica
22 Martinez, thank you for giving us the
23 opportunity to be with you here today. I'm
24 Steven Acquario, the executive director of

1 the Association of Counties.

2 And we can't do our job without you.
3 We partner with our Governor on the
4 preparation of an Executive Budget, but it is
5 ultimately you who must approve what's before
6 you. And we just can't do the things that
7 you want us to do, your programs, without
8 your support. The counties deliver pretty
9 much all your programs. All federal health
10 and all human service programs are delivered
11 through the counties. So all the great ideas
12 that you come up with, you want to serve the
13 people, they ultimately run through the
14 counties.

15 So giving us an opportunity to address
16 you is very important. The fact that you
17 listen to us during these forums is very much
18 appreciated, and we thank you for that.

19 Total state spending. We've submitted
20 testimony, I'll just give some quick talking
21 points here. Total state spending on behalf
22 of the counties through the various local aid
23 programs is expected to be around 8.2 billion
24 in this year's fiscal budget. This includes

1 nearly 4 billion for the state takeover of
2 the local Medicaid growth, one of the most
3 important state policies you ever adopted.

4 The Medicaid local cost cap is the
5 single most important element for counties in
6 controlling, as Chris mentioned, property tax
7 increases at the local level. And
8 maintaining this cap is essential to the
9 affordability fight that we're all trying to
10 win on behalf of New Yorkers. To this point,
11 we are very pleased that there are no major
12 cost shifts from the Governor, from the state
13 in this budget, or any new spending mandates
14 for the expansion of existing or newly
15 created state programs.

16 While the '26 Executive Budget did not
17 include another round of 50 million in
18 funding for the County Infrastructure Fund,
19 the infrastructure grant program that was
20 dedicated towards housing and infrastructure
21 that was established by the Governor last
22 year and approved by you, we have been
23 assured by the Budget Director that that
24 50 million will be restored in coming

1 amendments to the budget.

2 On this note, we ask that you consider
3 doubling that county infrastructure program
4 to 100 million. Just like the towns, cities,
5 and villages with the importance of AIM, so
6 too is the county infrastructure program.
7 It's among our highest priorities, and
8 doubling this allocation and raising the
9 maximum award from 1 million to 2 million per
10 grant under this new \$100 million level will
11 be most appreciated.

12 Funds under this program are targeted
13 towards critical local infrastructure
14 projects, with priority placed on housing
15 development, infrastructure, water, sewer,
16 land, towards new housing projects. Projects
17 that create at least 10 units of housing are
18 awarded the maximum grant allowed.

19 Finally, we urge you to reduce the
20 local match requirement from 50 percent to
21 25 percent to ensure that all counties, rural
22 and urban, can take advantage of available
23 funding.

24 With respect to aging, a very

1 important program advanced by the Governor
2 for our seniors, it's been a long time in the
3 making. Finally we've got -- we've advocated
4 for an increase of \$45 million to address our
5 aging service waitlists. That is before you.
6 We strongly support that and thank our
7 Governor and thank you in advance.

8 As I believe Barbara and Chris
9 mentioned, civil service reform is very
10 important to us. Raising the public-sector
11 retiree earnings. In our testimony on page 6
12 and page 7, we can't find folks to do certain
13 jobs in our counties. Whether it's a public
14 defender, an assistant prosecutor, a child
15 welfare examiner, a public health nurse, it
16 is very difficult to recruit now mental
17 health professionals.

18 So we have listed a number of
19 provisions in State Civil Service Law for
20 your consideration, amending the
21 Public Officers Law to allow for home-rule
22 authority to set employee residence
23 requirements, expanding the acceptable zone
24 of band scoring of civil service exams,

1 increasing from a list of three to a list of
2 five, and so on. We ask for some flexibility
3 in civil services.

4 In community colleges and higher
5 education tuition assistance, the Executive
6 Budget provides a funding floor for community
7 colleges at 100 percent of prior-year
8 funding. We strongly support that. Without
9 that funding floor, community colleges would
10 face a 124 million, or a near 20 percent
11 loss -- in formula aid due to the enrollment
12 declines. Counties of New York strongly
13 support maintaining this funding for our
14 community colleges.

15 The Governor has a new program to
16 implement the New York Opportunities
17 Partnership. The Executive Budget includes
18 28.2 million for the New York Opportunity
19 Promise Scholarship, a program that provides
20 for the cost of tuition, fees, books for
21 students age 25 to 55 for attending the
22 community colleges in high-demand fields.

23 Counties support the funding included
24 in the budget and appreciate that this does

1 not shift any new financial burden onto the
2 counties. And we look forward to working
3 with you and the Governor to make this
4 program a success, including identifying
5 other areas or trades that are in high
6 demand.

7 Economic development. Funding to
8 communities impacted by the recent Department
9 of Correctional Services and juvenile justice
10 facility closures. The Governor includes a
11 \$200 million allocation from the Downtown
12 Revitalization Program to be appropriated
13 towards communities that have been impacted
14 by closure of any New York State correctional
15 and juvenile justice facilities. We strongly
16 support this proposal.

17 With respect to a few environmental
18 initiatives, NYSAC strongly supports the
19 500 million, as do the towns, cities, and
20 villages, for the Clean Water Infrastructure
21 Program. We've asked for some tweaks, and
22 support what the others have said today.

23 We ask that you fund municipal
24 recycling and organics diversion. The

1 Executive Budget includes nearly 20 million
2 for municipal waste reduction and recycling
3 programs, including 2.5 for food donation and
4 food scraps recycling. We urge you to
5 increase capital projects funding for
6 municipal waste reduction and recycling
7 projects to at least \$40 million.

8 As far as sustainability, the budget
9 includes a \$1 billion program in new capital
10 projects for funding climate mitigation and
11 adaptation projects. To maximize the
12 effectiveness of state climate investments,
13 we recommend using a portion of the funding
14 for dedicating grant funding for local
15 climate initiatives, including expanding the
16 support for successful programs like the
17 Climate Smart Communities, the Clean Energy
18 Communities, the Municipal Zero-Emission
19 Vehicle Rebate.

20 We ask that you enhance the technical
21 assistance and training programs to build
22 local government expertise in clean energy
23 deployment and climate resilience. We ask
24 that you support regional sustainability

1 coordinators and clean energy hubs to
2 facilitate coordination between state and
3 local climate efforts. And we ask that you
4 ensure local governments have a formal seat
5 at the table in state energy planning and
6 investment decisions.

7 Lastly, on transportation, 100 percent
8 support what our colleagues and cities and
9 villages and towns are advocating for, an
10 increase of 250 million in the CHIPS program.

11 And lastly, Senator Cooney has an
12 initiative on transit equity. That bill is
13 sponsored in the State Senate, and we support
14 the provisions of Senator Cooney's transit
15 equity component.

16 That will conclude our testimony, and
17 thank you again.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

19 Assemblyman Jones.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Good afternoon,
21 everyone. Good to see you all again.

22 PANELISTS: Good afternoon.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: It feels as though
24 I just saw you not too long ago. But great

1 to have you here, and thank you for your
2 testimony.

3 I have several questions, but I'm
4 going to get right to it. This is kind of a
5 unique one, that the Executive has --
6 proposes requiring all municipalities to
7 report cybersecurity incidences to the
8 Division of Homeland Security and Emergency
9 Services within 72 hours, and all ransomware
10 payments within 24 hours.

11 Yes or no? Are we for that or not?

12 MR. KOETZLE: Yes. We believe this --
13 at the association -- really this is one of
14 the more important areas for local
15 governments, and we do support that.

16 MS. VAN EPPS: And the same with
17 NYCOM. We recognize that this is a critical
18 area -- issue for our municipalities, and a
19 lot of them just can't get their arms around
20 it. So we're actually --

21 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay. It kind of
22 bounced out of me because, like, where did
23 you report it -- like, I mean, if I was a
24 village official, the first person I'd be on

1 the phone with was somebody from the Division
2 of Homeland Security or something. So I
3 think -- okay, thank you for that.

4 Emergency services. The Executive
5 Budget proposes designating emergency medical
6 services as essential in requiring counties,
7 cities, towns and villages to ensure services
8 are provided within their boundaries.

9 MR. ACQUARIO: So -- so this one --
10 you want me to start his one?

11 MR. KOETZLE: I don't want to be the
12 one who keeps butting in first, but --

13 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: I can get into
14 the detail --

15 MR. KOETZLE: Yeah.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: -- on it, too,
17 but --

18 MR. KOETZLE: The concerns we have on
19 that -- I mean, obviously we know it's a
20 critical service. It's a crisis. This is
21 something that towns, though, would struggle
22 with being able to afford, particularly under
23 a tax-cap environment.

24 So this is what would be called a new

1 special district. The new special district
2 would then shatter the cap, because it's not
3 already in the cap. And so that would be
4 considered new spending by the state.

5 There's a lot of inequities in the tax
6 cap. There's a lot of reforms that can
7 happen in the tax cap. We can talk about
8 that later, because your question's about
9 this.

10 But we support it, but we need
11 funding, because it is a mandate at that
12 point.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Yup.

14 MR. KOETZLE: We believe too, also --
15 my friend may not be appreciative of this,
16 but it's a county service, we believe, best
17 delivered regionally.

18 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, I couldn't
19 disagree more.

20 (Laughter.)

21 MR. KOETZLE: We've agreed on a lot,
22 but not everything.

23 MR. ACQUARIO: But there's one thing
24 that -- I think you should strike the

1 language that was advanced by the Governor.
2 It doesn't make sense to ask 1,605 local
3 governments to all do that. Let the local
4 governments resolve this locally. That's
5 home rule. And despite the towns want it to
6 shift to the counties, it's not appropriate.
7 Let them work it out locally and regionally
8 at the local level, not by the state.

9 So thank you for that question.

10 MS. VAN EPPS: I agree with everything
11 they said. I mean, we're obviously very
12 concerned about the funding, but we recognize
13 there are some real gaps in services
14 throughout our communities. We are not
15 usually embrasive of things that are
16 countywide, if you will, but in this case we
17 are certainly open to considering doing this
18 countywide or at least doing it on a regional
19 basis, because we think at this point that
20 might be the only answer.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay. I think
22 Steve already answered my next question, so
23 I'll go on.

24 Housing. So the Governor puts in --

1 where am I? I had my spot. The Executive
2 Budget proposes \$10 million in technical
3 assistance and 100 million in funding for
4 municipalities that are certified as
5 Pro-Housing Communities. I just have a
6 couple of questions on that.

7 What steps are municipalities taking
8 to encourage housing growth? Are there any
9 barriers that municipalities are facing
10 related to the housing growth and production
11 in this proposal? And how can this money
12 be -- how can it better be used in the
13 proposal?

14 I guess -- we put in hundreds of
15 millions of dollars for housing every year
16 and what I hear from my villages and towns
17 and counties, there's really no assistance
18 behind it to get it to where they need it to
19 be. So does this program help you in any
20 way? And what are the barriers?

21 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, I'll just start
22 from the county's perspective.

23 We of course support the Governor's
24 push for more housing and more affordable

1 housing, and yours as well, as the State
2 Legislature. It's a local issue. It's more
3 of a municipal function, from the county's
4 perspective.

5 We want to bring infrastructure, we
6 want to bring that last mile for water and
7 sewer. And that is the contribution that the
8 counties can generally make towards this
9 issue. We're very supportive of whatever it
10 is the Governor is trying to push in, you as
11 a legislative body, and we look forward to
12 working with you during this session. It's
13 very important.

14 MR. KOETZLE: So we do support,
15 obviously, the need for more housing.
16 Housing is becoming unaffordable for every
17 New Yorker. That's really becoming a crisis.
18 And what you folks did with the short-term
19 rental Barb touched on was very helpful in
20 making sure that we don't have these big
21 equity things from New York City coming in
22 and buying up our housing stock. That was
23 huge. So thank you so much for that.

24 But there are barriers for towns in

1 particular because, as I mentioned in my
2 testimony, towns do not have the
3 infrastructure to support more housing.
4 Towns would build more housing if we had the
5 infrastructure to do so. We can't afford
6 that on our own.

7 And so we have these grant programs,
8 and as I said, some win and some lose. But
9 the grants don't go to the town, the grant
10 goes to the developer. It doesn't help the
11 town at all.

12 And one thing about housing in towns
13 is very often it's a lose from a revenue
14 perspective. So you build more housing in
15 towns, that means more services. So you have
16 more roads to plow, you have infrastructure
17 that goes in. And somebody pays for that
18 infrastructure, but guess who maintains the
19 infrastructure? The towns -- the water, the
20 sewer. So it's more money on the local
21 governments.

22 And so the other thing I just want to
23 mention, and I'll turn it over to Barb, we
24 have to address -- and I know it's unpopular,

1 but we have to address this. I have people
2 in our towns telling us that young people
3 buying homes today, guess what, the property
4 taxes rival -- if not more than -- what their
5 mortgage payment is.

6 Now, I'm old enough to remember when
7 property taxes were a fraction of your
8 mortgage. A fraction. Now they are equal,
9 if not greater. We have to find ways to
10 provide property tax relief into the towns.

11 And when you think about a town, the
12 only thing the town has to fund its
13 operations is levy. It's all we have. We
14 don't get sales tax by right, we don't get
15 the hotel tax by right, we don't get the
16 franchise revenue that cities and villages
17 and counties get. We have one place to go on
18 growth, and it's the levy.

19 And if we don't get relief there,
20 homes will not be affordable.

21 MS. VAN EPPS: I'll just quickly add
22 we are supportive of Pro-Housing Communities.
23 And like I mentioned earlier, we are even
24 more supportive of the technical assistance

1 that the budget recommends providing to local
2 governments to get them certified, especially
3 now that so much of the grant money out there
4 is conditioned on Pro-Housing.

5 We do think there can be tweaks to
6 housing -- the expansion of the housing tax
7 credit. It's certainly beneficial. The
8 money for infrastructure is an absolute
9 necessity.

10 But we are just very happy that she's
11 taking more of a bottom-up approach, as
12 opposed to the top-down, you know, that when
13 we talked about the housing compact -- our
14 mayors are still scarred by that. And so we
15 are very happy with this bottom-up, voluntary
16 approach to housing. And we think it's
17 working.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay, getting on
19 childcare, Stephen, I don't know if we talked
20 about this before. There's \$100 million in
21 the Executive proposal. I think there's a
22 \$25 million carveout for counties. Do you
23 have any details on that?

24 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, I think that that

1 was based off our Herkimer County childcare
2 initiative that we brought to their attention
3 over the summer. It worked incredibly well
4 in the Mohawk Valley, and I think that the
5 Governor is trying to give that more of an
6 expansion --

7 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: So the counties
8 would help assist building the infrastructure
9 and then hand it over to either a
10 non-for-profit --

11 MR. ACQUARIO: A not-for-profit, yes.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: -- childcare
13 facility or organization?

14 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay.

16 MR. ACQUARIO: We do support the
17 initiative.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay. SWAP
19 program, I'm all for, but we have to make
20 sure it doesn't come out of other funding.
21 Because I've heard fears from some people,
22 from some municipalities, they're afraid
23 that's going to take away from the funding
24 that we already have for clean water and

1 infrastructure and such.

2 So I support the concept of the
3 program, but I think we have to be careful
4 about not, you know, taking money, you know,
5 from Peter for Paul.

6 MR. ACQUARIO: As Chris mentioned
7 earlier, we support 100 percent what the
8 Governor's doing with the 500 million in the
9 water program, but it's a grant program. And
10 the benefit of a SWAP program is more of a
11 formula. It keeps entities from fighting
12 amongst each other and --

13 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Oh, I agree with
14 the --

15 MR. ACQUARIO: So. But we agree with
16 you a hundred percent.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: -- the concept, I
18 just think we need to be cognizant of, you
19 know, let's not rob one fund to pay for this
20 program. I think it's all great.

21 I have many, many more questions, but
22 thank you for coming to testify. And it's
23 great to see you all, and I look forward to
24 working with you.

1 MR. ACQUARIO: Thank you.

2 MR. KOETZLE: Same here.

3 MS. VAN EPPS: Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off;
5 inaudible.)

6 We're going to start with
7 Senator Martinez, 10 minutes, ranker -- uh,
8 chair.

9 SENATOR MARTINEZ: Thank you.

10 Good afternoon. So good to see all
11 three of you here.

12 Just some clarifications and follow-up
13 to my counterpart in the Assembly.

14 In terms of the EMS, when you talk
15 about having it regional, could you expand
16 just a little more on that and how we can
17 assist in the process of making it a more
18 regional process for you?

19 MR. KOETZLE: I'm sorry, can I ask you
20 to repeat that? I didn't hear you.

21 SENATOR MARTINEZ: You want the EMS to
22 be regionally based, correct?

23 MR. KOETZLE: Yeah.

24 SENATOR MARTINEZ: So how does that

1 look? And what can we do to help in that
2 manner?

3 MR. KOETZLE: Yeah, I mean -- for me,
4 because I brought that word up, so I'll
5 start. You know, I -- in terms of counties,
6 we believe that it's a county-level service.
7 Towns are poorly positioned to provide
8 critical lifesaving services that way. We
9 don't have fire departments, those are all
10 volunteer.

11 And so it wouldn't make sense. It
12 wouldn't like bolt on to anything, if that
13 makes sense. We believe -- and don't get me
14 in too bad a way with Steve here, but we
15 believe counties are already providing these
16 services in many ways -- you know, hospitals,
17 nursing homes, county homes, county
18 medical -- so it might make more sense.

19 It's also a service I think that
20 requires a lot bigger population base to
21 support because it's so expensive.
22 Reimbursements are so low for, you know,
23 whatever the care to give -- the cost to give
24 the care is not being reimbursed. You put

1 that on a small tax base, that's devastating.
2 You put it on a large tax base, it's
3 affordable. That's how we would approach
4 this.

5 SENATOR MARTINEZ: Okay. Perfect.

6 MS. VAN EPPS: I'll just add that I
7 think data, we need to -- we need better data
8 about where the gaps in the service are. And
9 I think that's something that the Governor
10 has proposed.

11 I will also add that the Medicaid
12 reimbursement, the law that you passed this
13 year that would allow for Medicaid
14 reimbursement for certain EMS services, is
15 going to be very helpful once we can get our
16 arms around that.

17 So I think we're absolutely making
18 progress. We just established an EMS
19 subcommittee among our membership, and we
20 really are hoping we can get some great ideas
21 out of that, because there are communities
22 who are finding ways to address this. So
23 we're bringing folks together to talk about
24 this, and we look forward to working with not

1 only the municipal associations, but all of
2 you, to try to find some answers to this
3 crisis.

4 SENATOR MARTINEZ: Please. And that
5 would be great if you can share that data
6 with us.

7 And just to follow up with the housing
8 perspective of this, what do you see IDAs
9 playing a role in housing and affordable
10 housing projects?

11 MR. KOETZLE: You want to go first?
12 Because I'm glad you brought IDAs up.

13 MS. VAN EPPS: Oh, IDAs. I didn't
14 hear it.

15 MR. KOETZLE: IDAs, yes. You know,
16 IDAs can play a role. Obviously economic
17 development is where they're focused, but we
18 believe -- we're not asking for towns to be
19 at the table of an IDA. We actually support
20 the IDA on the county level being able to
21 negotiate their pilots and whatnot.

22 But when an IDA makes a decision about
23 a town levy, the town ought to have a right
24 and an ability to agree to that. Right now,

1 we don't. And so what happens is, as I just
2 talked about, our only revenue source is
3 really the levy. And if the county IDA is
4 giving away our levy and then we're stuck
5 with all the infrastructure costs -- because
6 it doesn't go to the county. The
7 infrastructure cost is on the town. Our
8 levy's gone, and we have -- we've just
9 inherited new costs.

10 So whether it's economic development
11 or housing, the same would be true. We want
12 to say the town needs to have a say in -- if
13 our money is being given away, we need to at
14 least agree to that. Because we don't get
15 the growth, we don't get the sales tax
16 growth, we don't get anything else. The levy
17 is the only thing the town has.

18 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, if I may, the
19 fact of the matter is most counties are
20 sharing sales tax with towns. And if they're
21 not, they're doing other services.

22 This is an individual-by-individual-
23 municipality issue. If the state is going to
24 consider things such as that, such as

1 shifting EMS to a county, it really needs to
2 remove the mandate that we make towns,
3 cities, and villages whole or towns and
4 cities whole, or school districts with
5 delinquent property taxes. That's what you
6 should consider.

7 I mean, mandating one level of local
8 government onto another level of local
9 government is absurd to even think of that
10 way. Let the local governments -- I was at a
11 meeting two weeks in the Adirondacks with a
12 whole bunch of towns and a whole bunch of
13 counties, and I put this issue out there.
14 Everyone just stared at me. They didn't know
15 how to answer the question, Is this a good
16 idea or not?

17 That sends a signal to me. Let the
18 local governments work it out amongst
19 themselves. Incentivize them. Give the
20 counties incentives to do this if they want
21 to. But you ask any town official around
22 this state if they want the county to take
23 over EMS, I bet you the vast majority of
24 them, 95 percent of them would say absolutely

1 no. They want their response time. They
2 want to be able to handle the issue locally,
3 and they are concerned.

4 We deal with this with municipal law
5 enforcement. Why isn't the county sheriff
6 patrolling the town roads? It makes -- it
7 comes up all the time. They resist it.

8 So my advice to you is be very careful
9 when you're treading into this. There are
10 1605 units of local government that have been
11 established for hundreds of years. Let them
12 work these issues out locally.

13 SENATOR MARTINEZ: And thank you for
14 that. And you very well know that we believe
15 in local control, especially coming down from
16 Long Island. We love our home-rule
17 messaging. So obviously that's very
18 important for us down there.

19 And I had a couple of other questions,
20 but -- well, you can ask them. But I'm going
21 to -- well, I'm done.

22 (Laughter.)

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right. Thank
24 you. Assembly.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Brown.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you.

3 Welcome. I think all my questions
4 probably could go for all of you.

5 But I just wanted to say to
6 Director Epps, you have a great staff. I've
7 been speaking to Wade for like 20-something
8 years, and you've got John and Rebecca --
9 great. They always respond immediately, and
10 I appreciate that on a village level, at the
11 very least.

12 Director Koetzle -- is that how it's
13 pronounced?

14 MR. KOETZLE: Ketz-lee.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Koetzle. I
16 apologize.

17 MR. KOETZLE: Koetzle, like Nestle.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: I've got an
19 easy name, Brown.

20 (Laughter.)

21 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: You mentioned
22 the disparity of AIM funding. What do you
23 think that is? You gave two specifics,
24 two -- one municipality had 30,000 more

1 residents than Albany. Why do you think that
2 is?

3 MR. KOETZLE: Well, it's
4 formula-based, obviously, so it's in the
5 formula. It's baked in.

6 I don't have that right here in front
7 of me, but one of the things that we believe
8 should happen is we need to convene a council
9 to look at that, look at the formula, what is
10 it -- my question to the Legislature is, what
11 is it that is making that so unfair and so
12 unbalanced?

13 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: I think we all
14 know, but at a certain point we just have to
15 say it for what it is, you know.

16 With this particular body that we have
17 here right now, this group in front of us,
18 we're all on the same page. So many of us
19 come from village government and things like
20 that, we know the answer. We have to say we
21 have a \$252 billion budget, do you think it's
22 correct to say -- and I'm really asking you.
23 So let's stop all the waste. We're putting
24 it towards people who haven't contributed

1 perhaps to our local areas, could that be an
2 issue?

3 I know that's something uncomfortable.
4 If we could go, we could be here for another
5 20 years having this discussion. Let's say
6 it for what it is.

7 We all work hard, blue collar, my town
8 where I grew up. Shouldn't we be allocating
9 money to the people that work hard and put in
10 the infrastructure? I'm in the construction
11 business five decades. You better believe we
12 need infrastructure. I run a little village,
13 that's my biggest expense.

14 I hope and pray, you know, that the
15 medical won't go up and everything like that
16 every year. But, you know, paving roads, we
17 do it in-house and it still costs a fortune.

18 Shouldn't we be allocating funds the
19 way we know this -- you know, it's being
20 hidden in the \$252 billion budget?

21 MR. KOETZLE: Is that a question
22 directly to me?

23 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: That's a
24 question.

1 MR. KOETZLE: I would not be so bold
2 as to lecture any of you folks on where you
3 should be allocating state resources, how
4 they should be allocated. That's all, I
5 think, in the purview of the Legislature.

6 The only point that I'm making is that
7 there's an inequity in the AIM funding
8 formula. I would like us to convene a study
9 on that to find out where those inequities
10 are and why they exist and how we can fix
11 them.

12 But how you allocate your resources is
13 certainly up to you. I'll leave it to you
14 folks, and I'm confident you can ably make
15 those determinations yourself.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Thank you.

17 This could be for anybody. We talked
18 a little bit about fire services and things
19 like that. The Volunteer Fire Infrastructure
20 and Response Equipment -- V-FIRE -- program
21 provides only \$25 million in funding
22 statewide.

23 We run a little private fire
24 department. I could spend like, you know,

1 500 grand on a new piece of equipment because
2 on Long Island we need all the bells and
3 whistles with all the chrome.

4 Twenty-five million dollars for the
5 whole state. Why do you think we have that
6 inequity for one of the most important
7 services there is? Anybody?

8 MS. VAN EPPS: I mean, obviously we
9 would love to see more money toward that,
10 because I was told that the program -- we had
11 a discussion just two days ago at my
12 conference about this and how happy people
13 were about the fact that there was another
14 25 million put in.

15 So I recognize that, you know, there's
16 probably a much greater need there and that
17 it was probably oversubscribed. But we're
18 just grateful for the 25 million and know
19 that our people are already interested in how
20 they get their hands on that.

21 MR. ACQUARIO: You know, you've made
22 some strides over the years on volunteer
23 fire. It's very important what you're doing.
24 So thank you for the laws that you're

1 passing, especially with recruitment and
2 retention.

3 And I think in that respect we've been
4 advocating for both the income tax credit and
5 the real property tax credit, not one or the
6 other. That is a big deal. And so we would
7 ask that you consider that as part of your
8 deliberations.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN ARI BROWN: Absolutely. I
10 have a bill on that. Let's hope they'll let
11 me bring it to the floor.

12 Thank you all for being here.

13 MR. ACQUARIO: Thank you.

14 MR. KOETZLE: Thank you.

15 MS. VAN EPPS: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is that it?

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off.)

18 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Good afternoon.

19 PANEL MEMBERS: Good afternoon.

20 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: A question -- I
21 probably won't use my 10, but -- Local
22 Government Efficiency Grant Program? So I
23 think there's a proposal for an additional
24 8 million in funding. I guess a couple

1 questions, four parts to it.

2 Do you believe that that's adequate?

3 So what do you find -- what is the kind of
4 the participation -- it's not a brand-new
5 program, but the additional funding -- is the
6 \$8 million adequate, welcome? Thoughts?

7 MR. KOETZLE: I can speak just as --
8 experience as a supervisor. For 15 years
9 I've tried to access that program repeatedly
10 in my town. It's difficult.

11 The issues -- the common theme here is
12 the issue with the grant programs generally
13 is that they're arduous, they're expensive,
14 and they're time-consuming. Meaning that
15 towns often have to -- and other governments,
16 I'm sure -- but towns would have to hire,
17 often, a grant writer or a grant
18 administrator.

19 Administering the grant is often more
20 arduous than writing the grant. The state
21 has all sorts of things that you have to go
22 through in order to access these grants. You
23 have to use certain criteria to hire
24 engineers and whatnot. And sometimes they

1 have to be approved by the state, and
2 sometimes the engineer being approved isn't
3 the one in your region and is someone in
4 New York City for upstate New York that
5 they've approved.

6 There's all sorts of issues with
7 grants. And so a lot of towns, I can tell
8 you -- you have to remember, 58 percent of
9 the towns in this state have under
10 15,000 people. We're talking about very
11 small budgets, very small staffs. They can't
12 administer this stuff.

13 This is why, for us, these formula
14 programs are so important because it's easy
15 for a town in order to get a formula -- to
16 get the formula to get the AIM, get the
17 CHIPS, get the -- say, the SWAP, hopefully,
18 someday. But grants are very difficult for
19 communities because it takes so much time.

20 Very often the state is very slow on
21 reimbursement, too. A lot of the grants you
22 have to put the money up, then you have to
23 wait a year -- sometimes two, maybe three --
24 to get it back. Towns don't have that kind

1 of money to do that. So it's very difficult.

2 I tried a lot to find these efficiency
3 grants with other local governments, and very
4 often it's hard to get people with the same
5 priority -- say, local governments with the
6 same priorities. For example, a town and a
7 village trying to work together, very
8 difficult, because they have different
9 priorities.

10 SENATOR RYAN: But I don't think --
11 but I would hope that it wouldn't be, right?
12 So before I was in county government, I was
13 in town government. I was a deputy
14 supervisor. And we did a lot of work with
15 our village, which was literally right across
16 the parking lot.

17 But I don't know if this \$8 million is
18 sufficient, but I would -- I mean, I would
19 hope, right, and I know that we tried to make
20 sure that municipalities cooperate. Like we
21 made local government more efficient.

22 But if -- I guess if I'm hearing --
23 but the second question is, is that your
24 opinion with NYSAC too? With other --

1 MR. ACQUARIO: Thank you, Senator.
2 And welcome to the State Senate.

3 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Thank you.

4 MR. ACQUARIO: I did want to just
5 recognize and thank Senator Mayer and
6 Assemblyman Steven Otis for their work on
7 EMS. And I would encourage the body to
8 follow the work that they're both doing on
9 EMS for all of us collectively in local
10 government, because we've been working for
11 years together on that.

12 With respect to your question,
13 Senator, 100 percent agree with Chris.
14 Counties, generally speaking, are not taking
15 advantage of that program for the same
16 reasons that Chris articulated.

17 I would encourage you to shift the
18 money elsewhere to local governments.

19 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: I'm sorry, say
20 that again?

21 MR. ACQUARIO: I agree with what Chris
22 said, and I would encourage you to shift the
23 allocation to other local government
24 programs. It's generally speaking not

1 something that counties are using.

2 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Okay. Well, so
3 let me ask you -- so in a follow-up to that,
4 so I guess then I would be interested to hear
5 how we could do that better. Because if --
6 obviously if it's going to be in the budget
7 and there's money allocated for sharing of
8 services, grant programs to make local
9 government more effective, more efficient --
10 you know, if there are barriers, if there is
11 red tape, if you have to put up the money --
12 say, if it's a small town or village that
13 doesn't have the capital to put that forward
14 to then get reimbursed two or three years
15 later, if they want to share a piece of
16 equipment, a dump truck, whatever you want to
17 say.

18 Obviously because at the end of the
19 day, we're here for the taxpayers. So I
20 guess that's the question. So I'd love to
21 hear more about that.

22 MR. KOETZLE: So I think we're talking
23 two different things here. Grants obviously
24 have generally that issue that I -- or those

1 issues I articulated.

2 As far as the efficiency grants, I
3 think the biggest -- you know, I'm just going
4 to be honest about my experience in local
5 government, as many of you have had.

6 The issue you have, more than
7 anything, is labor. Right? The biggest
8 problem is you have turf wars. Say, for
9 example, let's take the Town of Glenville in
10 Schenectady County, and the Village of
11 Scotia, which is right inside the Town of
12 Glenville, and we both have a hard time
13 getting police officers today. We don't have
14 the police officers we used to have.

15 So we say to the Village of Scotia:
16 Well, why don't we at least just combine our
17 command staff. Right? Your chief is
18 retiring, we have a chief, we have a
19 lieutenant, but we have an open lieutenant
20 spot, you have a lieutenant -- let's combine
21 at least the command staff.

22 That was DOA with the PBA. It just
23 wasn't happening.

24 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: Well,

1 interestingly, so we -- let's see, '24 -- I
2 don't know, 15 years ago on the town board we
3 tried to merge police departments. And, you
4 know, it just didn't happen. But I don't
5 know -- we don't want to get -- I certainly
6 don't want to get into a place where I'm
7 suggesting what towns and/or villages do.

8 I'm not saying -- I'm just saying --
9 taking a step back, holistically looking and
10 see if there's a way that we can utilize this
11 program, if we can utilize it more
12 efficiently, more effectively, and more often
13 so that we can make government -- local
14 government, town government, village
15 government, state government, county
16 government -- more effective, then I think we
17 should do that. And I'm certainly open to
18 the conversation.

19 MR. ACQUARIO: One suggestion, if I
20 may, Chris, is that we had asked for the
21 shared services program to have the ability
22 to use a portion of the funds for
23 administration. So perhaps a suggestion we
24 have to you --

1 SENATOR RYAN: I'm asking. I'm
2 asking.

3 MR. ACQUARIO: -- constructively, in
4 this program --

5 SENATOR RYAN: Okay.

6 MR. ACQUARIO: -- and Chris is spot
7 on. I mean, we need some administrative --
8 the ability to use some of the funds for
9 administration, to help access these
10 programs.

11 MR. KOETZLE: And I think, Senator,
12 maybe an idea. I think more practical than
13 through grants is providing direct funding or
14 credits towards the tax cap, right? So if
15 there's an achieved savings between the two
16 municipalities, help with providing that
17 credit on the tax -- lower the burden of the
18 tax levy in those towns with direct credits,
19 not grants through a grant program.

20 So I think this is a very unique and
21 early stage idea, but I think if you're open
22 to a conversation, we should maybe take some
23 time and sit down and talk about how that
24 might be able to work.

1 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: I'd love to.

2 MS. VAN EPPS: And the only thing I
3 will add is that they have done some
4 tinkering with these programs over the last
5 couple of years in terms of maximum amounts
6 you can get and also how much you can spend
7 on studying versus implementation, which I do
8 think has helped.

9 So I do think there's room to make
10 changes, because they've already sort of
11 paved that road for us.

12 SENATOR CHRIS RYAN: I'm done. Thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
15 Assembly.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

18 Good afternoon, everybody.

19 So CHIPS. As you may be aware, in
20 this Executive Budget proposal the Governor
21 is adding money to the DOT capital plan in
22 recognition of the fact that costs have gone
23 up as it comes to paving roads in recent
24 years. And I know we've talked in the past

1 about materials. All of the changes and
2 costs that mean that the same amount of money
3 doesn't pave the same amount of miles as it
4 did a year ago, two years ago, three years
5 ago, five years ago.

6 So I'm wondering if you have any sense
7 of if we were to -- because I think the
8 Governor is kind of making our argument for
9 us with regard to this. I mean, certainly
10 we're advocating for increases to CHIPS. But
11 any sense of what that number would look like
12 if we did something comparable to -- as an
13 increase in the CHIPS program to make sure
14 that we're keeping up and able to pave the
15 same number of roads?

16 MR. KOETZLE: Well, asking for a
17 number -- asking for a number -- do you have
18 any?

19 MR. ACQUARIO: We don't have that
20 number with us right now.

21 I mean, the CHIPS program is one of
22 the best things that you ever did. Again,
23 it's a formula-driven program.

24 The counties have 85 percent of the

1 bridges -- that's what we do -- over 20 feet
2 long, we maintain bridges. Towns largely --
3 mostly have the roads, local roadways.
4 Cities and villages, everything in between.

5 What we do -- what we can say to you,
6 Assemblyman, is that every million dollars
7 that you invest in CHIPS has an exponential
8 amount of job creation. The amount of jobs
9 that it creates and spins off into the
10 private and public sector is tremendous.

11 And as far as the cost of goods and
12 services, we don't have that right now, but
13 we do appreciate the question and thank you
14 for your support of the program.

15 MR. KOETZLE: The Comptroller does
16 have something in a study on what it would
17 cost to maintain all the roads in New York
18 State over the next 20 years. And it's
19 somewhere in the billions, obviously.

20 MR. ACQUARIO: Several billions.

21 MS. VAN EPPS: Several billions, yeah.

22 MR. KOETZLE: Several billions. So we
23 don't have it broken down by county, town, or
24 cities, but certainly it would be a

1 significant investment.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And then about
3 the clean water side of things. I mean, it
4 sounds like essentially what you're saying is
5 a CHIPS-like program, but for water
6 infrastructure. Correct?

7 MR. KOETZLE: Yes. Yes. I mean, I
8 think our logic is you are gracious enough to
9 give us money for CHIPS, right, so we pave
10 our roads -- and I've seen this as a
11 supervisor repeatedly. You pave the road,
12 and then there's a water main break. And
13 then you've got to dig that road up and fix
14 that water main break.

15 If we're not maintaining our -- and as
16 I mentioned, for towns and cities it's
17 probably even older. Our water systems are
18 60 years old now most of the times. They are
19 failing. So we're getting more and more
20 water main breaks. So why are we investing
21 on the road level when we're not investing
22 under the road?

23 And in order just to change those
24 water mains out before we repave the road,

1 that would be a huge, huge help for us.

2 So yes, formula, there's a -- and
3 let's make the formula fair for towns. But
4 certainly it would be better than grant-based
5 programs.

6 MR. ACQUARIO: I think, Assemblyman,
7 on the earlier question that you asked, I was
8 thinking about -- that's why we have
9 \$250 million in our testimony, because
10 that -- we believe it keeps things status quo
11 right now.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

13 MS. VAN EPPS: I'll just add that the
14 only -- one thing that I think makes CHIPS so
15 popular is that it's predictable and it is
16 based on a formula that makes sense. And it
17 also helps us with those preventive -- the
18 preventive maintenance, the day-to-day
19 operations, the day-to-day upkeep that will
20 help you avoid those crisis situations where
21 you then need several million dollars in
22 grant money.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And on the water, you
24 know, I recently met with one of my village

1 mayors -- a relatively small village. We're
2 actually doing a follow-up meeting at the end
3 of this week. Now that the residents have
4 become aware of lead pipe service lines,
5 they're all asking us, "Okay, what's next?
6 What's the next step here?"

7 And as you know, you know, it's great
8 to have the \$500 million that we've allocated
9 year after year after year, but we've put
10 very, very little of it towards that. And
11 I'm just wondering if you're hearing from
12 your members concerns that my residents are
13 saying, Hey, you just told me I have lead in
14 my service line and, what, I have to replace
15 it for 10,000 or \$15,000?

16 MR. KOETZLE: Lead and PFOAs are a
17 crisis, and our residents know it. And
18 they're asking about it.

19 I'll put that in perspective just for
20 a moment. Town of Glenville, because
21 obviously prior experience, we're a
22 30,000-person town. But only 11,000 people
23 are on the water. Okay, 11,000 people are on
24 water.

1 Before I left service there and came
2 here to the Association of Towns, we got an
3 estimate from our engineer that it's going to
4 cost us \$22 million to upgrade our water
5 plan, \$22 million. PFOA's now being found in
6 the --

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Hold that -- hold
8 that -- hold that thought, please.

9 Senate?

10 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. You know
12 what? I'm going to take mine, because I want
13 you to answer that sentence.

14 MR. KOETZLE: Okay.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So please
16 continue with your answer.

17 MR. KOETZLE: So with the PFOA issue
18 now, obviously the DEC and EPA, rightfully
19 so, are lowering the legal amount of PFOAs
20 allowed in the water system. And also, by
21 the way, it's going to happen in the sewer
22 systems too, the outflow as well, because
23 that PFOA comes right back out into the
24 environment through that system. So

1 rightfully so, they're lowering the levels
2 that are acceptable.

3 Right now they're higher. So towns in
4 particular will have to now have filtration
5 systems to take out these PFOAs that
6 corporations put into our water systems. We
7 didn't do it. But now we have to do that.

8 So now I get hit with, okay,
9 \$22 million just to upgrade and modernize
10 your water plant for 11,000 people, but your
11 PFOA, now, cleaning system is an
12 \$8 million -- on top of the \$22 million, an
13 \$8 million capital investment. And then the
14 operational costs of taking those carbon
15 filtration systems out and disposing of them
16 and putting new ones in either on a monthly
17 or quarterly basis is huge for a town.

18 So those are the issues that we're
19 dealing with with clean water for towns
20 trying to deliver that to their residents.
21 And I would say that it's going to be
22 unaffordable for folks.

23 We tie it back to affordable housing.
24 All this just comes back on the resident, and

1 they can't afford that any longer.

2 MR. ACQUARIO: You know, I couldn't
3 agree more, Senator, with the PFAS situation
4 that we have, 1,4-dioxane on Long Island.
5 PFOA, PFOS, pervasive over the island. I
6 think we've just scratched the surface of
7 what we know to be in our drinking water
8 systems.

9 And New York is the leader in the
10 United States right now, and the standards
11 that we have imposed, thanks to you, all the
12 great work that's done by our state -- but
13 this is going to be a massive cost to clean
14 up and maintain our clean drinking water from
15 PFAS and 1,4-dioxane.

16 We need \$40 million to implement the
17 lead -- the new lead testing program and to
18 set up the registry. You mentioned that; it
19 came up from one of the prior speakers. It
20 was a great thing that you did in lowering
21 the blood levels, but you never funded it.

22 And for us to do that work is
23 extremely hard. And I know Chris loves
24 counties to do a lot of work out there in

1 their communities.

2 MR. KOETZLE: You're so good at it.

3 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, we are good at
4 it.

5 (Laughter.)

6 MR. ACQUARIO: But we need funding.

7 And so I encourage you -- and I really
8 want to double down on what Chris is talking
9 about with PFOA and PFOS. It is going to be
10 a very difficult thing that corporations
11 polluted our drinking water and local
12 taxpayers are being required to clean it and
13 maintain it for the next 50 years by changing
14 these filtration systems.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I want to ask
16 you all, so I've been doing this now for
17 23 years up here in the Senate, and I thank
18 you all for your work and your members. And
19 I have watched the Cuomo Hunger Games
20 competitions that never worked or made sense,
21 and you described water grants being some --
22 you know, you apply and if you are good at
23 writing a grant you might get money for your
24 water and somebody else might not. I've

1 heard disagreements over who gets to control
2 EMS, even though we all agree we need good
3 ambulance service everywhere.

4 When Albany tries to dictate what you
5 should do and how, it never really seems to
6 work. So can you get together and actually
7 propose to Albany, somehow, a model that
8 actually provides equity and fairness and
9 rationale to a structure where you have
10 counties and within counties you have bigger
11 cities, which are sometimes not as big as
12 their towns and vice versa. And then if you
13 go into Long Island, don't even start about
14 how many levels of government there are
15 there.

16 (Laughter.)

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That, like, are
18 there other states that have just figured out
19 how to do it better and more equitably?
20 Because, Stephen, when you talked about it in
21 your testimony, I think about the Governor's
22 \$1 billion for environmental -- you know,
23 she's talking capital. But you're talking
24 about the importance of money to the

1 localities so that you can plan to do these
2 things, so that you can have rational
3 exercises in how to get the things done we
4 know we need.

5 I think that's a perfect example of
6 what I'm hoping that everybody could just
7 say, you know, we've got to change what we're
8 doing, all of us. So in some counties they
9 share their money with towns and cities; in
10 some counties they don't. I never understood
11 that. But that's how it works.

12 And again, I just come from this
13 little town called New York City. So it's
14 five counties that's all one government, and
15 we don't have all these layers. We do lots
16 of things wrong, but we don't have all of
17 that.

18 So do you think it's realistic that
19 you can all come up with a better model?
20 Because I've watched Albany for 23 years --
21 you know, mergers, acquisitions, grants,
22 carrots, sticks, efficiencies -- I don't see
23 that helping any of you. And I want it to
24 work better. So is -- like, have you looked

1 at other states? Do they have a better
2 model?

3 MR. ACQUARIO: You mean with the
4 state? I'm not sure I understand the essence
5 of the question.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So -- well,
7 because what I'm hearing is you all need more
8 resources. I get it. And we actually do
9 want the regional models of service delivery.
10 That makes sense, particularly when you can
11 have a town with three people next to a city
12 with four people, right, within a county of
13 12 people. Or the reverse. That it's not
14 working.

15 MR. ACQUARIO: Right.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And so we don't
17 give you enough money, I'll accept that. But
18 we're also almost clueless on how to do
19 equitable and fair distribution in
20 relationship to populations and what you
21 need. And we don't want duplication of
22 effort. I don't think any of you want
23 duplication of effort. You want a good,
24 equitable system for clean water, roads,

1 emergency response, police, et cetera.

2 So we don't seem to get there. So I
3 just am looking for, you know, a new idea
4 about how we get there.

5 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, to answer your
6 question, yes, I think we should get
7 together, the three associations, and come
8 talk to you about what we came up with.

9 But I think you have to appreciate the
10 evolution of how we got to where we are
11 today. Why did the State of New York require
12 the counties to fund the non-federal share of
13 Medicaid? It was only after that that you
14 did the first sales tax in Erie County to pay
15 entirely for Medicaid.

16 So the amount of programs and services
17 that counties are mandated in the State of
18 New York is unlike any other state in the
19 United States. And I'm not here to complain
20 about that. We're here to serve the people.
21 We work together.

22 But it's difficult when we need
23 funding on 1100 categories from the county
24 level. And the towns, cities and villages

1 may not need funding categories in those
2 particular areas. Therefore, Chris is asking
3 for a focused concentration of funding for a
4 particular area.

5 So from our perspective with any state
6 service, any state service, we're delivering
7 it. Any health and human services,
8 corrections, everything. Mental health,
9 opioids. Every single program is being
10 delivered and funded in large part through
11 county property taxes. And so it's a
12 complicated question that you pose.

13 I know Governor Cuomo tried. I know
14 Governor Hochul continues to try to do this.
15 But I think if you listen to us and some of
16 the issues that we're raising, for me it's
17 the county infrastructure program. We use
18 that for housing. We're trying to achieve
19 the state's goals to ask you for 100 million,
20 to ask you for 250 million in CHIPS funding.
21 These are the priorities of our governments.

22 As Barbara mentioned, she met with
23 200 people today. I met with a hundred
24 county officials today. That's what they

1 told me, to come to you to say, Bring up
2 these particular programs and let us manage
3 our affairs.

4 This is a home-rule state. We're
5 enshrined in the Constitution. Despite what
6 others may want it to be in the state, we are
7 not a Dillon's Rule state. We're a home-rule
8 state. A Dillon's Rule state is the local
9 governments can only act on what you allow
10 them to act on. And a home-rule state is the
11 other way around. Our powers are enshrined
12 in the Constitution. So we want to use those
13 powers without disruption of the state.

14 So I'll stop there.

15 MR. KOETZLE: So, Senator, I so
16 appreciate that question. It's a phenomenal
17 question. So thank you for that.

18 And I don't want to leave the
19 impression that local governments aren't
20 working well together. We work not just as
21 associations, but our governments work very,
22 very well together. We know what our jobs
23 are, we all know the division of labor in
24 those jobs, and we all deliver those

1 frontline services every single -- critical
2 services every single day to our residents.

3 I think in respect to our relationship
4 with the state, my perspective -- again, more
5 so maybe as a supervisor -- is that the state
6 is so diverse, right, in so many ways. And
7 state policy is not. State policy is, like,
8 this is how we want it. Well, that doesn't
9 work in Western New York, or it doesn't work
10 in the Adirondacks, or it may not work for
11 towns, it may work for counties.

12 I say let's figure out a way how we
13 can build a partnership between local
14 government and state government. I don't
15 feel it's as strong as it can be. How can we
16 help you achieve your policy goals by going
17 out and working with our local governments on
18 what you're trying to achieve?

19 And there's no better example of that
20 than in energy policy. We have, like it or
21 not, many, many towns that are rural with
22 farmland that do not want solar.

23 I have to stop.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We have to stop

1 at that one.

2 (Laughter.)

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

5 Assemblyman Schiavoni.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: Thank you,
7 Chair, and good afternoon. Thank you for
8 being here.

9 As a former town councilmember and
10 former trustee in a village, I appreciate
11 what you do and that your members certainly
12 are where the tires hit the pavement, if you
13 will. So your testimony is incredibly
14 important.

15 Getting back to the ambulance corps
16 conversation. Our ambulance corps, they come
17 in many different forms. They're, you know,
18 private corporations that are contracted
19 either by a village or a town. Some of them
20 are under fire districts. And it's I believe
21 your contention that the county should take
22 them over.

23 MR. KOETZLE: Ambulances.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: Excuse me?

1 MR. KOETZLE: If you're going to --

2 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: Ambulances,
3 right.

4 MR. KOETZLE: If you're going to
5 mandate ambulance to be a critical service
6 provided by municipalities, it's my
7 contention that it should be at the county
8 level.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: I come from a
10 county with a population of 105 million {sic}
11 people. We're bigger than the State of
12 Maine. And I certainly wouldn't want to be
13 the State of New York telling towns and
14 villages, you know, what to do with their
15 EMS. Particularly when they're staffed with
16 volunteers, dedicated volunteers who have
17 spent hundreds of hours, thousands of hours
18 of training, and they love their community
19 and love their folks in the community.

20 I agree with you that something needs
21 to happen. I believe some kind of
22 streamlining as far as municipal law to
23 govern these, kind of like a fire district or
24 something. You know, Assemblyman Otis has a

1 bill in --

2 MR. ACQUARIO: He does.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: -- that I
4 think there is something there.

5 But it kind of goes to the shift
6 between volunteerism and professional staff.
7 I know in my district, most of our ambulance
8 corps are now some sort of hybrid. So are
9 you advocating for that, a shift to
10 professional staff?

11 MR. ACQUARIO: Absolutely not. There
12 is no way they can afford it.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: But it would
14 be a huge hit taxwise to our --

15 MR. ACQUARIO: Look, the policy is
16 just wrong to shift it to the counties. It's
17 just wrong.

18 What is right is let the local
19 governments work it out amongst themselves.
20 No town wants to abrogate an EMS program and
21 shift it to the county. I've never heard of
22 that except for Chris bringing it up today.
23 This is the first time I've ever heard of
24 this.

1 (Laughter.)

2 ASSEMBLYMAN SCHIAVONI: Okay, so I
3 agree with you, and I'll stop you there
4 because I've got 34 seconds.

5 I appreciate your list as far as
6 civil service reforms to help all of you, and
7 I'll throw in our school districts as well.

8 And lastly, you mentioned that
9 63 percent of the roads in the State of
10 New York are town roads. I love this
11 statistic. Do you have traffic statistics?
12 I don't expect you to have it here. But if
13 you can do that for towns, villages, and
14 county, that certainly I believe would go a
15 long way to get funding from the State of
16 New York.

17 I know what you do. I know what a
18 culvert is. You know, it's -- just for one
19 example.

20 MR. KOETZLE: We certainly do. I want
21 to circle back.

22 Steve and I like each other even
23 though it doesn't seem that way.

24 (Laughter.)

1 MR. KOETZLE: But I'm only saying --
2 (Time clock sounding.)

3 MR. ACQUARIO: Oh, let him finish!
4 (Laughter.)

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay.

7 Senator Walczyk.

8 SENATOR WALCZYK: You were saying?
9 (Laughter.)

10 MR. KOETZLE: If you're going to
11 mandate it, then it belongs there. I'm not
12 suggesting you do mandate it. I'm just
13 saying if you do.

14 SENATOR WALCZYK: I'm glad you two
15 like each other.

16 The chairwoman of Finance today at
17 16:47 -- it's February the 4th, 2025 -- said:
18 When Albany tells you what to do, it never
19 seems to work.

20 UNIDENTIFIED VOICE: Hear, hear!
21 (Laughter.)

22 SENATOR WALCZYK: So to the
23 Association of Counties, what percentage of
24 county budgets go to unfunded mandates or to

1 mandates to the county? What percentage of
2 your county budget?

3 MR. ACQUARIO: If I had to take a
4 guess, I'd say about 85 percent of the county
5 budget is mandated.

6 SENATOR WALCZYK: And if you had to
7 ballpark the total in billions of dollars --

8 MR. ACQUARIO: Ten, 8 billion. We
9 send 14 billion to Albany every year.

10 SENATOR WALCZYK: You sent \$14 billion
11 to Albany for these mandated programs that
12 Albany mandates to the counties in a
13 home-rule state?

14 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes. And I'm not here
15 to complain about that, even though it's
16 crushing us.

17 Look, we're a dual-purpose government.
18 Wouldn't we like to provide EMS services if
19 the towns wanted us to? Of course we would.
20 But we're completely shackled with
21 state-mandated programs. We are an
22 administrative arm of the state, but we're
23 also a general-purpose unit.

24 That's why we do EMS -- 911, excuse

1 me, 911 services. That's why a county has a
2 911 operation. But we don't if the city
3 wants to do it. It's absurd to mandate
4 county takeover of a function like that when
5 the other unit of government wants to do that
6 service.

7 But yes, we are buried in unfunded
8 mandates and it's crippling our ability to
9 innovate locally and do things like Chris
10 wants us to do.

11 SENATOR WALCZYK: Just as a follow-up,
12 so if 85 percent of your budget and
13 \$14 billion are just in meeting the state's
14 mandates, how can counties even consider
15 lowering property taxes? How do they do
16 that?

17 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, it's through
18 innovation. It's through trying to do things
19 more efficiently. But it's just marginal on
20 what we can do. We can't. We can't.

21 We tried to, we tried to here and
22 lower -- but this is the first year that I've
23 seen eight counties breach the state's
24 property tax cap. What kind of message does

1 that send?

2 SENATOR WALCZYK: Ms. Van Epps, on
3 village PDs, what do you need from the state
4 for recruitment and retention? Police
5 departments.

6 MS. VAN EPPS: What are we hearing
7 from the state?

8 SENATOR WALCZYK: What do you need?

9 MS. VAN EPPS: Oh, what do we need.
10 Oh, my gosh, it's all about resources,
11 unfortunately. I mean, that's what it boils
12 down to, being able to -- you know, Chris
13 mentioned, you know, the competition with the
14 private sector. We have people poaching from
15 other agencies. I mean, it's all about
16 resources.

17 SENATOR WALCZYK: Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

19 Assemblyman Burke.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you,
21 Mr. Chair.

22 How are you guys doing today?

23 MR. KOETZLE: Good, how are you?

24 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Good.

1 I just have a general question about
2 connectivity amongst municipalities, you
3 know, across the state, specifically when it
4 comes to the trains.

5 So I'm in Buffalo. I have to travel
6 to Albany quite a bit. It's my understanding
7 it was quicker in 1924 to get from Buffalo to
8 Albany than it is in 2024. That's, you know,
9 aside from unacceptable as a government. Any
10 structure where you have to move people to
11 connect economies to function, that's
12 ridiculous.

13 Do you have positions on this? Have
14 you -- you know, there's been I know a bunch
15 of studies, and we'll hear it in the -- some
16 will say tens of billions of dollars. Some
17 will say you can do enough modifications even
18 in like the \$2 billion range to be very
19 strategic, to actually make it even
20 reasonable to move people.

21 But when, you know, we're talking --
22 we're talking about taxes a lot. We're
23 talking about, you know, local
24 municipalities' like reticence to raise

1 taxes. Some of that is because of just --
2 like obviously like people can only bear so
3 much. But when your buying power is
4 challenged all the time in our current
5 economy and the cost of, say, transportation
6 is up exponentially for a family, how are we
7 not seriously talking about this in such --
8 it seems actually completely unserious that
9 we govern that way. That a hundred years
10 later we somehow move people slower in such
11 an important, you know, transportation
12 medium.

13 Can you comment, please?

14 MR. ACQUARIO: I'll comment. Thank
15 you for the question.

16 And we couldn't agree more. You can't
17 fly; there's no flights. You've got to go
18 through Pennsylvania to get to Buffalo.

19 I think we need a massive, big, bold
20 plan and invest in high-speed rail. I mean,
21 this is the Empire State. Florida does it.
22 I don't know why we don't have that major
23 investment in high-speed rail. We would
24 100 percent support it.

1 We built the Thruway, the Erie Canal
2 before others did. We were the innovators.
3 And I 100 percent support your initiative.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: I mean, I would
5 love high-speed rail. I'll take -- I'll take
6 normal-speed rail. I'll take -- I'll take
7 1924 rail.

8 (Laughter.)

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: I'll take about
10 anything other than what we have, which is,
11 you know, the hell-rail that we have now.
12 Not only is it incredibly slow and
13 infuriating doing it, it's also just
14 incredibly uncomfortable.

15 MR. ACQUARIO: I think --

16 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: You know, it's
17 hot. It's --

18 MR. ACQUARIO: I think Long Island and
19 Hudson Valley and the Capital District and
20 other parts of the state would like to see
21 Western New York, and they just can't. It's
22 too far.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Yeah.

24 MR. ACQUARIO: If there were ways to

1 get there quicker, people would visit there.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: When we saw the
3 five big city mayors who were here earlier,
4 you know, they're talking about their
5 struggling regions, their struggling
6 economies. You know, transit-oriented
7 development is a very real thing.

8 So again, if you can't connect Buffalo
9 to Rochester to Syracuse to Albany -- if you
10 can't do that effectively, like, then really
11 what are we doing here? And I know we invest
12 a lot in roads and highways and CHIPS and we
13 talk about all the money we have to do for
14 roads and we talk about electric cars. But
15 an efficient, environmentally friendly way to
16 move people, it just -- you can imagine how
17 much time I personally spent sitting on a
18 train thinking about this and being angry
19 about it.

20 (Laughter.)

21 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: So I would just
22 like to -- I just want to take this
23 opportunity to address, like, what is a
24 priority for me, and that I would like to

1 continue the conversation with you going
2 forward.

3 MR. ACQUARIO: Absolutely.

4 MR. KOETZLE: Yes.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN BURKE: Thank you.

6 SENATOR O'MARA: Senator Borrello.

7 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you, Tom.

8 Thank you all for being here.

9 I spent 10 years in county government,
10 as Mr. Acquario knows. And, you know, we
11 talk about unfunded mandates, but I really
12 want to talk about the growth of those in so
13 many ways. You know, back when I was -- when
14 I first became a Senator, went from county
15 executive to Senator, about one in three
16 New Yorkers was on Medicaid. Now it's close
17 to half, five years later. And New York
18 State has gone out of their way to invite
19 people from around the world to come to
20 New York and to live on Medicaid,
21 essentially, the most expensive Medicaid
22 program in the nation.

23 And Steve, particularly to you, you
24 know, how has this impacted our county

1 budgets?

2 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, Medicaid is an
3 \$8 billion program. You have two programs
4 that consume 85 percent of all your available
5 revenue at the state level. What you do here
6 now, until April 1st, is for two programs:
7 education and Medicaid.

8 So what happens in Washington, D.C. --
9 who knows what's going to happen in
10 Washington, D.C. But I'll say this. If
11 there's any tweaks to the Affordable Care
12 Act, if there's any adjustments to the
13 eFMAP -- the enhanced federal Medicaid
14 assistance percentage -- that Washington
15 could potentially do, it will completely blow
16 a gigantic hole into your state Medicaid
17 budget.

18 So what does it mean for us? It means
19 everything. We can't fund and innovate and
20 get enhanced 911 services or fix our bridges
21 or focus more on our economic development or
22 do more for our seniors and our aging.

23 It's everything, Senator.

24 SENATOR BORRELLO: Well, and, you

1 know, that's the thing, you know. When you
2 think about county government and your tax
3 dollars, your property tax dollars -- and
4 town government as well -- you know, people,
5 it's -- quite frankly, the thing that people
6 expect from local government are things that
7 aren't quite frankly -- not often mandated,
8 you know?

9 Emergency services, road and bridge
10 maintenance and repair, you know, senior
11 services, veterans' services -- that's what
12 people expect from county government. And
13 those are the things, quite frankly, that if
14 you have to cut in order to fill those
15 unfunded mandates, you're going to have to
16 cut.

17 So what I want to touch on, just
18 briefly, is EMS. You know, when I was in
19 county government we created a Fly Car system
20 so we could support our local volunteers.
21 And it's worked well, but it's been costly.
22 But it is saving lives. That, to me, is the
23 way for county governments to support that,
24 and I know that that's something I think we

1 should fund more of here, and the thoughts on
2 that, so that we can close the gap and get
3 those calls answered quickly.

4 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, 100 percent.
5 That's what counties are doing. Like
6 counties like Wayne County is doing just
7 that, taking over EMS for the towns there.
8 It's happening. Albany County does a Fly
9 Car, Montgomery County does a Fly Car
10 service. It's something worth investing in.

11 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

13 Assemblyman Otis.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you all.
15 Thank you for your good testimony and
16 especially all the discussion about EMS
17 today, which is very helpful moving the
18 issue.

19 And I'll just say briefly, EMS should
20 not be a one-size-fits-all thing, that in
21 some places it works in municipal,
22 intermunicipal, county and/or regional, and
23 it varies.

24 But I have a question for each of you,

1 which is one of the issues is identification
2 of where we have gaps. And so I guess the
3 premise I have is it would probably, in my
4 mind, make sense that counties, towns,
5 cities, and villages work together to try and
6 identify where gap areas are in any part of
7 the state. Does that make sense to each of
8 you?

9 If you could -- and you're free to
10 riff further on EMS more, but let's start
11 with what's the best way or the quickest way
12 to identify where we have gap areas.

13 MR. KOETZLE: Gaps in EMS?

14 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Gaps in EMS.

15 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, we have to find
16 the gaps. I think perhaps funding a study
17 makes sense from the New York State
18 Department of Health. I mean, why would you
19 disrupt something that's working in
20 Westchester County and working well?

21 I mean, and it's all about response
22 time. When I hear 18 minutes in the
23 Adirondacks to get an ambulance, an EMS
24 vehicle to someone's house, that's

1 unacceptable.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Let me just ask the
3 question -- and we want to hear from
4 everybody. But don't your members in most
5 areas of the state have a sense of where
6 their areas are that have coverage --

7 MR. KOETZLE: Yes.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: -- and where there
9 are areas where we have gaps?

10 MR. KOETZLE: Rural areas. Rural
11 areas are certainly struggling with coverage,
12 no question about it.

13 And it's multilayered, right? You
14 don't have the volunteers, you don't have the
15 finance and the money for that. This whole
16 issue is multilevel.

17 Workforce development -- I've talked
18 to private companies. In my town, a private
19 company covers it. They don't have workforce
20 folks any more. So when they send a rig out
21 to cover something, they send that rig to the
22 hospital and they have to stay at the
23 hospital for whatever the rules for that are,
24 they're stuck there, they don't have anyone

1 else.

2 And so the more rural you get, the
3 more difficult that becomes for a community
4 to provide those services.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you.

6 And Barbara, we have 43 seconds left.

7 MS. VAN EPPS: I would just echo yes.
8 And that was one of the things I had
9 mentioned earlier, was this lack of data
10 doesn't allow us to know where those gaps
11 are.

12 And certainly communities know when
13 they're having gaps, but the issue is coming
14 together and somehow bringing -- you know,
15 getting comprehensive data attached to tell
16 us where that is, where those gaps are.

17 I do want to get on record, though,
18 that, Steve, I am not necessarily saying that
19 the counties need to take it over. I just
20 think we need to take a countywide --

21 MR. KOETZLE: Thank you, Barbara.

22 MS. VAN EPPS: -- or regional
23 approach --

24 MR. ACQUARIO: Oh, thank God.

1 MS. VAN EPPS: -- to looking at it,
2 which would help us do exactly what you're
3 suggesting, which is to identify those gaps.

4 But we can't do that community by
5 community. We have to come together and
6 bring all that data together and then
7 identify where those gaps are.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you all.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

10 Senate?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 Senator Fahy.

13 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you. Thank you,
14 Chair.

15 Thank you and welcome. Good to see
16 each of you. I missed some of the EMS
17 debate, so I will -- or discussion here. It
18 looks like it was a lively one. So I look
19 forward to following up on that and learning
20 a little bit more.

21 And I also thought we had made some
22 real progress on Medicaid, but happy to
23 follow up to see where we still -- it looks
24 like while we've made that progress, I know

1 we still have work to do.

2 A couple of things. I want to thank
3 each of you for your work on short-term
4 rental, the bill that I carried for seven
5 years, worked with Senator Hinchey on. Can
6 you just give me a minute, either of -- any
7 of you, on where we are with implementation?
8 And do you still expect tens of millions of
9 dollars in receipts on this, or has any of
10 that changed?

11 And again, I also hope that you're
12 already seeing some impact with the fact that
13 it seems to be empowering more towns and
14 villages to really push back and focus on
15 where this might -- the short-term rentals
16 may be fueling the housing shortage supply.

17 So on any of those fronts, if you
18 can ...

19 MR. KOETZLE: I haven't seen
20 implementation yet in the towns, so I can't
21 report on that.

22 One of the things I brought up
23 earlier, I'm not sure if you were in the room
24 for or not, but we -- the towns will not see

1 really a revenue growth because we don't get
2 the hotel occupancy, we don't get the sales
3 tax by right.

4 There are places where obviously
5 there's some share, but you have to go and
6 negotiate a share. But not all counties
7 share the sales tax. So we're not going to
8 see that.

9 We do believe hopefully it's going to
10 be helpful with the shortage in housing
11 availability, especially with trying to limit
12 the multi, you know, company trusts buying
13 these homes --

14 SENATOR FAHY: Yes.

15 MR. KOETZLE: -- which would be
16 phenomenal and greatly appreciated. But from
17 the towns' perspective, we haven't seen any
18 implementation yet.

19 SENATOR FAHY: Okay. Okay.

20 MS. VAN EPPS: I don't think we're
21 there yet, either.

22 But I did mention earlier in my
23 testimony that we do appreciate, you know,
24 this bill getting done and all your efforts

1 on it, along with Senator Hinchey.

2 We do see this as a great benefit to
3 have municipalities have that data in one
4 place so they can actually see where these
5 short-term rentals are and what are the
6 impacts they may or may not be having on
7 housing, as well as the whole issue of the
8 taxation and leveling the playing field. We
9 think that's of great benefit as well.

10 SENATOR FAHY: Yes. Thank you again
11 for the help.

12 Any impact thus far or any concerns or
13 any projections that you have made on some of
14 the proposed federal funding cuts? I don't
15 think any of those have hit you directly
16 right now, but I don't know if there's
17 anything you want to comment on in terms of
18 what you're hearing of projections.

19 Mr. Acquario, I already heard you
20 mention Medicaid.

21 MR. ACQUARIO: Yeah.

22 SENATOR FAHY: Anything else on that?

23 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, I mean, on the
24 STR, I want to congratulate you personally

1 and Senator Hinchey and all of you for
2 passing that legislation. That was historic
3 what you did. I think it's a national model,
4 and I think the best is yet to come on that.

5 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you.

6 MR. ACQUARIO: It is going in the
7 right direction, and we're very appreciative.

8 SENATOR FAHY: Thank you.

9 Thank you, Chair.

10 (Off the record.)

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
12 Kassay.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Thank you very
14 much for your testimony and your
15 representation.

16 Coming from village government myself,
17 I was compelled to represent us at the state
18 level in the district because I understand
19 that at local government levels sometimes
20 these issues feel like David versus
21 Goliath -- you know, big economic
22 infrastructure and environmental issues.

23 So I'm going to sprint through three
24 questions, and after you can grab those.

1 So sewers. In my district alone we
2 have communities like Coram and
3 Gordon Heights that have blighted commercial
4 areas. There are incredibly passionate and
5 smart residents who are trying to work
6 through these so that they can have daycares
7 and multifamily developments and all the
8 housing, but sewers is where the conversation
9 stops.

10 In just a few words, could you tell me
11 the best way for the state to help Coran and
12 communities like it better navigate or have
13 the state provide better access to sewers for
14 communities?

15 MR. KOETZLE: Formula-based funding.
16 SWAP.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Formula-based
18 funding, all right.

19 MS. VAN EPPS: I would agree with
20 that.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: All right. Do
22 we have consensus?

23 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Fabulous.

1 Wonderful. Thank you.

2 (Laughter.)

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: So that brings
4 us to housing. We need to diversify the
5 housing stock. So currently there's a lot of
6 multifamily developments going up in
7 Suffolk County, but a lot of it almost
8 exclusively is rental because of the
9 structure of the IDAs.

10 Are there conversations happening with
11 your members where we can -- where it is
12 maybe looking at restructuring the IDAs so
13 that there's not that financial incentive,
14 there's more parity so that we have a diverse
15 housing stock, you know, affordable but both,
16 you know, affordable for first-time home
17 buyers and other folks, different stages in
18 life, as well as affordable rentals?

19 MR. KOETZLE: IDAs get involved in
20 the -- yes, I said earlier that I think
21 that's appropriate, that would be fine.

22 The issue that towns have is that very
23 often county IDAs make the decisions and then
24 we give away the town's resources.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Right.

2 MR. KOETZLE: We would like to see
3 that gap closed and let the towns have more
4 control over their own --

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: I'd love to
6 be -- you know, learn more about that from
7 your perspective and see how the state might
8 be able to, you know, guide or assist in
9 that.

10 Last question: Municipal waste. So
11 especially on Long Island where we have, you
12 know, geographic constraints -- but I think
13 all throughout the State of New York -- we're
14 really facing questions on how to deal with
15 municipal waste. Would your members be
16 interested in increased state support for
17 regional conversations as far as how to deal
18 with our waste crisis?

19 MR. ACQUARIO: Yeah, I think the waste
20 crisis is a real one. And I think we need to
21 look to recycling efforts. Organic recycling
22 can process municipal solid waste and solve
23 Long Island's problems.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Great.

1 MR. ACQUARIO: Let me also say,
2 Assemblywoman, on the Governor's proposal for
3 hedge funds owning private housing stock, I
4 think that's -- her program, the proposal
5 makes a lot of sense.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Oh, that was my
7 stand up and clap moment at the State of the
8 State. So excited. So many friends can't --
9 you know, can't get in there. So looking
10 forward to supporting that.

11 Thank you very much.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator O'Mara.
14 Oh, excuse me. Senator Rolison next.

15 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
16 Madam Chair.

17 It's good to see all of you here
18 today. I really appreciate the discussion
19 amongst the three of you as well on
20 complicated issues. It's a good example of
21 how people get together and figure things
22 out.

23 And as someone who was in local
24 government for 19 years, it sometimes seems

1 to be easier on the other side because you're
2 just reacting to get things done based on
3 what the state tells you to do, whether they
4 get the funding or not, because you don't --
5 so I appreciate that.

6 And, I want to thank my colleagues. A
7 lot of great questions today back and forth
8 here in the hearing room. And so I wasn't
9 really sure what I was going to ask because
10 many of the questions have already been
11 asked. But one of the things in local
12 government, county government, there has been
13 sort of an example of a go-to person that can
14 help navigate amongst the various departments
15 within those governments.

16 And I've heard here and I've heard
17 back home in the district that that is needed
18 in Albany when it comes to various state
19 agencies. That you all have to work through
20 funding streams, regulations, reporting
21 requirements, and it takes so much time,
22 effort, and sometimes the staff that you
23 don't have. Why don't we have it, I think
24 would be -- would be -- and what would you

1 say to that to make it easier to navigate a
2 very complicated system?

3 Again, going back to real quickly, is
4 that yeah, the money's there, but you can't
5 get it. Or it takes forever to get it and
6 you can't lay out the in-kind, so to speak,
7 that comes with this, and sometimes many
8 projects don't get done.

9 So I would think -- and you don't have
10 to give it to me now, because I've got a
11 minute and 25 seconds, but I think that is
12 needed up here in various state agencies.

13 MR. KOETZLE: I think if you provided
14 a grant advocate from the state that would
15 help local governments find the right source
16 and administer grants, I think that would be
17 a home run.

18 MS. VAN EPPS: And even just a
19 clearinghouse. You can find it -- you know,
20 you have to go to the DOH website to find the
21 grants that DOH offers, EFC's website to find
22 EFC's grants. There's no one place you can
23 go to find all the grants that the state
24 offers.

1 And that's something we've been
2 working on in NYCOM, trying to pull all of
3 that together to have it in one place.

4 MR. KOETZLE: The CFA process, not to
5 leave that out, is a little bit difficult for
6 local governments as well, smaller
7 governments. They don't know how to interact
8 with the counsel. They don't know these
9 folks who are kind of bigwigs in the
10 community. They need help understanding that
11 whole process -- getting into the portal,
12 filling it out, all of that. It would be
13 huge if you have an advocate.

14 SENATOR ROLISON: Mr. Acquario,
15 30 seconds.

16 MR. ACQUARIO: Senator, I agree
17 completely. You would know, being a mayor
18 and chairman of a county legislature, it's a
19 complicated system.

20 The state agencies are extremely
21 complicated. The federal agencies are even
22 more difficult for us to access grants. For
23 the public, trying to interact with state
24 agencies is extremely difficult. But we

1 would definitely support what you're saying.

2 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
4 Levenberg.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEVENBERG: Thank you so
6 much for your testimony.

7 As so many of my colleagues, I also
8 served in local government, as town
9 supervisor in Ossining, and so I understand
10 so many of the issues that you've discussed
11 today and obviously am sympathetic.

12 I did want to kind of talk a little
13 bit about sales tax, because a couple of you
14 brought up that sales tax isn't shared. And
15 I had a bill talking about sales tax
16 transparency, which would require I think
17 it's the Department of Taxation and Finance
18 to disclose information that they already
19 have so that we understand where the sales
20 tax is being generated.

21 Because part of what I've heard is
22 that, you know -- I mean, certain counties
23 that don't share their sales tax, many of the
24 local municipalities feel like they're not

1 getting back the services that they need or
2 the money to support the services that they
3 need. I'm just curious what you think about
4 that.

5 And then my follow-up question -- I'm
6 just going to give them both to you because I
7 only have three minutes -- is about housing.
8 I mean, you know, obviously we talked a lot
9 about it. And I think, Barbara, you're the
10 one who said -- or I can't remember. One of
11 you said, you know, we want to help you help
12 us. Well, what do you think is the best way
13 that we can actually help municipalities?

14 One of the things that we're looking
15 at is actually asking for more money for that
16 Pro-Housing to use specifically for the
17 planning to get the grants or to get to
18 become a Pro-Housing Community.

19 But, you know, what else can we do as
20 a state to make sure that we help with those
21 neighborhood defenders, I guess we could call
22 them, and some of the issues that hold up the
23 development of housing? Not just
24 infrastructure; we talked a lot about that

1 already.

2 MR. KOETZLE: I'll take sales tax
3 quick, because it is a town issue. Towns do
4 not get it by right, as we all know. Some
5 towns do share, they're generous enough to
6 share. Some do not.

7 But the question was asked about how
8 do counties, you know, with the levy, how do
9 they give a tax cut? The answer is simple.
10 Sales tax growth. Right? We have record
11 sales tax growth. Counties are benefiting
12 from that. Towns by and large are not.

13 So even where they do share sales tax
14 with the towns, many of them don't share the
15 growth in the sales tax, and that's where the
16 real money is. So the Town of Glenville and
17 Schenectady, we get a flat 2 million. And
18 all that growth that occurred, we didn't get
19 a penny of that because the county doesn't
20 share.

21 So giving towns some ability to share
22 sales tax would be phenomenal for towns,
23 absolutely.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Thanks.

1 MS. VAN EPPS: If I can just quick
2 chime in on the housing. I mean, I mentioned
3 earlier some of the things that the Governor
4 proposed in the budget are going to be very
5 helpful, including the support for
6 infrastructure.

7 But also the broadening of some of
8 those tax credits, because our municipalities
9 are saying they need more flexibility so that
10 they can really take advantage of them but
11 also not to be boxing developers in by
12 putting too many requirements on them,
13 because they're walking away from projects as
14 a result.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN KASSAY: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

17 Senator?

18 (Laughter.)

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Tom
20 O'Mara is making me laugh, and he still gets
21 five minutes.

22 (Laughter.)

23 SENATOR O'MARA: Five minutes.
24 Hopefully we can do this in less than

1 five minutes.

2 Thank you all for being here. It has
3 been a very good panel. So thank you for
4 your input on this.

5 Steve, from the county's perspective,
6 you mentioned a few answers with
7 Senator Walczyk on the total amount of
8 unfunded mandates that the county is
9 carrying. What was that amount again?

10 MR. ACQUARIO: Unfunded mandates?

11 SENATOR O'MARA: Yeah.

12 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, it's 8 billion in
13 one, in Medicaid. And it's about
14 14 billion --

15 SENATOR O'MARA: So Medicaid's still
16 about 8 billion.

17 MR. ACQUARIO: Eight billion, each and
18 every year from the --

19 SENATOR O'MARA: And if those unfunded
20 mandates were funded fully by the state for
21 the services the counties are providing, what
22 would the counties -- in your opinion, what
23 would the counties' response be as far as how
24 far would they lower property taxes based on

1 the easing up of those unfunded mandates?

2 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, you could lower
3 property taxes or share sales taxes with
4 towns.

5 SENATOR O'MARA: Does that go over
6 well?

7 MR. KOETZLE: We -- we're going to
8 hold them to that.

9 SENATOR O'MARA: Yeah, right.

10 MR. ACQUARIO: I mean, obviously local
11 governments want to work together. And if we
12 can share taxes, sales taxes with towns and
13 others, we would. And we are, and we do.

14 But it's hard to do that when you're
15 doing a billion dollars in delinquent
16 property taxes that we're making the towns
17 whole with.

18 So it's a complicated thing. When you
19 pull the string, these local governments have
20 evolved over the years working together
21 locally and sharing things locally based on
22 what they negotiate through MOUs. So I would
23 really caution you on making changes in that
24 regard.

1 SENATOR O'MARA: Caution on making
2 changes in what regard?

3 MR. ACQUARIO: Requiring counties to
4 share sales taxes.

5 SENATOR O'MARA: Oh, no, I'm talking
6 about the unfunded mandates and what the
7 county's reaction would be -- I mean, would
8 it be a dollar-for-dollar reduction in
9 property taxes?

10 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes.

11 SENATOR O'MARA: Probably not.

12 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes, Senator.

13 SENATOR O'MARA: It would be a
14 dollar-for-dollar?

15 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes, Senator

16 SENATOR O'MARA: Counties would commit
17 to that?

18 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes.

19 SENATOR O'MARA: Excellent.

20 The last couple of years there's been
21 some changes the Governor has made to the
22 eFMAP funding. What's your understanding of
23 where that stands now? That was kind of an
24 off-budget thing that was done. And what's

1 the impact to the counties been over the last
2 two years of that holdback of eFMAP funds
3 that were supposed to go to the counties from
4 the federal government but didn't get to
5 them?

6 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, it's over a
7 billion dollars right now that has been
8 intercepted. It was an egregious act by the
9 state. It was wrong.

10 What happened? We fought it, the
11 hardest we've fought anything, and we lost
12 it. And you heard the City Council speaking
13 about that today, that they want that money
14 back. I don't know what Washington, D.C.,
15 will do with respect to that.

16 But as long as that is on the books,
17 this is a \$400 million loss for the counties.

18 SENATOR O'MARA: Now is it -- from
19 your perspective, was that a scenario that --
20 certainly the Governor took that unilateral
21 action to hold that money, intercept that
22 money. But the Biden administration allowed
23 that to happen, right?

24 MR. ACQUARIO: They were complicit,

1 yes. And that's partially the reason why
2 eight counties exceeded their property tax
3 cap this year.

4 SENATOR O'MARA: Do you have any hope
5 that there will be a different interpretation
6 or approach on that by the Trump
7 administration in Washington now?

8 MR. ACQUARIO: I think Medicaid is one
9 of the number-one policy areas that the new
10 administration's going to be looking at in
11 Washington, D.C. How they interpret that --
12 do they reduce the floor for New York State,
13 which would throw New York State into chaos?
14 Do they create block grants for Medicaid for
15 the states, which would also throw our state
16 into chaos?

17 Right now every program that you
18 create in Medicaid, you draw down a 50-cent
19 match. They may change that.

20 So I don't have the answer to that,
21 Senator. Perhaps.

22 SENATOR O'MARA: These are the various
23 multiple, many waivers that New York State
24 has obtained from the federal government to

1 even multiply the Medicaid dollars that come
2 to the state.

3 MR. ACQUARIO: Yes. Yes.

4 SENATOR O'MARA: So those are in
5 jeopardy.

6 MR. ACQUARIO: Those are definitely
7 going to be looked at in a different lens
8 now.

9 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you. Thank you
10 all.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
12 Assembly?

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
14 Shimsky.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: I think I'll
16 start with the subject area that's basically
17 the counties' purview, so the two of you can
18 take a little bit of a lap.

19 Public health. That is something we
20 saw with COVID, how vital having a strong
21 public health system is. They obviously have
22 to work closely with the state.

23 How do you see our public health
24 infrastructure on the county level

1 functioning, and what do we need to do to
2 strengthen it?

3 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, I think it's
4 resilient. I think that the counties were
5 heroes. They had heroic efforts during
6 COVID. And I can't applaud them enough for
7 distributing body bags, to distributing N95
8 masks and everything in between. But they
9 are in desperate need of an Article VI public
10 health increase.

11 I mean, we need to increase
12 Article VI. We only get 36 percent. You
13 heard New York City talk about this today. A
14 few years ago, you, at the request of the
15 Governor, eliminated the medical examiner
16 from being reimbursed under Article VI.
17 That's wrong. You should return to that and
18 we should try to innovate on regional medical
19 examiner offices and other functions that
20 counties do, coroners and medical
21 examiners -- incredibly important, but
22 excluded from Article VI public health.

23 That's important to New York City,
24 that's important to the 57 counties. So I

1 really strongly encourage you to look at an
2 opportunity to increase Article VI public
3 health spending.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: We'll do a
5 follow-up on that.

6 Is that -- we were talking before
7 about how the counties really don't use much
8 the intermunicipal cooperation and efficiency
9 agreements. Do you think that -- is there
10 something in the law that excludes the
11 counties' ability to use that for such issues
12 as coroners and medical examiners? Or is
13 that something that may actually breathe new
14 life into that part of the program?

15 MR. ACQUARIO: I think it's better off
16 through Article VI public health
17 reimbursement, as opposed to applying for a
18 grant. For all the reasons that Chris
19 elaborated, it's just not worth it.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: The grants --

21 MR. ACQUARIO: It's not worth it.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: Yeah. Well,
23 one of the things we're going to have to do
24 and one of the things I wanted to bring up,

1 too, is compliance.

2 We all know how important compliance
3 is. But sometimes when the scandal of the
4 year happens, there's another layer of
5 compliance put on. And it's not clear that
6 that compliance is going to solve the
7 problem, but it adds to everyone else's
8 expense.

9 Do you see a way of -- and this is a
10 jump ball for all three of you in 9 seconds.
11 What should we do about that?

12 MR. ACQUARIO: I'm just --

13 MR. KOETZLE: I lost three.

14 (Laughter.)

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: I'll ask next
16 year.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay.

18 Senator Rachel May.

19 SENATOR MAY: Thank you. Thank you.

20 So Syracuse has the highest child
21 poverty in the country, the fastest-rising
22 rents. It's got -- for the first time ever
23 the homeless population has more families
24 with children than single individuals.

1 Today the Faith-Based Affordable
2 Housing Coalition was here arguing for that
3 policy that would allow faith institutions to
4 use their land to build affordable housing to
5 house the people who -- it's in their mission
6 to try to help.

7 Last year, local governments went
8 ballistic against this policy. So what can
9 be done to bring local governments along?
10 What changes are needed in that policy in
11 order to make what seems to me like a
12 no-brainer to use that land, to use those
13 missions, to really get some affordable
14 housing in communities where there isn't
15 enough?

16 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, I'll just lead us
17 off here.

18 First of all, I'm sorry that Syracuse
19 has that level of poverty. That's -- I have
20 been watching that over the years, and it
21 seems to have gotten worse.

22 But when I convened 20 county
23 executives three weeks ago and we talked
24 about this issue, of all the issues that were

1 on the table, they all talked about
2 homelessness and how to deal with it.

3 Monroe County actually bought a hotel,
4 instead of renting it, because the state was
5 so difficult on the regulations, how much it
6 was costing for a room for one person --
7 \$1100 a day to rent the one room with
8 children in there -- it made no sense. So
9 they bought the hotel.

10 There's better ways to do it. We have
11 to focus on how to help the counties help the
12 homelessness.

13 MS. VAN EPPS: The only thing I will
14 add is that our members -- you know, this has
15 been such a controversial issue. But
16 everybody recognizes that homelessness is an
17 epidemic across our -- particularly our
18 cities.

19 And the one thing that we get a little
20 bit frustrated with -- again, Steve, I don't
21 want you to think we're picking on you -- is
22 that a lot of the resources for these types
23 of services go to the counties, but it's the
24 cities that are really dealing with these

1 people 24/7. And so we want the state to
2 come together in using, you know, our --
3 talking with us as well about how to better
4 allocate these resources so they will go to
5 the communities that are actually performing
6 some of those services.

7 Not that the counties aren't, but the
8 counties are more 9-to-5, where we're 24/7
9 and we're dealing with people on the streets
10 at 2 a.m. And so we just want to talk a
11 little bit more about how we can better
12 allocate those resources.

13 MR. KOETZLE: And on this, I just want
14 to quickly remind my friend Steve that
15 counties make towns whole on property taxes
16 because towns do not have foreclosure power
17 like counties have, and that's why.

18 So one doesn't have anything to do
19 with the other on the sales tax.

20 MR. ACQUARIO: Actually, it does. The
21 United States Supreme Court just ruled we
22 can't keep any surplus. So we're stuck with
23 that.

24 MR. KOETZLE: But you get your money

1 back. We can't.

2 MR. ACQUARIO: We don't get our money
3 back.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off.)
5 Senator Alexis Weik.

6 SENATOR WEIK: Thank you very much.

7 I want to thank you very much for your
8 testimony today. I can't agree with you more
9 when you say that local control is the best
10 way to do it, having come from local
11 government as well.

12 I want to go back to the unfunded
13 mandates. I'm just curious, at each level,
14 are there antiquated unfunded mandates that
15 we could look to do away with? I know how
16 difficult it is when you talk about property
17 taxes and how you're going to lower property
18 taxes, when three-quarters of the bill is
19 typically school taxes. It's not town and
20 county that's really making it unaffordable
21 for people to buy homes.

22 And so when we do that, one of the
23 ways we could look to make trims to that is
24 to perhaps look at any unfunded mandates that

1 could be antiquated, duplicative. Is there
2 anything that could be eliminated or that you
3 would ask to have eliminated?

4 MR. KOETZLE: If I can jump in quick.
5 Senator, this is a great question because my
6 staff and I were just talking today that we
7 are going to study this and we're going to
8 come to you -- maybe not this year -- we're
9 going to come to you with a Local Government
10 Modernization and Efficiency Act with a bunch
11 of things in there.

12 And some of the things you've already
13 called out on that are some simple things
14 like, you know, requiring us to put
15 everything in the newspaper, all our notices
16 in the newspaper, is incredibly expensive to
17 the town. If we could use our internet, if
18 we could use social -- if we can use
19 modern-day tools, it would save us a
20 tremendous amount of money.

21 There's a whole bunch of stuff in the
22 MS4 program now that is -- new mandates have
23 just come down that require us to do a lot
24 more work there, so we have to hire more

1 people.

2 But we're starting to identify those
3 kind of antiquated things in at least town
4 government and how can we move forward and
5 save money. So we'll be coming back to you
6 with a report on that.

7 SENATOR WEIK: I look forward to that.

8 And is there any kind of duplicity
9 {sic} between the village to the town and the
10 town to the county where perhaps you could be
11 working better together and eliminate
12 unfunded mandates in that manner as well?

13 MR. KOETZLE: I mean, think we could
14 all work together better always, right? But
15 I think we have a pretty clear division of
16 labor on the duties that we provide for our
17 residents.

18 But, you know, you can look at places
19 like the DPWs we all run or the DOTs we all
20 run and try to figure out can we do more with
21 sharing salt sheds, can we share more
22 equipment. There's more that I think can
23 always be done there.

24 It's a lot more difficult than it

1 sounds, because very often if we're sharing a
2 piece of equipment between the county and the
3 town -- and we both need it at the same time
4 very often, so it becomes very hard for that
5 to --

6 SENATOR WEIK: I'm just trying -- like
7 as far as unfunded mandates go.

8 MR. KOETZLE: Oh, unfunded mandates.

9 SENATOR WEIK: With the purpose of
10 trying to trim down some of those unfunded
11 mandates in order to make your budget a
12 little better and to be able to offer those
13 lower amounts.

14 MR. ACQUARIO: Well, the towns don't
15 have any unfunded mandates. That's just the
16 counties.

17 MR. KOETZLE: That's not true.

18 MR. ACQUARIO: So what we would
19 suggest is in the age zero to five-year-olds
20 for special education, in early intervention
21 and preschool special education, those areas,
22 we have to do and can do a better job with
23 the -- there's two state agencies involved
24 here.

1 You have the Department of Health with
2 a newborn to a three-year-old, and the
3 Department of Education from a three-year-old
4 to a five-year-old. They're not integrated.
5 The care is not consistently from the child's
6 life from zero to five, and then six to 12
7 goes to yet another system.

8 So I think we could do a better job,
9 save money there. It's duplicative between
10 what the counties are doing, the school
11 districts are doing, the State Education
12 Department and the Health Department. So
13 that's one area.

14 The other area I would mention is
15 Part 730, mental health competency. When you
16 have to stand for a criminal charge, you have
17 to be deemed competent. The state changed
18 that from a fifty-fifty partnership. They
19 didn't put it on the towns, they put it on
20 the counties to pay the other 75, 100 percent
21 of that cost for mental competency right now.
22 That has gone up 3,000 percent in some
23 counties.

24 So mental health competency, big

1 mandate, unfunded.

2 MS. VAN EPPS: Can I just chime in?

3 The ones we talk about most -- and
4 again, we just had our 200 mayors in town --
5 Scaffold Law, prevailing wage, the fact that
6 we can't use design-build. Those are the
7 things that our people focus on because
8 that's hurting our economic development.

9 And I know that some of them are
10 third-rail issues, but that's what we talk
11 about when we talk about unfunded mandates.

12 SENATOR WEIK: Thank you very much.

13 MR. ACQUARIO: Thank you.

14 MR. KOETZLE: Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right. I
16 think Senate's done.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate's done. The
18 Assembly's done except for me and my pearls
19 of wisdom.

20 I just find it interesting that it's
21 going to take over a year to figure out what
22 unfunded mandates you have. If they're so
23 antiquated, they should be on the tip of your
24 tongue. I mean, the county, he came up

1 with -- you know, he came up quick.

2 I'd have to disagree with you about
3 affordability of housing. You said if we
4 lowered property taxes, it would make houses
5 more affordable. That flies in the face of
6 economics. Because if we lowered the price
7 of a -- if we lowered -- if we made it more
8 affordable, more people would want it.

9 The object now is to buy in desirable
10 areas. So the more desirable an area, the
11 more the costs are. And it really has
12 nothing do with those costs if someone can
13 afford it.

14 I did a quick study once, and some of
15 my colleagues might remember this, when I
16 asked a group of well-to-do people in
17 Westchester: How many people of you own a
18 home or a condo or a co-op? And, you know,
19 80 percent raised their hand and said yes.
20 And this was a conference where we were
21 talking about affordable housing.

22 And I said, How many of you are
23 willing to sell your home or your condo, your
24 co-op, for less than you paid for it? And no

1 one said yes.

2 And I said: There's your problem.

3 The problem is us. We all want more than
4 what it is that we paid for whatever it is
5 that we have. And we've blocked out anyone
6 that's in the same income level that was
7 where we were when we bought what we have.

8 Does that make sense?

9 UNIDENTIFIED LEGISLATOR: That makes
10 sense to me.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So things -- the
12 only way to make something affordable is
13 something none of us want to do, and that is
14 to make our area, our town, our village, our
15 city less desirable.

16 And if you lower the desirability of
17 some place, then you're going to have people
18 wanting to buy there but not willing to pay
19 as much. And then none of us want to do
20 that. Making things, you know -- it's just
21 going to be difficult.

22 And, you know, the unfunded mandates
23 that the counties have -- I mean, Steve, I
24 don't know if you know the history behind

1 that, but when Medicaid first came about, it
2 was a group of individuals in the Senate in
3 New York that thought that all the poor
4 people in New York lived in New York City
5 where those D's lived, and we're going to put
6 some of it on them.

7 So instead of doing what every other
8 state did, which was to pay -- the state paid
9 half and the feds paid half, they put a
10 quarter of it on the counties and a quarter
11 on the state and half on the feds. And lo
12 and behold, there's a whole bunch of people
13 in the other 60-x counties in the State of
14 New York that no one thought existed. But
15 when it came time for the funding or paying
16 the Medicaid, they all showed up. So that's
17 where that is.

18 Now, there are some mandates that we
19 would like to get rid of. But I had a
20 similar conversation in a meeting with school
21 superintendents, there were a couple of
22 school districts there, and they were
23 complaining about unfunded mandates. And I
24 said, Which mandates do you not want? And

1 they couldn't think of a single one, because
2 every one that they had was important to that
3 school district or to their school districts.

4 So just to eliminate mandates is not
5 the answer, because someone has to pay for
6 it. And, you know, it turns out it's all of
7 our constituents are actually the ones that
8 are paying for it, whether they're our county
9 constituents, town constituents, village
10 constituents, city constituents, state
11 constituents. It doesn't matter. They're
12 all New Yorkers in the case that we're
13 talking about.

14 So we do have some issues that we have
15 to look at. We do have things that we have
16 to do. We can try to save some money. I'm
17 frightened half to death right now about
18 what's coming out of Washington, because
19 you're all -- everyone sitting at that table
20 depends in some way on federal funding. And
21 I'm hearing they're shutting down the
22 Department of Education, not paying this, not
23 paying that -- those costs are all going to
24 translate to the counties, the state, the

1 cities and villages at some point in time.
2 And I think it will make this -- not only
3 this state, but this country unaffordable.

4 But anyway, that was just me rambling
5 on. I want to thank you all for your
6 participation in this. If you have any
7 response to anything that I said, I'd love to
8 hear it. Yes?

9 MR. KOETZLE: I would, Assemblyman,
10 and I appreciate your comments. And I don't
11 disagree.

12 Affordable housing is very, very
13 difficult with many, many, many different
14 layers. There's no question about it. And
15 there's a lot of different ways to attack it.

16 My only suggestion was -- and I'll
17 just use my own personal example. Fifteen
18 years ago I bought my house, and my mortgage
19 was a thousand dollars and my property tax
20 was \$650. Today my mortgage is a
21 thousand dollars and my property tax is
22 \$1200. That makes that house a lot less
23 affordable.

24 Now, that's only on me. We could

1 take that and any other house you want to
2 take. But that makes that so much less
3 affordable for people. I have three
4 children; all three of them are trying to buy
5 houses today. Not one of them can afford a
6 house today, because of the property tax and
7 the fact that house pricing has gone through
8 the roof because of some of the things we
9 addressed with the Senator where we have
10 houses -- you know, these multi-trusts buying
11 these houses up and things like that.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I don't think the
13 difference between the property tax 15 years
14 ago and the property tax now has anything to
15 do with affordability. The affordability
16 comes with the inflation and the increase in
17 the value.

18 If you paid \$100,000 for your house 15
19 years ago and now you want \$900,000 for that
20 exact same house, that's not because the
21 property tax went up, you know, double.
22 That's because inflation and the desirability
23 of the property that you own has increased
24 the perceived value in a prospective buyer.

1 MR. KOETZLE: Right. But the wages
2 have not kept up with property taxes.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Well, that is my
4 point. That's my point. When your house
5 goes up to what you're going to ask for it
6 now, the wages haven't gone up, so what
7 you've done is priced out every individual
8 that was earning what you were earning when
9 you qualified for your mortgage 15 years ago.
10 So you priced them out.

11 So now instead of having to earn
12 \$50,000 to buy your house 15 years ago, you
13 have to earn \$150,000, because you're raising
14 the price of your house too much. It had
15 nothing at all to do with the property taxes.
16 The property taxes went to schools, it went
17 to police, it went to fire, it went to
18 garbage removal, it went to health, it didn't
19 go to anything.

20 MR. KOETZLE: And some of these -- and
21 some of these mandates. But then, you know,
22 I -- we do know what the mandates are. I
23 didn't have time to go through all the
24 mandates, but we do know what the mandates

1 are.

2 And my friend Steve is incorrect;
3 there are a tremendous amount of mandates on
4 towns. I mentioned some of them. I
5 mentioned the newspaper mandate, that's huge.

6 But when you look at the building
7 code, right? You folks all implement the
8 building code, but where does that fall to
9 implement it? It falls to local governments.
10 So every time there's a new mandate out of
11 the building code, we have to go and enforce
12 it. And often towns, we don't have the
13 inspectors to be able to do that.

14 New fire standards, when they come in,
15 we have to be the ones doing all the fire
16 inspections now. That falls to towns. It
17 doesn't fall to counties, it falls to towns.

18 When you look at MS4 -- we could be
19 here for a whole 'nother, you know, couple of
20 hours on MS4 regulations and what's now is
21 being mandated -- the new MS4 mandates on
22 towns. We don't have the people, we can't
23 afford the people to go -- and now we have to
24 inspect not just our outflows, we have to

1 inspect every private outflow in the entire
2 town. And now you look at my town, the Town
3 of Glenville, that's going to require three,
4 four new people. That's the most expensive
5 cost we have to a town.

6 So the mandates that require things
7 that require employees is extremely,
8 extremely expensive.

9 So, you know, I'm looking forward to
10 working on how we can make housing more
11 affordable. I think it's a crisis of our
12 time, there's no question about it. We're
13 here to help, we're here to try to find
14 answers to that. And if we can find answers
15 to mandates at least being funded, that would
16 be -- that would be tremendous.

17 But we'll have a whole comprehensive
18 list for you. We just don't have time today
19 to go through the entire list. And I don't
20 want to take time from my colleagues. I know
21 Steve has a -- wants to say something too.

22 MR. ACQUARIO: The only thing --
23 thanks, Chris.

24 The only thing I would say is to

1 redouble our efforts. In addition to seniors
2 not leaving their homes now, not going into
3 nursing homes, which is a very good thing,
4 those houses are not going on the market
5 these days.

6 And the other thing I wanted to
7 reemphasize is the hedge funds owning
8 20 percent of the available inventory of
9 houses on the open market. So --

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That is definitely
11 going to be a problem now.

12 MR. ACQUARIO: Another barrier.

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You know, the
14 Governor's budget attempts to address that.
15 I really don't know how successful it's going
16 to be to say that certain groups can't get
17 into the housing, you know, purchase market
18 for 75 --

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I have a bill
20 that's better than her --

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: All right.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Everyone should
23 look at it, it's a Senate/Assembly bill --

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I'll look at it.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- limiting
2 private equity buying up houses. Okay.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Lady and gentlemen,
4 thank you very much for your participation.

5 MR. KOETZLE: Thank you.

6 MR. ACQUARIO: Thank you.

7 MS. VAN EPPS: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
9 much.

10 MR. KOETZLE: Appreciate it. Thank
11 you.

12 (Off the record.)

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Good evening,
14 everyone, and welcome.

15 We're going to pull an audible on this
16 because the chairs of our Election Committees
17 weren't originally part of this, but they are
18 now. And we have the chair of the
19 Assembly -- and the ranking -- Elections
20 Committee, and the chair of the Senate -- and
21 ranking -- Election Committee. So we have
22 everyone. They will get 10 minutes each, the
23 rankers will get five.

24 Everyone else at this hearing --

1 except for Ed Ra, myself, and Senator Krueger
2 and the ranker on the Finance Committee --
3 will have our short time. And the other
4 chairs of the other various committees are
5 regular members this time, and they get three
6 minutes.

7 Is that understood, everyone? Yes.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes. Of course.

9 And you each get three minutes
10 (indicating panel).

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Right.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And you want them
13 to each introduce themselves?

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Yes, just for the
15 media, if they're still taking stuff up here,
16 if you'd just go through quickly and mention
17 who you are.

18 And then we'll decide what the
19 speaking order would be, whether you want to
20 start from the left or the right or the
21 middle and work out, however you guys decide
22 you want to do it.

23 MR. CZARNY: Hi, I'm Dustin Czarny.
24 I'm the Democratic caucus chair for the

1 New York State Elections Commissioner
2 Association and a commissioner from
3 Onondaga County.

4 MS. PINO: Hi, everyone. Marina Pino,
5 counsel with the Brennan Center for Justice.

6 MS. SMITKA: Hi. Erica Smitka,
7 executive director, League of Women Voters of
8 New York State.

9 MS. WHARTON: Hi, I'm Karen Wharton,
10 democracy coalition coordinator at
11 Citizen Action, and fair election
12 facilitator.

13 MS. LERNER: I'm Susan Lerner. I'm
14 the executive director of Common Cause
15 New York and one of the founders of the
16 Let New York Vote Coalition.

17 MR. CZARNY: We might as well go in
18 the same order, right? All right.

19 Well, thank you very much for allowing
20 me to come and speak once again. In my role
21 today I'll be speaking on our bipartisan
22 request from the New York State Election
23 Commissioners Association.

24 We applaud the Governor's budget for

1 including many different things in it,
2 including and most importantly the
3 reappropriation of some of the grants that
4 were appropriated last year, most importantly
5 the poll book grant, which is going to
6 address our aging poll book infrastructure.
7 We went to electronic poll books in New York
8 in 2019, and many of those poll books that
9 were bought at that time period are now
10 starting to age out and they will not be
11 available for the new IOS.

12 Most of our poll books are Apple
13 products, and the fifth and sixth generation
14 poll books that were bought back in 2019, the
15 new IOS 18 is not going to cover that, and
16 that means that they would not be secure. So
17 we need to replace that infrastructure.

18 And we ask, you know -- this body
19 generously gave us this grant last year, but
20 in the middle of the presidential election
21 many counties were not able to spend that
22 money to replace their poll book fleet and
23 they plan to do so this year, when the new
24 iPad 11th generation is released sometime

1 later in the year. So we ask for that grant
2 to be reappropriated.

3 We also ask for more flexibility in
4 the grants that this body and the Governor
5 approve. So last year you provided an Aid to
6 Localities grant which was very flexible and
7 allowed different counties to be able to use
8 that money in the ways that they need in
9 their county. Some counties need staffing,
10 some need infrastructure, some need to buy
11 new voting equipment, some need to upgrade
12 their facilities and their buildings and
13 upgrade their security.

14 So we ask that when this body starts
15 to apply grants for elections that they allow
16 for more flexibility in these grants and
17 longer time periods in these grants, so we
18 don't always have to ask for them to be
19 reappropriated each year and that the county
20 boards of commissioners can do long-term
21 planning to continually upgrade our election
22 infrastructure so that they have the most
23 secure, up-to-date and functional voting
24 equipment for our public.

1 I'm going to end a little early, but I
2 want to thank you all. And I do need to note
3 that New York is one of the few states that
4 doesn't have annual funding for county boards
5 of elections, and we do ask for it each year.
6 I hope that we will start to address that in
7 the future budgets.

8 Thank you.

9 MS. PINO: Good afternoon,
10 Chairs Pretlow and Krueger and members of the
11 Legislature. Again, my name is Marina Pino,
12 and I'm counsel for the Brennan Center for
13 Justice. Thank you for this opportunity to
14 testify in support of funding for our
15 democracy infrastructure.

16 We commend this body for championing
17 reforms to build a stronger and more
18 inclusive democracy. You have provided a
19 blueprint for campaign finance reform
20 nationwide, and you have made New York a
21 leader in fighting race-based voter
22 suppression.

23 As you continue this vital work, I'd
24 like to preview some findings of a

1 Brennan Center analysis of the public
2 financing program's first cycle, which will
3 be published later this week. Data show the
4 program has already transformed the state's
5 campaign finance landscape for the better.

6 While big money dominated races
7 nationwide in unprecedented ways last year,
8 New York showed that there is an alternative
9 path forward. The program made constituents'
10 small, in-district donations much more
11 important to candidates' fundraising. In
12 recent cycles these contributions barely made
13 up 5 percent of overall funding, but with
14 public financing they jumped to 45 percent
15 when including matching funds. At the same
16 time, the share of large donations from
17 individuals and entities like PACs decreased
18 substantially from prior cycles.

19 The data also showed a sizable
20 increase in civic engagement. About twice as
21 many New Yorkers made small, in-district
22 contributions as in 2020 and in 2022. The
23 shift in fundraising occurred in all corners
24 of the state, across party lines, and in

1 rural, urban, and suburban communities of
2 diverse socioeconomic levels.

3 Critically, independent expenditures
4 did not diminish the program's success. The
5 vast majority of this outside spending was
6 concentrated in just 10 percent of
7 legislative districts, and publicly financed
8 candidates facing that spending still ran
9 viable campaigns.

10 The program needs full funding to keep
11 succeeding. We strongly support the
12 Executive Budget's appropriation of
13 \$114.5 million. This funding covers
14 administrative needs, including a
15 user-friendly online platform and matching
16 funds to give candidates and small donors
17 alike confidence in the program ahead of the
18 first statewide cycle.

19 We also urge this Legislature to
20 ensure the final budget supports the voting
21 reforms you have already delivered. That
22 includes the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act
23 of New York, which placed our state as a
24 national leader in restoring legal

1 protections against race-based voter
2 discrimination.

3 The final budget must include
4 \$2.5 million to support the voting and
5 elections database for this act. And we urge
6 you to include funds allocated in the
7 Executive Budget to support the overdue
8 implementation of automatic voter
9 registration and the online voter
10 registration platform.

11 Lastly, this Legislature must
12 prioritize funding election administration.
13 I echo my copanelist's just now remarks
14 supporting funding for local boards as they
15 prepare for the next cycle. That includes
16 funds to upgrade e-poll books, covered
17 prepaid postage for ballots, and purchase of
18 new voting machines which have already
19 surpassed their age.

20 Thank you for your continued efforts
21 to support our democracy.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

23 MS. SMITKA: Thank you for the
24 opportunity to testify today. As I said, my

1 name is Erica Smitka, executive director of
2 the League of Women Voters of New York State.

3 We applaud the Governor's Executive
4 Budget for including adequate funding for the
5 State Board of Elections and the Public
6 Campaign Finance Board. However, many of our
7 reforms remain insufficiently funded at the
8 local level, especially considering the
9 growing challenges facing our local boards of
10 elections.

11 The cost to run our elections is
12 simply not the same as it was in years past.
13 In a recently released report, the estimated
14 cost per voter has almost doubled, on
15 average, from around \$15 in 2016 to almost
16 \$28 per voter in 2024. This is largely due
17 to the passage of long-overdue measures to
18 improve access to the ballot.

19 We're grateful for state legislation
20 that has finally pushed New York State into
21 the 21st century, but we need to see state
22 funds directly support these state
23 initiatives by providing a direct line of
24 funding to local boards.

1 In addition to increasing expenses,
2 local boards are running our elections in an
3 increasingly challenging environment. Mis-
4 and disinformation is eroding trust in our
5 election process, and nearly two-thirds of
6 Americans do not have faith in our electoral
7 process.

8 Our local boards are on the front
9 lines of organizing and conducting our
10 elections, and we rely on them to reach
11 voters with timely and accurate information.
12 In conversations with commissioners about the
13 2024 election, most reported being
14 overworked, understaffed, and lacking
15 resources to promote accurate voter
16 education.

17 Investing in local boards of elections
18 not only strengthens the democratic
19 foundation of our state, but it also
20 reinforces public confidence in our election
21 system. We ask that a minimum of \$10 million
22 in funding be allocated to county boards of
23 elections to support statewide initiatives,
24 voter education, as well as for the training

1 and recruitment of poll workers and staff.

2 I'd also like to touch on two
3 important voting reforms. A critical method
4 for combating mis- and disinformation across
5 the state would be to adopt a centralized
6 database, such as the Electronic Registration
7 Information Center. A database such as this
8 would improve the accuracy of New York's
9 voter rolls, reduce election costs, and would
10 increase efficiency. We urge you to include
11 the \$51,000 to support this legislation in
12 your one-house budgets.

13 Lastly, democracy is not a democracy
14 unless we are all included and all voices are
15 heard. Thousands of New York State voters
16 are detained in jails each and every year,
17 and in 2023 the League conducted a study
18 finding that only 11 of New York's
19 57 counties surveyed had a program to
20 facilitate voting while detained.

21 This lack of access primarily affects
22 voters in communities of color. We strongly
23 support legislation to rectify this and urge
24 the Legislature to provide direct funding

1 commensurate with similar programs in other
2 states to support this legislation.

3 Our elections are the cornerstone of
4 our democracy, and it is imperative that we
5 ensure they're adequately funded.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9 MS. WHARTON: Chairpersons Krueger and
10 Pretlow, members of the New York State
11 Legislature, thank you for allowing me to
12 testify this evening.

13 Again, my name is Karen Wharton, and I
14 represent Fair Elections for New York, a
15 coalition of over 200 organizations that
16 successfully fought for the New York State
17 Public Campaign Finance Program, the PCFP.

18 Today we stand before you to advocate
19 for a profound investment in the future of
20 our democracy, an allocation of
21 \$114.5 million for the PCFP. Like my other
22 colleagues here, we applaud Governor Hochul's
23 commitment to fully funding this program in
24 her Executive Budget with this allocation,

1 which includes 14.5 million for
2 administrative costs and 100 million for
3 public matching funds, as requested by the
4 Public Campaign Finance Board.

5 These funds are needed to support the
6 programs run in 2026 to match qualifying
7 small donations for state legislative
8 candidates statewide -- legislative
9 candidates as well as the state
10 legislative -- the Senators and
11 Assemblymembers. Also the continued
12 development of a new campaign finance
13 software system to better assist candidates
14 and treasurers with program-related
15 administrative paths and more. We urge you
16 to include this funding in this year's
17 one-house budgets and final budget.

18 The \$114.5 million is not just a
19 budget line item -- it's a moral obligation
20 to enhance and protect our democracy. Since
21 the Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United
22 decision dismantled key limits on political
23 spending, the wealthiest donors have
24 increasingly dominated political campaigns.

1 This influx of big money in politics has
2 grown to unprecedented levels across the
3 country, drowning out the voices of
4 everyday citizens and perpetuating a system
5 that favors a select few, the wealthy.

6 Because of this, our democracy is now
7 at a critical crossroads. Just look at what
8 is happening in D.C. But thanks to the PCFP,
9 we are creating a different path in New York.
10 By providing essential funding to candidates
11 who demonstrate grassroots support, the
12 program ensures that public office in our
13 state is accessible to all, regardless of
14 their financial backing.

15 According to the PCFP, 70 percent of
16 candidates for state legislative office opted
17 into this program in its first cycle. It's
18 been a resounding success.

19 And in closing, we urge you to invest
20 in this democratic system by supporting the
21 allocation as requested by the board,
22 \$114.5 million. Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

24 MS. LERNER: Thank you so much for

1 this opportunity to testify.

2 I'm Susan Lerner. I'm the executive
3 director of Common Cause New York, and I will
4 incorporate all of the comments that were
5 made by my colleagues. Common Cause supports
6 all of them.

7 I do want to point out that support
8 for the Democracy During Detention and ERIC
9 are priorities of the Let New York Vote
10 coalition. And my colleagues have talked
11 about all of the things which are the
12 day-to-day questions and issues which come up
13 in your committee and in the
14 Elections Committee, and generally dealing
15 with democracy.

16 I would like to focus on the threats
17 that are absolutely salutary and completely
18 unprecedented. I do not envy the work that
19 the State Budget Committee has in front of it
20 when we are dealing with an emergency at the
21 federal level.

22 I'd like to join New York City
23 Comptroller Brad Lander in his request that
24 there be a working group that is set up

1 between the localities and the state to try
2 and anticipate where the holes are going to
3 be not, just in our budgets but in our laws,
4 because we are seeing an unprecedented
5 destruction of the federal government.

6 And one area where it's really going
7 to hit particularly hard, I believe, both in
8 election administration but in so many other
9 functions of both the state and the federal
10 government, is in our cybersecurity.

11 We've already seen an attempt to pull
12 back the kinds of assistance which the
13 federal government up until now has been
14 uniquely positioned to provide to states and
15 localities, particularly in the election
16 area, but in all of the areas. And
17 cybersecurity could not be more essential at
18 not just the state level, not just with our
19 elections, but in every locality.

20 I think we only need to look at what
21 happened to Orange County when they really
22 dropped the ball on cybersecurity, and they
23 were offline -- the entire county, all of its
24 services, not just its website, but

1 absolutely everything -- for months and
2 months and months.

3 So cybersecurity I believe is an
4 absolutely essential area that we need to
5 anticipate how to protect New York's
6 government and New York's residents in this
7 extremely troubling time.

8 And so I not only support what
9 Comptroller Lander suggested, but I urge you
10 to put money aside at the locality level to
11 be sure that every county has additional
12 funding to prepare for cybersecurity threats
13 and to protect its online presence.

14 And in the testimony I will file for
15 Public Protection, I'll talk about the need
16 for funding at the state level.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you. Thank
18 you, Susan.

19 Assemblywoman Walker.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Thank you,
21 Susan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you,
22 Madam Chairwoman.

23 I just have maybe one or two
24 questions.

1 The New York State Public Campaign
2 Finance Program has been in effect for a
3 whole election cycle, and the Executive has
4 continued funding of this program. So what I
5 was wondering, to your knowledge, have there
6 been any concerns that have been raised by
7 candidates?

8 MS. WHARTON: I'm not -- okay. I'm
9 sorry about that.

10 Yes, there have been some. The
11 candidates that I've spoken to reported some
12 difficulty basically in the administration of
13 the program. So they would really benefit
14 from a software system that I described
15 earlier so that that would assist them
16 more -- with more of the administrative parts
17 of it.

18 So yes, that's one of the things that
19 we keep hearing.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Awesome.

21 So -- and my next question I guess
22 would be to Ms. Pino, for the John Lewis
23 Voting Rights Act that was signed into law in
24 2022.

1 And so since the implementation has
2 rolled out, with the many upgrades to
3 streamline administration and compliance, are
4 there any concerns that have been raised with
5 respect to its implementation, in your
6 estimation?

7 MS. PINO: Thank you for that
8 question, Assemblymember.

9 We have not heard any specific
10 concerns with that. I will say the
11 importance of funding is reupping that.

12 Of course, when I mentioned the
13 \$2.5 million for the database, that will help
14 streamline compliance with the act, as well
15 as enforcement. That is something that we
16 need to continue to see in this budget.

17 And it's also my understanding the
18 rest of the enforcement allocation can be
19 found in the Department of Law's budget for
20 its Social Justice Division. That also
21 should be included going forward to ensure
22 that the act lives up to its full promise.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Awesome. Thank
24 you.

1 And lastly for -- I guess Dustin,
2 you'd be the best person for this. New York
3 State has authorized the establishment of
4 ballot drop boxes for both absentee and
5 early-mail votes.

6 How has this affected the board of
7 elections where you are as well as from some
8 of the other commissioners that you are
9 affiliated with?

10 MR. CZARNY: I seem to remember that
11 that is a permissive bill, so not every
12 county is going to participate in that. You
13 know, that was approved late in the cycle, so
14 this will be the first cycle that many of the
15 counties will be able to do that.

16 I will note that early vote-by-mail
17 and absentee voting is on the rise in
18 New York. We saw a lot of participation in
19 that process, with also a trepidation of the
20 postal service and their ability to deliver
21 some of these ballots on time, especially in
22 late situations.

23 We already have a successful rollout
24 of collecting these ballots at all of our

1 polling places on Election Day at early
2 voting centers, and I know that many counties
3 in New York City are looking at additional
4 ballot drop boxes. And I think any tool --
5 you know, any arrow in our quiver will be
6 good to use if the county has the funds and
7 the ability to implement it successfully. So
8 that it is permissive is important, because
9 many counties will choose to participate in
10 that this year and not be mandated to do so
11 without funds to support it as well.

12 MS. LERNER: I would like to add that
13 providing ongoing support at the county level
14 for elections will help with the
15 implementation of drop boxes, because to have
16 appropriate drop boxes isn't a significant
17 expense that we want the counties and the
18 BOEs to incur.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Awesome. Thank
20 you. You know, the beautiful thing I think
21 about elections is that we're in vogue until
22 we're not. And clearly we're in vogue right
23 now.

24 (Laughter.)

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: And so thank
2 you so much for all of the work that you do
3 in the administration of justice.

4 I will turn the balance of my time
5 back over to the chair and get back into
6 conference.

7 And so again, thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The balance of your
9 time --

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: I had to. I
11 could not resist the opportunity to, you
12 know, reclaim my time, but then give it back
13 if I want to.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Go on. Over.
15 (Laughter.)

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALKER: Thank you.

17 MR. CZARNY: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

19 Okay, we're going to start with our
20 Elections chair, Kristen Gonzalez.

21 SENATOR GONZALEZ: Thank you. I thank
22 you, Chairwoman Krueger and Chairman Pretlow,
23 for the accommodation today. We're really
24 excited to be here.

1 Hi to our panelists. Thank you so
2 much for joining us. It's great to see some
3 familiar faces. But if this is the first
4 time that we're meeting, my name is Kris
5 Gonzalez. I'm the new Elections chair in the
6 State Senate.

7 And so I'm very excited to speak with
8 you all today. Obviously this is a critical
9 moment. We know that democracy is under
10 threat, and there are a lot of new challenges
11 that are being posed that we haven't dealt
12 with before.

13 I'm also the chair of Internet and
14 Technology, so my first part of my
15 questioning today is to look ahead: What are
16 the future challenges and what should
17 New York State be doing? And then the second
18 part is mostly to get a current state
19 assessment and see what we need to do in this
20 year's budget to support the integrity of our
21 elections, because we know when we do that,
22 we're protecting our democracy.

23 So for the panel, whoever wants to
24 start, you know, last year I was proud to

1 carry and pass the New York FAIR Act through
2 the New York State Budget. The FAIR Act bans
3 deep fakes and deceptive media in election
4 communications. And we saw this risk
5 materialize in certain parts of the country,
6 certainly here in New York.

7 Do you see the rise in misinformation
8 as an existential threat to our elections?
9 And how are you all -- or who wants to
10 answer -- thinking about this issue?

11 MS. SMITKA: I'll jump in. Thank you
12 so much for that question.

13 Mis- and disinformation is a critical
14 threat to our elections, as you noted,
15 nationwide. Just in New Hampshire, there
16 were AI phone calls made to voters from
17 President Biden saying that they didn't need
18 to go to the polls to vote.

19 And so something like this is directly
20 affecting whether voters make it to the polls
21 and let their voices be heard.

22 So the League has been working on this
23 initiative for a while, as have many of my
24 colleagues. Really the best thing we can do

1 is to get the right information out into the
2 hands of voters before they are met with bad
3 information. So that when they do hear mis-
4 or disinformation, they can use the -- what
5 they've learned already to combat that.

6 So we've been working on a lot of that
7 on the ground, and it's also essential that
8 our county boards have the funding to do so
9 as well.

10 MS. LERNER: You know, unfortunately,
11 New York is a low-information state when it
12 comes to providing information to voters.
13 That is something which it is within your
14 purview to change. The more formal, official
15 information that is widely disseminated, the
16 more difficult it is to put dis- and
17 misinformation into the information flow.

18 MR. CZARNY: And I'd like to jump in
19 on that, because we did have an incident in
20 New York right before the primary last year,
21 of a company that was sending texts and
22 emails out to people with wrong polling
23 locations.

24 It turned out to be a mistake, as

1 opposed to a nefarious act. It was a
2 database error. But it did cause a lot of
3 concern. And our only way to get our message
4 out was to talk to the media and beg them to
5 tell them to look at our websites and look at
6 our voter systems.

7 But, you know, a lot of times a voter
8 will see that text and that's what they'll do
9 and that's what they will follow, and they
10 won't get other information. So we need to
11 have, you know, again, what I said earlier
12 about having, you know, a little bit more
13 flexibility in our spending.

14 Some counties -- most counties will
15 not give a budget for information campaigns
16 or media campaigns from the boards of
17 elections. But if there is flexibility in
18 state grants that would allow us to do that,
19 then those counties can choose to use that
20 money to get people to trust the trusted
21 messengers at the boards of elections to get
22 their election info, and that will prevent
23 stuff like that in the future.

24 SENATOR GONZALEZ: Thank you so much

1 for your answers.

2 With the rise of generative AI, we're
3 going to see misinformation with a quality on
4 a scale that we've never seen before. So I
5 appreciate the insight and certainly want to
6 make sure that we're supporting our local
7 BOEs as well, you know, in different-sized
8 counties.

9 On a similar note, the Heritage
10 Foundation's Project 2025, which we are
11 already seeing being rapidly implemented
12 throughout the federal government, includes
13 reforms to the Cybersecurity and
14 Infrastructure Security Agency, CISA. The
15 entry specifically makes reference to CISA's
16 work in protecting elections.

17 What does CISA do for our state and
18 for our local BOEs? And could you all speak
19 to the work we could do to ensure that we're
20 protecting the integrity of our elections
21 with cybersecurity?

22 I know, Susan, you mentioned this in
23 your testimony, so I might start with you and
24 then open it up.

1 MS. LERNER: So CISA is really unique.
2 It was set up in 2018, and it not just helps
3 the federal and state governments and
4 localities prevent cyber incursions, but it
5 also helps -- and what's really unique about
6 it is that it helps the government figure out
7 what to do to be more resilient and how to
8 respond.

9 So CISA has provided a tremendous
10 amount of support and information to not only
11 our state boards but the county boards,
12 helping to identify vulnerabilities and also
13 helping them to conduct what are called table
14 exercises, which is anticipating what would
15 happen if this particular problem, this
16 particular cybersecurity were breached, how
17 would we deal with it, to be sure that our
18 elections are not only secure but resilient.

19 And that is really unique in the
20 cybersecurity world. So we really need to
21 think about what happens when that kind of
22 support is not coming from the feds. Can we
23 duplicate it here in our state, or do we need
24 to form a consortium with other states to

1 pool our resources to be able to provide that
2 kind of support and planning that we now see
3 at the federal level?

4 SENATOR GONZALEZ: Thank you so much.

5 And looking at time, I'm going to
6 pivot to our current state challenges. So we
7 know we're going to have more challenges to
8 our election integrity in the future. We
9 right now have a budget proposal of
10 142 million in All Funds support, which is a
11 decrease of 23.5 million.

12 So I wanted to open it up to all of
13 you to see, you know, with our funding asks
14 if we feel that there is more funding needed
15 or if that will cover some of the things that
16 you all are working on.

17 MR. CZARNY: We will always welcome
18 more funds. And we are usually one of the
19 least-funded departments in our county
20 government. And a lot of times those funds
21 are -- evaporate even quicker in
22 non-presidential years.

23 But we still have several elections
24 that we're running this year. And our costs

1 don't really go down that much, despite
2 people not necessarily participating in those
3 local elections. And as we see our election
4 infrastructure age, a lot of counties are
5 going to be looking at not just the poll
6 books that I mentioned earlier, but voting
7 tabulators and BMDs and cybersecurity and
8 just upgrading computers inside of our own
9 offices and upgrading our security in our
10 offices.

11 These are all funds that are happening
12 right now, and there's very few county boards
13 of elections that are 100 percent covered at
14 this point.

15 MS. PINO: I would love to jump in too
16 and echo that.

17 We see -- I think it's in my written
18 testimony -- that 38 of 62 counties in
19 New York State are using voting machines that
20 are over 15 years old.

21 This is the time, when we're not
22 facing a presidential election, you know,
23 later this year for the counties to build up
24 their infrastructure, to purchase that

1 infrastructure, test it, plan with their
2 staffs.

3 And this is the time that we always
4 recommend counties are having all that full
5 support to prepare for the next major
6 election cycle.

7 MR. CZARNY: And if I can just also
8 say that, like, investing in this
9 infrastructure will lead to savings later on
10 down the line. Much of this new voting
11 equipment can support things like vote
12 centers.

13 Senator May has a bill on there that
14 has passed the Senate several times that will
15 allow counties who have this infrastructure
16 to move to vote centers on Election Day.
17 And, you know, the adoption of voter centers
18 could lead to significant reduction in costs
19 in terms of election personnel on
20 Election Day as we're able to diffuse our
21 precinct level polling places to vote centers
22 throughout the county, like we do with early
23 voting.

24 MS. SMITKA: I just want to jump in.

1 And Senator Gonzalez, please correct me if
2 I'm wrong, but I believe the 142 million you
3 noted is for the State Board of Elections,
4 correct?

5 SENATOR GONZALEZ: Correct.

6 MS. SMITKA: So there is a portion of
7 that that will go directly to county boards.
8 But I really want to make clear the
9 difference between all the funding that does
10 go to our state board and then a more direct
11 line of funding to county boards -- which
12 really is essential, as Dustin and Marina
13 were saying, to really help counties build up
14 their infrastructure when we're only going to
15 be faced with more challenges in the future.

16 SENATOR GONZALEZ: One hundred
17 percent. I think if we want to ensure that
18 we're funding our state BOE -- but I wanted
19 to give you all an opportunity to talk about
20 the necessity to have funding, especially for
21 our local boards.

22 I know we are tight on time, but
23 especially with the John Lewis Voting Rights
24 Act being upheld by the New York State

1 Appellate Court, I think that'll be another
2 round of costs.

3 And very quickly in 20 seconds, as a
4 beneficiary of the public financing program,
5 why do you think it had such a positive
6 impact in the last year? And I guess I will
7 target that towards you. In 12 seconds.

8 (Laughter.)

9 MS. WHARTON: Thank you so much for
10 that question.

11 Because it amplifies the voices of
12 ordinary, everyday New Yorkers. It empowers
13 us. And that is why candidates and citizens
14 alike are enamored. And this is why --

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
16 Ms. Wharton.

17 (Laughter.)

18 SENATOR GONZALEZ: Amazing. That was
19 succinct and --

20 MS. WHARTON: Okay.

21 (Inaudible overtalk.)

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Slater.
23 Five minutes.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: Thank you very

1 much to everyone here. Thank you to those
2 who are spending their time testifying today.

3 Commissioner, you talked about the
4 drop boxes, and I just want to get clarity on
5 who's paying for those drop boxes. Because
6 you said that they're not mandated. Do we
7 have a cost of what the drop boxes are going
8 to be for individual counties who opt in?

9 MR. CZARNY: Well, that would be up to
10 the individual county, so I wouldn't be able
11 to give you a cost. It would -- each
12 individual county will have to determine how
13 many drop boxes they need, the personnel to
14 operate that, and whether they have the
15 infrastructure to be able to deploy those.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: Is security part
17 of that infrastructure?

18 MR. CZARNY: There's security part of
19 that, whether, you know --

20 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: What type of
21 security do you envision for the drop boxes?

22 MR. CZARNY: Well, I'd imagine that
23 you would have them at like town halls and
24 other things where you have cameras and

1 personnel on board.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: Is that a
3 stipulated requirement right now?

4 MR. CZARNY: I don't know if that's a
5 requirement. It would be a requirement -- it
6 is, right? I'm sorry.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: Is it a
8 stipulated requirement to have cameras at
9 drop-box locations?

10 MR. CZARNY: I'll be honest, sir, I --

11 MS. LERNER: That would be a question
12 for the State Board of Regulations --

13 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: I know. I wish
14 they were here.

15 MS. LERNER: -- as to how to deploy
16 them.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: I appreciate it,
18 thank you.

19 What about -- I spoke with a lot of
20 the Board of Election commissioners a couple
21 of weeks back, and there were discussions
22 about early voting and curtailing some of the
23 early-voting locations but also the
24 timelines.

1 For example, there's a special
2 election in Westchester going on right now,
3 but the early-voting requirements are equal
4 to that of a presidential election.

5 How do you feel about the request to
6 curtail that timeline in some fashion?

7 MR. CZARNY: So our association has
8 come out in favor of special elections and
9 primaries to have more flexibility in times
10 and days for early voting.

11 So for low-turnout elections -- well,
12 we already have flexibility in primaries in
13 terms of number of locations, because the
14 number of voters that are affected would go
15 out there, and so that -- we can already
16 reduce the number of locations. What we
17 can't do is reduce the number of days or
18 hours. And we as an association believe that
19 flexibility on that in specials and primaries
20 are warranted.

21 There's no bill out there that I can
22 talk to specifics on this. That is something
23 that we as an association, a bipartisan
24 request for flexibility --

1 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: And in regards to
2 the location -- I'm sorry, I thought I heard
3 you -- I just want to make sure I'm clear.
4 So in regards to location, especially for
5 more rural areas, some of their county seats
6 are not their most populous and vice versa.

7 Does the association support providing
8 flexibility on early-voting locations in that
9 respect?

10 MR. CZARNY: I believe county seats
11 are not required as early-voting locations.
12 What is required is the highest city and/or
13 the highest town have an early-voting
14 location.

15 The boards have asked for places where
16 there are -- where they say the highest city,
17 but the highest city has a very small
18 population, they have flexibility in that.

19 But there is already flexibility in
20 the law except for you do have to put it in
21 the highest affected town or city. And we
22 want a curb on cities that are under
23 10,000 voters.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: I appreciate it.

1 In my remaining time, I'm just
2 curious: 10 states have passed legislation
3 opting into the SAVE program. Seven states
4 require proof of citizenship. My favorite,
5 36 states require some form of voter
6 identification when showing up to the polls.

7 I'm curious what your position is on
8 the -- especially voter ID provisions. Since
9 36 other states in the country have enacted
10 this provision, why hasn't New York? And if
11 there are barriers, can we identify them to
12 remove them?

13 MR. CZARNY: So I'm going to answer
14 that in my role as the Democratic caucus
15 chair and not as the association as a whole,
16 because I'm sure there are varied opinions.

17 But in my personal -- in my role as
18 Democratic caucus chair, my personal opinion
19 is the problem with voter ID laws are the
20 devils are always in the details.

21 And we see voter ID laws like in
22 Texas, where a gun license is an appropriate
23 ID but a student ID from a state college is
24 not.

1 And these are the barriers that are
2 usually put up with voter ID laws that keep
3 people from enacting their franchise. And we
4 simply do not have a problem with
5 impersonation at the polling places. There
6 is no widespread voter fraud that is
7 affecting the vote. So it is a --

8 ASSEMBLYMAN SLATER: But I know that
9 we're very concerned and focused on voter
10 integrity. In my district I hear from people
11 constantly who show up to the polls with
12 their license in their hand, and they ask:
13 How come they're not checking my license?

14 And if 36 states have already passed a
15 measure that provides for voter ID, if we
16 want to make sure that voters feel confident
17 in their elections, why wouldn't we pass this
18 legislation?

19 MS. LERNER: Because it interferes
20 with the franchise for a substantial number
21 of people. Period. And that's why New York
22 has refused that form of voter suppression.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

24 Senator?

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 Senator Walczyk.

3 SENATOR WALCZYK: Thank you,
4 Madam Chair.

5 Just to piggyback on the ranker from
6 the Assembly, I think it was Erica that said
7 two-thirds of Americans don't have faith in
8 our electoral process, is that right?

9 Yeah, I think voter ID would probably
10 help the two-thirds of Americans that also
11 support voter ID in polling. Eighty-seven
12 percent of Americans support voter ID.

13 But I do have a question because,
14 Erica, you also said elections are the
15 cornerstone of our democracy. Does the
16 Governor have an obligation to call a special
17 election expeditiously to fill a vacancy in
18 either the statehouse or in Congress?

19 MS. SMITKA: At this time I don't have
20 the ability to comment on behalf of the
21 League of Women Voters on that.

22 SENATOR WALCZYK: Okay. Does anybody
23 else want to comment on --

24 MS. LERNER: We certainly support

1 special election reform. The problem that we
2 see is that the special elections happen too
3 frequently. What we hear from voters is that
4 there are too many elections.

5 They need to be consolidated. And
6 Common Cause and other good government groups
7 believe that there should be a process where
8 you have a primary followed by a special
9 election. They should be consolidated, and
10 they should not be called on these arbitrary
11 dates that simply confuse voters.

12 SENATOR WALCZYK: So, Ms. Lerner, just
13 to follow up on that question, currently
14 Public Officers Law says Congress will be
15 filled, the Governor has to call a special
16 election within 10 days and then to have that
17 special election you have between 70 and
18 80 days to have that, so that we don't have a
19 vacancy in the House of Representatives to
20 represent -- they roughly represent 750,000,
21 760,000 New Yorkers. So I think that's
22 pretty important as a bedrock of our
23 democracy.

24 And then in the statehouse, that's

1 40 to 50 days from the time that the Governor
2 calls that. And do you think we should draw
3 that timeline out?

4 MS. LERNER: I think we should
5 consolidate our specials. Because what we
6 see is that almost nobody knows that they
7 happen, and voters complain that we have too
8 many elections. There's voter burnout. And
9 there are better ways to do it.

10 We've gone from one extreme, where
11 Governor Cuomo abused his ability to set a
12 date for a special election, leaving 11 seats
13 in the Legislature open for close to a year,
14 to now where we have too short of a deadline.

15 So we need to rethink this and make it
16 more voter-friendly and less expensive, less
17 arbitrary.

18 SENATOR WALCZYK: Okay, so Ms. Lerner
19 believes that we should extend that timeline
20 out because we have too short of a deadline.

21 Does anybody believe that the dates
22 should stay the way that they are right now,
23 in any of your good government groups
24 recognizing that we -- this is the bedrock of

1 democracy, having seats filled in a vacancy?

2 MS. LERNER: When almost nobody votes,
3 something's wrong with how we're doing it.

4 SENATOR WALCZYK: What problems does
5 this panel think that we might see if there's
6 a vacancy in, say, Congress for a long period
7 of time?

8 Or maybe you can make some
9 observations about the problems that you saw
10 with Andrew Cuomo dragging these out.

11 MS. LERNER: Well, we thought that
12 that was unfair. But as I said, I think
13 we've gone from one extreme to the other. We
14 need to find a middle ground. We need to
15 consolidate. And we need to set up a system
16 where the people who are running in the
17 special are not just hand-picked by party
18 chairs, but the voters have a voice in
19 deciding who runs.

20 SENATOR WALCZYK: Anyone else want to
21 offer up any other opinion on that?

22 (No response.)

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I guess not.

24 (Laughter.)

1 SENATOR WALCZYK: No opinion as to
2 whether a seat in the United States House of
3 Representatives should remain vacant for a
4 long period of time?

5 I heard a lot of talk about
6 enfranchisement, representation, bedrock of
7 democracy from this panel. They were great
8 talking points when you introduced
9 yourselves. But what you're saying is
10 there's no opinions from this panel as to
11 whether the Governor has an obligation to
12 call a special election to fill a vacancy in
13 the United States House of Representatives, a
14 seat that represents 760,000 New Yorkers.
15 There's no opinions there?

16 MS. LERNER: Senator, is there
17 currently a statute?

18 SENATOR WALCZYK: Yeah, the state --

19 MS. LERNER: Then I assume the
20 Governor will follow the law, unless this
21 body decides to change the law.

22 SENATOR WALCZYK: Do you support a
23 change?

24 MS. LERNER: So what we're talking

1 about is more theory. How do we get this
2 right? We've gone from, as I've said, one
3 extreme to the other.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
5 Assembly.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.
7 Assemblyman Ra.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good evening. Thank
9 you for waiting around to testify.

10 I mean, somewhat to the point of my
11 previous colleague, I do have to point out --
12 because we hear all these talking points over
13 and over again. And I look at what has gone
14 on in the last several years here. I've
15 watched a statute get changed to allow
16 somebody to get put on the ballot.

17 I should have five minutes.

18 A statute -- it changed midstream to
19 allow the Governor to put a new candidate on
20 the ballot for lieutenant governor. I've
21 watched attempts to change an independent
22 redistricting commission in the -- right as
23 we were about to undertake a process. I know
24 there's an organization here that supported

1 that effort.

2 I've watched the doors to courthouses
3 throughout the state get closed in all but
4 four places with regard to redistricting and
5 constitutional challenges.

6 So it cuts both ways. So it would
7 take a lot more than five minutes to have
8 some of these conversations.

9 And then obviously to my colleague's
10 point, the ridiculous conversation that
11 started at the end of last week with regard
12 to the seat.

13 I understand we want more people to
14 come out and vote, but think about it. If we
15 just did them on primary days and general
16 election days -- I have any number of
17 colleagues who are running for local offices
18 this year. One of them wins, we have a
19 vacant seat come January, we're going to let
20 the entire legislative session go next year
21 without those seats being filled?

22 We changed those timelines -- you're
23 right, what Andrew Cuomo did that year was
24 ridiculous. And that's why we shortened

1 those the timelines. So I think we should
2 have a conversation about these reforms out
3 in the open, not closed-door discussions that
4 have the potential to have residents go
5 unrepresented.

6 Because that's the balance that -- you
7 have to balance the need for these people to
8 be represented against having the election in
9 a form that maximizes turnout.

10 MS. LERNER: Assemblymember, can I
11 point out that you're not talking to anybody
12 who is in any of those closed-door
13 conversations?

14 We are the people who ask for exactly
15 the kind of conversations that you're talking
16 about. And what I'm suggesting is that there
17 is some middle ground. We haven't hit it
18 quite yet, but we could. And absolutely,
19 this is the sort of thing where there needs
20 to be concerted discussions among all.

21 We've seen all sorts of abuses -- for
22 instance, in Florida, just like following
23 Andrew Cuomo's example, DeSantis --

24 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I don't represent a

1 district of Florida.

2 MS. LERNER: -- just kept --

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I'm concerned about
4 New York.

5 MS. LERNER: -- offices open.

6 So, you know, we don't have it right
7 yet. I think we're all in agreement that we
8 need reform, and we look forward to an open
9 discussion and coming up with the best
10 solution.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I'm glad. I do as
12 well.

13 So I do -- I do have a question that I
14 want to see if you have any thoughts on,
15 because I want to point out it's
16 unfortunate -- we've talked about public
17 campaign financing. You guys made commentary
18 it's a system that we have now allocated, up
19 until this budget, \$46.8 million for staffing
20 and administration, \$135 million for matching
21 funds. We have another 14.5 and 100 million
22 in this budget.

23 Yet we have no opportunity to question
24 anybody who's charged with the administration

1 of this program, which doesn't make any sense
2 to me. Especially going through the first
3 round of it, we're going to have it for
4 statewide offices, we're now up to that
5 cycle.

6 But I know we're going through an
7 exercise of how did it work? Should there be
8 any changes made? And I want to ask your
9 thoughts on any of that.

10 One thing that I think I saw as a
11 problem as a candidate was the competitive
12 election, which I think is extremely
13 arbitrary, and I saw situations where
14 basically it wasn't competitive and then, you
15 know, three college Republicans or college
16 Democrats met in their dorm room and endorsed
17 somebody, and now it's a competitive
18 election. I don't think that makes a lot of
19 sense.

20 MS. WHARTON: So thank you,
21 Assemblymember.

22 So the Public Campaign Finance Board
23 has published its report on the performance
24 of the program at last cycle, and it's fairly

1 detailed.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes, I'm aware.

3 MS. WHARTON: And I'm sure that the
4 commissioners would be open to speaking with
5 you, as they are with us. They have public
6 hearings as well, so I think there is -- you
7 have a -- there are opportunities for you to
8 engage.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I'm asking if you
10 have any thoughts on changes to the program.

11 MS. WHARTON: Certainly there are some
12 changes that the board has actually proposed,
13 and we're on board with that. Some of them
14 include additional mandatory training for
15 candidates and their staff -- so treasurers,
16 fundraisers.

17 They've also -- the board has also
18 suggested or recommended changing the payout
19 schedule, the payment schedule, and a number
20 of others that, you know, I'm not -- I
21 haven't committed to memory, but they're
22 listed. And we are on board with those.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very
24 much.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Senator May.

5 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

6 Thank you all for your testimony and
7 for the work you do to try to keep our
8 democracy healthy.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Pull the mic up a
10 little closer to you.

11 SENATOR MAY: Okay, is that better?

12 So, Dustin, I wanted to ask you a
13 question. We have a -- we passed a bill
14 about requiring full-time elections
15 commissioners. We have a bill about staffing
16 levels in boards of elections. And one of
17 the concerns is about the cost.

18 And is there an estimate for whatever
19 counties that would mean requiring more
20 people than they have now?

21 MR. CZARNY: Well, certainly we are --
22 there will be an additional cost for both of
23 those bills. But it would not be an
24 additional cost to every county, and that's

1 important to know.

2 For the full-time commissioner bill, I
3 believe there's only 12 counties now that
4 have part-time commissioners. And the last
5 version of the staffing bill we have to look
6 at -- we're still getting this data from the
7 state board about how many positions were
8 added at the county boards of elections
9 during this last cycle. A lot of them did
10 comply with adding permanent positions.

11 So we'll -- it's something that my
12 caucus is in the process of getting all of
13 that together, and I know we're working with
14 your office about the staffing bill.

15 It definitely will be more of a cost.
16 But I will say that these two bills are
17 targeting counties that have not brought
18 their staffing levels up to --
19 involuntarily -- to meet the needs that this
20 body and the New York State government but
21 also the voters have asked for with our
22 boards of elections.

23 It's a -- this is not a part-time job,
24 being an elections commissioner. No matter

1 the size of your county, we have four or five
2 elections a year, each election has three to
3 six months' worth of lead time. We have
4 early voting. We have early voting by mail.
5 We have permanent absentees. We have
6 military ballots. We have 10-day
7 registration now that is bringing, you know,
8 even a higher burden for boards of elections
9 to be able to meet the moment. So yeah.

10 SENATOR MAY: I'm going to interrupt
11 and --

12 MR. CZARNY: Yeah, yeah.,

13 SENATOR MAY: -- ask one other
14 question. Which is there is a lot of concern
15 in my district, in a lot of rural districts,
16 about petitioning, now that we have to do
17 petitioning mostly in February and March, and
18 people are afraid of slipping on the ice or
19 getting shot if they go to a door.

20 So Arizona has an online petitioning
21 system that seems to be working well. Is
22 that something -- just asking the kind of
23 good government groups, is that something
24 that you are interested in knowing more about

1 and possibly implementing in --

2 MS. LERNER: Reform of New York's
3 petitioning process is one of our goals. We
4 feel that it's too onerous, and it's unusual
5 in its requirements. Online sounds like a
6 great idea to explore.

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very
8 much.

9 SENATOR MAY: Okay, thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
11 Jacobson.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: Thank you,
13 Chair.

14 The Governor's proposed budget
15 eliminates all additional money to the local
16 boards of elections. Since 2019, as people
17 have mentioned, we've made significant
18 reforms to make voting simpler and easier.
19 We've instituted early voting, the right to
20 cure absentee ballots. We now count most
21 absentee ballots by Election Night, so we can
22 have -- most of the times we have the results
23 then. We have prepaid postage for returning
24 of mail-in ballots.

1 But these reforms mean that the boards
2 need more employees. It also means more
3 money. Every year the boards need to replace
4 basic equipment -- the poll machines, the
5 voting machines, the on-demand printers,
6 sign-in iPads, and it goes on.

7 The reason this is so important to be
8 funded on a state level is not all counties
9 support their county boards of elections as
10 they should. I think we need another
11 30 million, of which 15 million would be for
12 equipment and such, and 15 million for
13 additional employees and administrative
14 costs.

15 I just want to say that democracy is
16 priceless, but it does cost money.

17 So comments, starting with the
18 commissioner?

19 MR. CZARNY: Yeah. We obviously would
20 welcome the money. As my colleague said,
21 that 38 of the 62 counties have machines that
22 are over 15 years old now. They have not
23 been able to get enough money from their host
24 counties to be able to replace those

1 machines. We have poll books that are aging
2 out.

3 But we also need office staff inside
4 of the boards of elections to be able to
5 process registrations, new applications for
6 vote-by-mail in both of the absentee and
7 early vote-by-mail, and staffing early-voting
8 locations.

9 So the burden is higher than ever and
10 we -- and remember, a good portion of our
11 ballots are New York State positions, whether
12 they're State Supreme Court or the positions
13 that you all hold, as well as propositions.
14 And in other states those are refunded to the
15 county boards of elections for those costs by
16 the state.

17 So definitely we need more money now,
18 and we need a reform in the future of how
19 much money that New York gives to county
20 boards of elections.

21 MS. PINO: And if I can,
22 Assemblymember, there was really excellent
23 reporting at the Times Union after this most
24 recent election that gets to your point about

1 the disparity of election funding in
2 different county boards.

3 There was one election commissioner
4 who shared that he could not purchase all the
5 security measures that he wanted to do
6 because he was not supported as much as other
7 counties.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN JACOBSON: I've pushed for
9 extra money every year since I've been here,
10 and this will not be an exception.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very
12 much.

13 Senate?

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I
15 think I am the last senator -- no? I
16 apologize.

17 Please, Roxanne Persaud, go first.

18 SENATOR PERSAUD: I waited patiently.

19 So thank you all for staying around
20 and for your testimony.

21 I just have two quick questions --
22 actually, three. And it pertains to the poll
23 workers. We continuously hear complaints
24 about poll workers. Do you think that there

1 is any specific training that should be added
2 to the training poll workers have so that
3 they can, you know, enhance the workforce?

4 And also, don't you think it's time
5 that poll workers receive an increase in the
6 amount of money they're paid based on the
7 number of hours that they're working? And
8 what can you do to relieve them? Instead of
9 working 15 hours straight across the day,
10 what is it that we need to do?

11 MR. CZARNY: So, definitely the pay
12 disparity is a problem from county to county.
13 Many counties, including my own, pay minimum
14 wage. And that's what they set the inspector
15 pay rate at, and they won't budge off of
16 that. That really makes it hard to recruit
17 poll workers. That is one of the number-one
18 concerns I hear from people who don't want to
19 do the job.

20 And while there is flexibility in our
21 staffing right now to allow for part-time
22 poll workers, and some counties are
23 experimenting with that, I don't think that
24 that's a panacea, because it does create a

1 staffing issue in the middle of the day as
2 opposed to -- and just at the beginning of
3 the day when people don't show up for work,
4 and then we have people that -- poll sites
5 that might not have enough poll workers at it
6 for the rest of the day.

7 So I don't want to take up all of the
8 time on that, but ...

9 MS. SMITKA: Dustin, I think you're
10 exactly right. It's a long shift. There is
11 the ability for folks to do split-shifts, but
12 again, that's more administrative burden on
13 local boards to ensure that even more folks
14 are trained up to support those processes.

15 The one thing I think we could really
16 enhance as it relates to poll worker training
17 is training around affidavit ballots and when
18 those are given out to voters. That's
19 something that time and time again we've all
20 seen every single election, voters denied the
21 right to vote simply due to a poll worker who
22 didn't understand New York State law.

23 MS. LERNER: And I do want to suggest
24 that there be a refresher requirement. What

1 happens is the poll workers are trained far
2 in advance. Sometimes they get confused
3 between the primary and the general because
4 it's been so long since they've had the
5 training.

6 So we're looking forward to the
7 statewide curriculum that you have happily
8 required the state board to provide. We hope
9 to see more hands-on training, not just
10 talking at the poll workers but giving them
11 an opportunity to engage with the machinery,
12 and that there is a refresher requirement at
13 the end of summer.

14 SENATOR PERSAUD: One quick thing.

15 What do we need to do to increase
16 voter turnout? We've put in a lot of money,
17 but what do we need to do?

18 MS. LERNER: If I had a magic silver
19 bullet, believe me, I would have sent it out
20 by now.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.
22 Assemblyman Dais.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Good evening.

24 First off, to everyone who wants to,

1 election integrity is big. I had a special
2 election, a primary and a general last year.
3 It takes a lot of coordination. And even if
4 we do make some changes, I do believe
5 New York has one of the shortest time periods
6 in the country for special elections, even if
7 there's a small extension.

8 But I want to pivot to the future. To
9 me, leadership is having the vision to see
10 what's coming ahead. I'm concerned about the
11 census. We are now projected, from what the
12 Brennan Center said about it, that we could
13 lose two congressional seats in 2030. That
14 will impact our funding at the state. This
15 is a bipartisan issue, a Democrat and
16 Republican issue.

17 I'm currently working on legislation
18 that I want to be in the budget asking the
19 Governor to do \$2.5 million annually with a
20 bump going to 2029 and 2030. I believe we
21 have to put this in as a budgetary aspect if
22 we want New York to remain this political
23 hammer that we are in this great country of
24 ours.

1 What can we do, what should we do, and
2 would you support this initiative to have
3 budget line items to make sure we have a
4 census office in the Secretary of State's
5 office? And what other recommendations would
6 you make?

7 MS. LERNER: Excellent idea. We would
8 support it.

9 The big problem that we had in the
10 last census was money was appropriated and
11 not actually paid out, so our census work
12 started late.

13 I think this is absolutely essential.
14 And it will allow to build the neighborhood
15 community-based work that's necessary for a
16 good census turnout.

17 MS. SMITKA: Our support would
18 certainly depend on the details. But the --
19 you know, ensuring that we've got an accurate
20 and holistic census is of utmost importance
21 to the League. And so it's something we'd be
22 very interested in hearing more about.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Okay?

24 MS. PINO: Yes. While I can't opine

1 on it on behalf of the Brennan Center at this
2 moment, I am very eager to bring this back to
3 my team to explore it further.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Listen, I did a lot
5 of research through Brennan now also, so
6 thank you.

7 MR. CZARNY: In general, I'm always
8 for counting as many people as possible, and
9 I think that that would be a good thing. I
10 think we lost our congressional seat last
11 time by 48 people?

12 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Eighty-nine.
13 Eighty-nine people.

14 MR. CZARNY: Eighty-nine. A little
15 bit more. But we need to do better.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN DAIS: Right. And to me,
17 that's a bipartisan issue because certain red
18 areas will definitely become purple, moving
19 lines, and some of the issues that we ran
20 into would have been solved if just we'd
21 counted 89.

22 And particularly, I think it needs to
23 be a permanent office that we need to fund
24 through the Secretary of State. And more

1 importantly, we need to make sure our ethnic
2 media -- we've got to reach the immigrant
3 population, especially with our migrant
4 population that we incurred. These upstate
5 areas definitely make sure they're counted,
6 right, so they get the funding, so they get
7 the representation that they need.

8 And like I said, I think this is a
9 New York issue and a country issue and a
10 democracy issue. Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Now I think I'm
13 the last Senator.

14 So I think, Susan, you were attempting
15 to answer an earlier question about the
16 timelines of special elections here over
17 history. But am I right, like this varies
18 state to state all over the place?

19 MS. LERNER: It does. It definitely
20 does. I mean, you know, that's the glory of
21 our federalist system. There are a lot of
22 different models out there that we can be
23 looking at.

24 I will admit I have not done the

1 thorough analysis that my colleagues at
2 Citizens Union did several years ago, so
3 sitting here I can't say, Well, I like this
4 one; I don't like that one.

5 But I think it's a discussion we need
6 to have.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And is it also
8 true that states that don't have endless
9 elections and primaries and specials not
10 lined up at all actually do have better voter
11 turnout? I mean, you pointed out how low
12 ours is.

13 MS. LERNER: Yes.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But does it
15 actually help voter turnout?

16 MS. LERNER: It does, because voter
17 burnout is a persistent problem in New York.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So if we
19 had fewer, we would have bigger voter
20 turnout.

21 And to the two commissioners, my
22 understanding is every election is pretty
23 damn expensive. So if we have fewer
24 elections per year, will we not save a

1 significant amount of money?

2 MR. CZARNY: So my personal opinion on
3 this -- I always support elections being held
4 in a time period that more voters are going
5 to turn out. And if it can also save money
6 at the same time, that's generally something
7 I support.

8 It's one of the reasons I supported
9 the even-year bill. It's one of the reasons
10 I urged my villages to move their elections
11 to November instead of in March and April --
12 or March and June. So if I'm being logically
13 consistent, that is a pattern that I would
14 support.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And I guess then
16 for Citizen Action, if we can save money by
17 not having so many elections that nobody
18 votes in, doesn't that help to address the
19 fact that there are some costs from having a
20 campaign finance system?

21 MS. WHARTON: Um -- yes.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's a good
23 answer.

24 (Laughter.)

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That was a direct
2 question.

3 So it seems to me we could change our
4 special-election time frame, be consistent
5 with many other states -- perhaps see a
6 significant increase in our voter
7 participation rates, which is what we want --
8 save money, and maybe even help answer some
9 people's concerns that we're now spending
10 some money on campaign finance reform.

11 I could ask many other questions, but
12 I won't, about why actually having campaign
13 finance reform actually saves us quite a bit
14 of money for many other reasons.

15 But I think I'll just stop with that
16 and give back my seven minutes, Mr. Assembly
17 Chair.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: It is in the ether
19 now.

20 (Laughter.)

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I guess MaryJane
22 Shimsky has left us, so it's up to me to
23 close this out.

24 I just have two questions. One has to

1 do with campaign finance reform, which I
2 don't think -- I don't think is effective.
3 We differ in opinion here. We've had
4 statewide campaign finances for several years
5 now. How many individuals that ran for
6 statewide office as AG, Governor, or
7 Attorney General participated?

8 MS. WHARTON: Assemblymember, that
9 rollout, the statewide elections will be for
10 the first time in 2026.

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: No, we put it in
12 effect a long time ago, it's been in effect.

13 MS. WHARTON: For public campaign
14 financing?

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Public campaign
16 financing for statewide elected officials.

17 MS. WHARTON: So with --

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: See, it is so
19 unused that you don't even know it existed.

20 (Laughter.)

21 MS. WHARTON: So -- perhaps. So the
22 public campaign --

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: When DiNapoli ran.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: For Comptroller.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: When DiNapoli ran,
2 yeah.

3 MS. WHARTON: He did use it.

4 So the Public Campaign Finance Program
5 that we currently have was created in 2020.
6 I think the law was passed in 2020.

7 So I believe when the Comptroller used
8 it earlier, it was a different version of it.

9 But since it's been created, the last
10 election cycle was for state legislative
11 offices.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. And in that
13 last election cycle, how many incumbents lost
14 because of their opponent using campaign
15 finances?

16 MS. WHARTON: So that's a very good
17 question, and one that we're quite interested
18 in as well.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I kind of know the
20 answer, but --

21 MS. WHARTON: Yes, incumbency does
22 have its advantages.

23 But I don't have that number at my
24 fingertips, to be honest with you. But, you

1 know, we can get that to you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. Well, since
3 only I think four incumbents in total lost,
4 you can kind of do the extrapolation and
5 figure that out.

6 Special elections, you know, the dates
7 are funny. Right now we're in a special
8 election in Westchester County, we're in the
9 early-voting stage right now for county
10 executive for a position that was made
11 possible because of the election of our past
12 county executive, and the deputy is running.

13 My real question, though, is -- I
14 guess this is for the people on the boards of
15 elections. I find early voting to be a
16 pleasure to vote in because in
17 Westchester County I can go to any of the
18 voting places, give my address and my name,
19 they go in their clipboard, they find where I
20 am, and a ballot prints out.

21 Now, this is -- this is only one
22 person running. But when you're in
23 general -- when there's a general election,
24 if I go into White Plains, where I'm not the

1 Assemblyperson, but I give them my name, a
2 ballot with my name will show up and I can
3 vote there.

4 Why don't we use that in the general
5 elections? It would save -- I know it would
6 be -- you guys are always complaining about
7 not having sufficient staff. This would
8 definitely cut down on the staff you needed.
9 You wouldn't need a separate machine for
10 every election district. You'd never have
11 wrong church, right pew, wrong pew, right
12 church -- none of that would take place.

13 And it would make, I believe, voting a
14 lot easier, a lot quicker. And maybe that's
15 a way to increase voter participation, where
16 the wait time is so much shorter.

17 MR. CZARNY: I'm happy to answer that
18 question. That has been a legislative
19 priority for both the Republican and
20 Democratic commissioners for the last couple
21 of years.

22 A bill, as I mentioned earlier,
23 Senator May had passed the Senate the last
24 two or maybe even three sessions.

1 Unfortunately, it hasn't come up for a vote
2 yet in the Assembly.

3 This permissive bill would allow us to
4 do just that. And I really believe that vote
5 centers are the next wave of voting in
6 New York. We've done early voting. We have
7 a permissive early mail voting. This is the
8 next big thing. In many of our counties,
9 including my own, we already have the
10 technology ready to go to be able to do this,
11 but we don't have the law in place to allow
12 it.

13 And if this permissive bill is passed,
14 we can start using the next couple of years
15 having different counties experimenting with
16 this vote center on Election Day before we
17 get to a presidential election and allow the
18 state board to create regulations that will
19 help us refine and improve that.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Aren't we already
21 using it statewide? What we do for
22 presidential, you can vote for Congress or
23 president? Who else was running with the
24 president? The governor?

1 MR. CZARNY: You still have to vote in
2 your county, and I think going outside of
3 your county --

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: No, no, I'm not
5 talking about outside the county. Within the
6 county, if I went to White Plains to vote for
7 Congress --

8 MR. CZARNY: If you're talking about
9 affidavit voting, is that right? Yes. We do
10 allow wrong church -- you know, wrong pew --
11 wrong church --

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: No, no, not
13 affidavit voting.

14 I'm a registered voter, I'm registered
15 to vote. I give them my name, they go on
16 their little board and they find me, and a
17 ballot prints out with my candidates, my
18 district, my congressperson. And the
19 governor and the president, it's the same.
20 But the local -- wherever your
21 representatives are from is what comes up on
22 that ballot.

23 And that solves another issue that a
24 lot of good government people want, and I

1 also want, is to have a paper ballot or
2 something to show who voted. I don't like
3 this touchscreen and there's no record of how
4 people voted other than a number.

5 MR. CZARNY: That is allowed in early
6 voting now.

7 It is not allowed or not explicitly
8 allowed in law for Election Day. Some cities
9 and counties have experimented with it, but a
10 lot of them are reticent to do so because
11 it's not explicitly allowed. And that's what
12 the bill that I talked about would do, would
13 allow that on Election Day as well.

14 It is currently not the best -- it is
15 the best practice for early voting in just
16 about every county in New York State outside
17 of New York City because of the many ballot
18 styles in New York City.

19 MS. LERNER: Chairman Pretlow, we hope
20 to have a conversation with you outside of
21 this hearing about having you cosponsor that
22 bill.

23 (Laughter.)

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Come talk to me.

1 (Laughter.)

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I believe that is
3 all for our testimonies.

4 I appreciate you all coming and
5 waiting, and waiting so long for this. But
6 your testimony was totally worthwhile,
7 listening to it. And we'll see what we can
8 do with that bill, because I think it's a
9 good idea.

10 Thank you all very much.

11 MR. CZARNY: Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And this officially
13 closes this hearing. Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But if you come
15 back at 9:30 tomorrow morning, we start a
16 Mental Health hearing and other -- OPWDD and
17 OASAS.

18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The Senator and I
20 will be here.

21 (Whereupon, the budget hearing
22 concluded at 7:01 p.m.)
23
24