

HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOOD
10/4/2022

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT
AND THE HOMELESS

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Tuesday, October 4, 2022
10:30 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR., VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DRISCOLL
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM

BILL: 220655

1 - - -

2 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

3 I understand that state law
4 currently requires that the
5 following announcement be made at
6 the beginning of every remote public
7 hearing as follows: Due to the
8 current public health emergency,
9 City Council Committees are
10 currently meeting remotely. We are
11 using Microsoft Teams to make these
12 remote hearings possible.

13 Instructions for how the
14 public may view and offer public
15 testimony at public hearings of
16 Council Committees are included in
17 the public hearing notices that are
18 published in the Daily News,
19 Inquirer and Legal Intelligencer
20 prior to the hearing and can also be
21 found on PHLCouncil.com. I note
22 that the hour has come.

23 Cydnea Shearlds, will you
24 please call the roll to take
25 attendance. Members that are in

1 attendance will please indicate that
2 you are present when your name is
3 called. Also, please say a few
4 brief words when responding so that
5 your image will be displayed on
6 screen when you speak.

7 THE CLERK: Vice-Chairman
8 Jones.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good
10 morning, Madam Chair and Members. I
11 am present.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
13 Good morning.

14 THE CLERK: Councilmember
15 Gilmore Richardson.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
17 RICHARDSON: Good morning, Madam
18 Chair. Good morning, colleagues. I
19 am present.

20 THE CLERK: Councilmember
21 Driscoll.

22 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: Good
23 morning, colleagues. I am present.

24 THE CLERK: Councilmember
25 Squilla.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good
2 morning, Madam Chair and colleagues.
3 Present.

4 THE CLERK: Councilmember
5 Brooks.

6 (No response.)

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember
8 Bass.

9 (No response.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Do
11 we have a quorum?

12 THE CLERK: Yes,
13 Councilmember.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
15 Okay. Thank you. A quorum of the
16 Committee has been established and
17 this hearing is now called to order.
18 This is the public hearing of the
19 Committee on Housing, Neighborhood
20 Development and the Homeless
21 regarding Bill No. 220655.

22 Ms. Shearlds, will you
23 please read the title of the
24 resolution.

25 THE CLERK: Bill No.

1 220655, amending Chapter 9-800 of
2 The Philadelphia Code, entitled
3 "Landlord and Tenant" to modify
4 requirements and authorizations
5 related to the City's residential
6 Eviction Diversion Program,
7 including associated changes to the
8 landlord and tenant relationship,
9 and to make sure technical changes,
10 all under certain terms and
11 conditions.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

13 Before we begin to hear testimony
14 from the witnesses we have for
15 today, everyone who has been invited
16 to the meeting to testify should be
17 aware that this public hearing is
18 being recorded. Because the hearing
19 is public, participants and viewers
20 have no reasonable expectation of
21 privacy. By continuing to be in the
22 meeting, you are consenting to being
23 recorded.

24 Additionally, prior to
25 recognizing Members for the

1 questions or comments they have for
2 witnesses, I will note for the
3 record at this time that we will use
4 the chat feature available in
5 Microsoft Teams to allow Members to
6 signify that they wish to be
7 recognized. In order to comply with
8 the Sunshine Act, the chat feature
9 must only be used for this purpose.

10 Before we begin, I would like to
11 make a few remarks about the
12 legislation before this Committee
13 today.

14 Good morning, colleagues.
15 Good morning, witnesses and
16 everybody listening in. It is very
17 exciting to be here today to
18 consider extending the Eviction
19 Diversion Program, an innovation
20 shepherded by my colleague
21 Councilmember Gym that I'm really
22 proud to have supported, that has
23 drastically decreased the number of
24 evictions filed in the City since
25 its inception in 2020.

1 During the time when
2 Philadelphians were thrown into
3 financial distress because of the
4 COVID-19 pandemic, we came together
5 as a City and created programs that
6 would keep residents in their homes
7 whenever possible, making filing for
8 an eviction a last resort instead of
9 the first and only step in
10 landlord-tenant disputes.

11 The Eviction Diversion
12 Program has been a monumental
13 success and our model has been
14 rightfully recreated in other cities
15 in hopes to decrease eviction
16 filings and destabilization. In a
17 city that at the beginning of the
18 pandemic had the fourth highest
19 eviction rate in the country with 1
20 in 14 renters facing eviction every
21 year, it is of the utmost importance
22 that we recognize the positive
23 effect that the Eviction Diversion
24 Program and targeted rental
25 assistance has had on our residents.

1 Providing millions of
2 dollars in targeted local rental
3 assistance helps almost 40,000
4 families remain in their homes when
5 the pandemic had thrown every other
6 aspect of their lives into a
7 tailspin. The City's landlords, the
8 majority of whom have smaller
9 operations, were able to be paid and
10 residents were not under the
11 constant threat of homelessness.

12 The Eviction Diversion
13 Program has created an alternative
14 means of landlord-tenant dispute
15 resolution that often keep the
16 parties out of courts all together.
17 By decreasing the number of
18 evictions filed, the courts have
19 been able to provide more efficient
20 legal proceedings.

21 No longer burdened by the
22 thousands of eviction filings that
23 once plagued our courts, when an
24 eviction is filed, the wait time for
25 landlords has decreased by half from

1 90 days to 30. Seeing the positive
2 effect that the Eviction Diversion
3 Program has had on residents across
4 the City, it only makes sense to
5 consider extending the protections
6 past the December 22 expiration
7 date.

8 Extending the Eviction
9 Diversion Program will allow the
10 City's stellar housing advocates to
11 continue the work that they've been
12 doing to keep folks in their homes
13 while mediating disputes between
14 landlords and tenants, providing a
15 pathway to resolving conflicts that
16 does not destabilize our residents.

17 A stable home is the
18 foundation of a stable life and it
19 is critical that the housing
20 policies we put forward are centered
21 around maintaining stable housing
22 for our residents. Extending the
23 Eviction Diversion Program is a
24 necessary step in doing so.

25 And so, I want to again

1 thank Councilmember Gym and
2 acknowledge also the hard work of
3 the Kenney Administration and
4 housing advocates across the City in
5 implementing this program. And with
6 that, I want to provide an
7 opportunity to Councilmember Gym,
8 who is the bill's sponsor, to make
9 remarks as well as other members of
10 the Committee. Councilmember.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank
12 you so much, Madam Chair. And we're
13 just so fortunate to have you as our
14 Chair of our Housing and Homeless
15 Committee. It is an important
16 aspect towards the success of this
17 work, the bill before us directly,
18 but also more importantly for a
19 vision for the City going forward.

20 Madam Chair, members of the
21 Committee, for the past two years
22 our City has administered a
23 successful and acclaimed Eviction
24 Diversion Program and built a
25 collaborative network among City

1 agencies, housing advocates and a
2 municipal court system that has been
3 a model of hope and action in dire
4 time.

5 In the past two years, our
6 City has dramatically reduced the
7 evictions in what was once the
8 fourth highest evicting city in the
9 nation, and has received praise from
10 the White House, the U.S. Department
11 of Justice and the U.S. Department
12 of Treasury.

13 Diversion programs like
14 ours are now adopted in at least 180
15 jurisdictions across 36 states. The
16 legislation before us today which
17 has earned the support of the
18 Mayor's Administration, of legal
19 organizations like our partners at
20 Community Legal Services and the
21 Pennsylvania Apartment Association
22 ensures that this essential work
23 continues.

24 As our City scales up
25 complementary eviction prevention

1 programs, including expanding the
2 Philly Tenant Hotline and bringing
3 Right to Counsel to what is now four
4 zip codes in the coming months. We
5 must ensure that the eviction
6 prevention work continues to grow
7 and continues to be responsive.

8 These programs work in
9 concert with eviction diversion to
10 bring increased housing stability to
11 communities and to protect the
12 public health. Today's bill updates
13 and extends the existing law to
14 improve clarity and match the
15 current diversion program structure.

16 It was important for us not
17 to be so prescriptive within the
18 bill, but to allow our City and City
19 agencies the flexibility to adapt,
20 respond and evolve the program. The
21 bill also allows for a future
22 transition to a post-filing program
23 with protections for eviction record
24 should that be an option,
25 particularly with our municipal

1 courts.

2 Every eviction prevented is
3 a day that is more stable -- every
4 eviction prevented is a day that's
5 more stable in a family's life, a
6 child who isn't suddenly disrupted
7 from their schooling, a family that
8 can stay whole and a chance for our
9 City agencies to deliver on a
10 mission that is the foundation of
11 public safety, that is the
12 foundation of economic security and
13 of the City's vitality, and that
14 begins with a stable housed family.

15 The Eviction Diversion
16 Program not only prevented an
17 overwhelming number of cases from
18 reaching court, it helped reduce
19 court times from 90 days to just
20 about 30 to 35 days. By building on
21 this program's success, cases which
22 require court resolutions are now
23 heard significantly faster. The
24 program ensures that small landlords
25 also get paid.

1 Philadelphia City Council
2 has allocated \$45 million in
3 targeted specific funding for the
4 Diversion rental assistance program
5 to help settle cases in the
6 Diversion program, and with thanks
7 from my colleagues on Council and
8 this Administration for this clear
9 investment in the future of our
10 housing stability program.

11 This afternoon -- this
12 morning and afternoon's hearing will
13 also introduce an amendment to this
14 legislation to extend the duration
15 of the program for another 18 months
16 until June of 2024. This is the
17 longest extension yet of this
18 program and the commitment that our
19 City takes eviction prevention
20 seriously. I want to especially
21 thank my co-sponsors, Councilmember
22 Brooks, Gauthier and Thomas, and all
23 members of the Committee on Housing,
24 Neighborhood Development and the
25 Homeless for your attention and

1 consideration of today's bill as
2 well as to Melissa Long, our program
3 partners, the Pennsylvania Apartment
4 Association and many others for
5 their work, leadership and
6 collaboration.

7 Our work together preceded
8 this pandemic, but it proved that
9 our City which so often faces some
10 of the nation's most serious
11 problems can also be the starting
12 point for dedicated and successful
13 solutions and in cases like this,
14 can sometimes be a model for the
15 nation.

16 Thank you very much, Chair
17 Gauthier.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

19 Thank you so much.

20 I want to recognize the
21 presence of Councilmember Brooks in
22 the hearing. Good morning,
23 Councilmember Brooks.

24 And I also want to ask if
25 there are any other members of the

1 Committee that would like to make
2 opening remarks.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Madam
4 Chair, this is Councilwoman Bass.
5 I'm present.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
7 Good morning, Councilmember Bass.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
9 morning. For some reason my camera
10 is not working, but I am present.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
12 Okay. Thank you so much.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank
14 you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
16 Okay. So if there are no more
17 opening remarks, we'll move on.

18 Ms. Shearlds, would you
19 please call the first panel or
20 witness we have to testify this
21 morning.

22 THE CLERK: Melissa Long,
23 Director of the Division of Housing
24 and Human Development.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

1 Ms. Long --

2 MS. LONG: Okay --

3 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

4 Wonderful. Please state your name
5 for the record and proceed with your
6 testimony.

7 MS. LONG: Okay. Good
8 morning. I'm Melissa Long. Good
9 morning, Councilmember Gauthier,
10 Councilmember Gym, thank you very
11 much, other members of the Housing,
12 Neighborhood Development and
13 Homeless Committee and members of
14 City Council. I'm Melissa Long of
15 the Division of Housing and
16 Community Development.

17 I'm very pleased to present
18 testimony on Bill No. 220655, and
19 today I'm joined by my colleagues in
20 the Managing Director's Office, Eva
21 Gladstein, Kathleen Grady and Josh
22 Roper.

23 As I have previously
24 testified, the Kenney Administration
25 strongly supports Philadelphia's

1 Eviction Diversion Program. This
2 partnership among the
3 Administration, City Council, PHDC,
4 housing counseling agencies, NACs,
5 legal assistant organizations,
6 mediators, tenants, landlords and
7 the First Judicial Court has really
8 helped make our City a national
9 leader in keeping tenants in their
10 homes during the pandemic. As you
11 can see, I really want to thank --
12 it takes so, so many partners, all
13 the groups and agencies that I just
14 said and I can't thank them enough
15 for all their perseverance and hard
16 work.

17 The availability of
18 emergency rental assistance during
19 the first 16 months of the program
20 was critical to the extraordinary
21 levels of success. From September
22 2020 through the very first full
23 week in January 2022, of the over
24 2,000 participating landlords and
25 tenants with a final outcome, more

1 than 1,750, that's 80 percent,
2 reached an agreement.

3 This level of success would
4 not have been possible without all
5 of the partners and without all
6 phases of the Emergency Rental
7 Assistance Program, which to date
8 has distributed nearly \$300 million
9 to over 46,000 applicants. Again,
10 thanks to all of the partners.

11 After January 7th of this
12 year, the substantial emergency
13 rental assistance to help to pay
14 rental arrearages has no longer been
15 available. Nevertheless under the
16 current legislation and to date a
17 high percentage, 60 percent of
18 landlord, tenant participants and
19 the Eviction Diversion Program have
20 continued to reach agreements.

21 Specifically, since January
22 10th of the over 1500 pairs of
23 landlords and tenants, nearly 930
24 households have reached agreements
25 that have enabled them to remain in

1 their homes. In light of this
2 ongoing record of success, the
3 Kenney Administration continues to
4 strongly support the Eviction
5 Diversion Program, and I'm extremely
6 pleased to testify in favor of Bill
7 No. 220655, which will facilitate
8 the program's continuation. Thank
9 you, and I'd be happy to answer any
10 questions.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

12 Thank you so much.

13 Are there any questions or
14 comments from members of the
15 Committee for this witness?

16 (No response.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Madam
18 Chair.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

20 Sorry. Councilmember Gym.

21 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I was
22 wondering if members of the
23 Committee are not asking questions,
24 I'd like to ask one, but after the
25 members of the Committee are done.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: I
2 don't think we have anybody, so feel
3 free.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank
5 you so much.

6 First of all, Melissa,
7 thank you so much for your
8 partnership. This has been a long
9 journey, but it's been one that
10 we've worked through a tremendous
11 amount of challenges and come out on
12 the other side with, as you
13 mentioned, something that's been
14 incredibly successful and most
15 importantly has been a real model of
16 collaboration amongst a lot of
17 different entities, and I think
18 that's been one of the most
19 important things that we can do
20 together as a City, is to have a
21 united front, a common mission and a
22 real commitment to one another. So
23 I want to thank you for your
24 leadership on all of that first and
25 foremost.

1 So I wanted to note that we
2 have the committed funding of the 45
3 million for the Targeted Diversion
4 Rental Assistance Program thanks to
5 Council colleagues, and thank you to
6 you as well, Melissa, for committing
7 an additional 15 million in addition
8 to that 30 million to bring us to
9 the 45 million amount.

10 MS. LONG: Yes.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: We
12 expect this money will be used in a
13 targeted way, is that right, with
14 the new program that's rolling out
15 in the coming months?

16 MS. LONG: Yes, that's
17 absolutely correct. That will be 30
18 million in this year, in this fiscal
19 year. And the partners are all
20 working around the clock to get this
21 stood up as quickly as possible, and
22 it will be targeted to landlords and
23 tenants participating in Eviction
24 Diversion.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And I

1 think that's been one of the most
2 important aspects that we have
3 targeted amounts of money that has
4 been dedicated to this program. So
5 any landlord who does participate,
6 they and their tenants have access
7 to a targeted and restricted pool.

8 So we brought on the
9 Reinvestment Fund to assess the
10 program, given their expertise in
11 similar evaluations of pro --
12 actually of the City's Mortgage
13 Foreclosure Diversion Program, so we
14 wanted to bring them along and
15 expect to see their findings. Could
16 you be specific about when you
17 expect the findings to be available?

18 MS. LONG: Sure. We
19 continue to work with them. I think
20 it's important to acknowledge in a
21 short period of time we've had a
22 couple of iterations of rental
23 assistance and legislation for the
24 Eviction Diversion Program, so we
25 are working with them to finalize

1 the methodology for that evaluation,
2 but hopefully soon. We meet with
3 them on a regular basis.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM:

5 Understood. It's my understanding
6 that again we did not want to be
7 hyperprescriptive within the law.
8 We wanted to allow the program to
9 evolve, but I recognize that the
10 program in its current iteration has
11 only been in existence for several
12 months, so this is partly why there
13 are just kind of shifting narratives
14 about what is working at different
15 times. But I think what we're
16 trying to do is be responsive.

17 MS. LONG: Exactly.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I know
19 that the program has also tried to
20 prioritize being responsive to small
21 landlords. Could you share a little
22 bit about what the City is doing to
23 meet the needs of smaller landlords?

24 MS. LONG: Absolutely. And
25 Eva, Kathleen, if I'm missing

1 anything, chime in. I really want
2 to -- we're very excited about the
3 Landlord Gateway Project, a
4 partnership of 15-plus City agencies
5 to create a website with resources
6 for landlords on a broad range of
7 how to get a rental license,
8 questions with eviction diversion,
9 et cetera.

10 And I can also say we're
11 looking for outreach to small
12 landlords to make sure that they're
13 engaged and working with Paul Cohen
14 at HAPCO and Andre Del Valle at PA
15 Partnership -- PA Apartment
16 Association. I think this is very
17 exciting. I now also can say CORA
18 Good Shepherd, I think Sue
19 Wasserkrug is on this call, we now
20 have a landlord liaison.

21 So I have said before our
22 small landlords are critical
23 partners and a source of affordable
24 rental housing in this City, and we
25 want to ensure that we're providing

1 as much support that we can to them
2 as well.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And how
4 often do you hold meetings?

5 MS. LONG: Well, we're
6 starting now. We just started
7 convening the partners of the
8 Landlord Gateway, and my office and
9 my partners at MDO as we speak are
10 going to start scheduling some
11 bimonthly meetings with our partners
12 Paul and Andre to make sure that
13 we're meeting the needs of all
14 partners in this program.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I
16 appreciate that. I also understand
17 that the department is looking at
18 more clearly outlining regulations
19 for participation to the program so
20 that these are not something that
21 are done by word of mouth, but are
22 actually written down so that people
23 don't have to wonder what it is that
24 they should expect. They will have
25 a clearer understanding of what to

1 expect in a little bit of the
2 timeline; is that accurate?

3 MS. LONG: That's totally
4 accurate. And a huge thanks to
5 Kathleen Grady and Josh Roper.
6 Can't thank enough people, right.
7 It really does take a huge amount of
8 folks to come together to make this
9 happen. We really want to thank
10 them. We've already started that
11 process, so we will continue that.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank
13 you very much, Melissa. And again,
14 I just want to thank all of our City
15 agencies and their leadership. This
16 wouldn't be possible without the
17 vision and the commitment held by
18 Eva Gladstein.

19 At its earliest inception
20 when it was the very hardest to do,
21 Eva absolutely knew where we wanted
22 to be and we were able to adapt and
23 make sure that we could get there
24 ultimately. And of course, as you
25 pointed out, Kathleen, Josh and so

1 many other individuals at the City
2 level that helped create portals and
3 have smoothed over and done outreach
4 and are responsible for the
5 operations of the program.

6 None of this success would
7 be possible without anybody, any of
8 you especially. And for that, I
9 think our City Council offers you
10 our tremendous gratitude and I know
11 46,000 families for sure do.

12 So thank you very much,
13 Madam Chair. Those are all my
14 questions.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
16 Vice-Chair Jones, do you have
17 questions or comments?

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank
19 you, Madam Chair. Thank you,
20 members of the Committee.

21 I just want to go on the
22 record echoing and lauding the
23 accomplishments of a program that
24 had difficult origins to say the
25 least. It was often contentious,

1 but people from all stakeholder
2 groups stayed at the table to come
3 up with the best possible scenario
4 that helped the most amount of
5 people.

6 When I say people, I mean
7 those people who are rentals, those
8 people who are the investors, those
9 people who are small business
10 managers who have put their life
11 savings often into a rental
12 property. It was not perfect, but
13 it was -- we did not let the
14 imperfect be the enemy of the good.
15 And sometimes programs are measured
16 whether we talk about the diversion
17 program that was set into motion for
18 evictions and foreclosures or this
19 eviction program. It's not just
20 measured by the people that it
21 helped, but the catastrophe it
22 avoided.

23 And I want to say kudos to
24 the sponsors of this bill and
25 previous bills, but also for their

1 work with the stakeholders to make
2 sure it was as amicable as possible,
3 so thank you for that work.

4 Thank you, Madam Chair.

5 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

6 Thank you.

7 All righty. Okay.

8 Ms. Shearlds, will you please call
9 the next panel to testify.

10 THE CLERK: Vikram Patel,
11 Abraham Pardo, Taniya Harvey.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

13 Mr. Patel, are you there and
14 connected?

15 MR. PATEL: I am indeed.

16 Thank you, Chair.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

18 Good morning. Please state your
19 name for the record and proceed with
20 your testimony.

21 MR. PATEL: Yeah. My name
22 is Vikram Patel, and I'm a
23 supervising attorney at the Housing
24 Unit at Community Legal Services.
25 Good morning. Thank you for this

1 opportunity to address City Council
2 in support of the Eviction Diversion
3 Program.

4 So to talk about this bill
5 and to give a little background
6 also, this bill is going to extend
7 the requirements that landlords
8 participate in the Philadelphia's
9 Eviction Diversion Program, which
10 has been as we've heard already, a
11 great success.

12 Now, this bill in
13 particular is going to extend the
14 current version of the program,
15 which essentially was put in place
16 earlier this year, but it has its
17 origins starting back in the summer
18 of 2020 in response to the pandemic
19 through the Emergency Housing
20 Protections Act, we first got the
21 first version of the Eviction
22 Diversion Program.

23 Now, this bill in this
24 current format requires a couple of
25 things. One, for landlords to send

1 the tenant a notice and then
2 participate in the program for at
3 least 30 days and you'll negotiate
4 in good faith. However, there is an
5 exception for cases of imminent
6 harm. So if there is an emergency
7 situation, it can go directly to
8 court.

9 The program matches certain
10 tenants with Philadelphia's
11 well-trained network of housing
12 counselors who meet with tenants,
13 review their finances, help them
14 connect with rental assistance and
15 other resources and help support
16 them during the mediation process.

17 Now, this is a free program
18 for landlords and tenants. It's far
19 less intimidating than court and it
20 actually provides landlords and
21 tenants the space to discuss the
22 issues at hand. Now, one of the
23 most compelling parts of the program
24 is that it actually works on
25 repairing that landlord-tenant

1 relationship.

2 Now, Community Legal

3 Services, what I'm doing at court, I

4 deal with landlords and tenants in a

5 very limited fashion. I'm only in

6 their lives for a short time, but

7 these landlords and tenants, they're

8 in their lives for -- in each

9 other's lives for an extended

10 period. So if we can repair that

11 relationship, it saves the landlord

12 from having to spend time and money

13 trying to find a new tenant and have

14 an empty unit. And then on the

15 other hand, it helps tenants with

16 maintaining their housing.

17 Now, in cases where the

18 landlord-tenant relationship can't

19 be repaired, it allows them to part

20 on more amicable terms because it

21 saves the landlord from having to go

22 to court, but it also saves the

23 tenant from having an eviction

24 filing, which follows them around

25 for the rest of their life.

1 I want to reiterate that,
2 eviction filings follow tenants
3 around for the rest of their lives,
4 which makes finding safe and
5 affordable housing significantly
6 harder. This program doesn't just
7 help people with maintaining housing
8 now, but it also helps people with
9 maintaining and having access to
10 safe and affordable housing in the
11 future.

12 Finally, with these
13 agreements, when a landlord and a
14 tenant can reach an agreement
15 outside of court, it saves court for
16 those complex cases, the things that
17 actually need a judge, that actually
18 need a court and allows them to be
19 heard in a timely manner. As we
20 heard earlier, there was a 90-day
21 waiting period which has now come to
22 about 30 days. So cases that need
23 to be heard in court can be heard in
24 a timely fashion.

25 Community Legal Services,

1 we've been a proud part of the
2 coalition that has helped with
3 building and supporting the Eviction
4 Diversion Program and will continue
5 to work on improving and growing it.
6 We deeply appreciate all the support
7 you've given this program in the
8 past and ask that you continue to
9 support this program and this bill
10 today. Thank you.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

12 Thank you so much. We deeply
13 appreciate the work of CLS, and I
14 also appreciate you highlighting how
15 damaging evictions are for people
16 not just in the moment, but for the
17 rest of their lives.

18 Abraham Pardo, are you
19 there -- I see you there. Can you
20 state your name for the record and
21 proceed with your testimony.

22 MR. PARDO: Yes. Good
23 morning. My name is Abraham Reyes
24 Pardo. I'm the Director of Housing
25 at the Urban League of Philadelphia,

1 which is a civil rights
2 organization. We're a housing
3 counseling agency. I am here to
4 provide testimony in support of Bill
5 220655 to extend Philadelphia's
6 acclaimed Eviction Diversion
7 Program.

8 It is true that the
9 pandemic has left a mark in all of
10 our lives. The most vulnerable
11 populations continue to fight some
12 of the side effects, which includes
13 the current conditions of the
14 housing market. Renters across the
15 United States and Philadelphia are
16 trying to navigate the uncertainties
17 of many evolving scenarios that will
18 potentially impact their ability to
19 secure housing.

20 Some examples are the
21 interest rate increases set in
22 motion by the Fed from the beginning
23 of this year, which has subsequently
24 prevented thousands of hopeful low-
25 and moderate-income renters from

1 accessing affordable mortgages. But
2 there are other situations, like the
3 one in the recent report published
4 by the Pew Charitable Trust, which
5 indicated that in the last three
6 months of the year 2021, private
7 equity firms purchased nearly 20
8 percent of all U.S. homes.

9 Nearly a third of American
10 house sales went to people who had
11 no intention of living in them.
12 Private equity is now the most
13 prominent backer amongst the 35
14 largest owners of multi-family
15 buildings. At times they don't only
16 hold the stock, but also write the
17 rules of a significantly
18 underregulated field.

19 All of this to say that the
20 circumstances surrounding the
21 housing market continue to elevate
22 the relevance of the Eviction
23 Diversion Program, which thanks to
24 your support became a national
25 reference. Now more than ever, our

1 most vulnerable communities are in
2 need of safe spaces to mediate and
3 de-escalate matters before they make
4 it to municipal court.

5 The budgets of some of
6 these affected families are already
7 stretched thin in trying to keep up
8 with their basic living expenses.

9 Hence, some of them make the
10 decision to risk their housing
11 stability by foregoing what at times
12 might be perceived as their most
13 significant expense, their housing
14 expense.

15 This also means that many
16 of these families lack the resources
17 to hire an attorney, which will
18 prevent them from understanding and
19 communicating in the same language
20 used by their counterparts. These
21 can significantly alter the power
22 dynamics and creates a tenant's
23 ability to understand and navigate
24 the different processes assigned to
25 complete an eviction. At times they

1 will receive letters and
2 communications written in legalese
3 using terminologies and time frames
4 they're very unfamiliar with.

5 However, through the
6 Eviction Diversion Program tenants
7 access support from a dedicated
8 group of advocates, which includes
9 housing counselors certified by the
10 Department of Housing. We act as
11 translators for all participants
12 regardless of their financial
13 profile.

14 We play the role of
15 connectors and advocates, setting
16 realistic expectations for both
17 parties and creating feasible action
18 plans for all participants. The
19 program has already proven to have
20 the capability to successfully
21 connect struggling families with the
22 services and the resources they
23 need. But it is now more than ever
24 that we need your support to
25 continue creating opportunities for

1 those families who are one rent
2 payment away from becoming homeless.

3 Thank you so much.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

5 Thank you so much. Thank you for
6 your work. Thank you for the
7 partnership of the Urban League, and
8 thanks also for outlining these
9 macro trends that are having an
10 impact on the housing market in
11 making this program all the more
12 critical.

13 Ms. Harvey, are you there
14 and connected?

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM:

16 Councilmember Gauthier, Madam Chair.

17 MS. HARVEY: Yes. How are
18 you doing? Good morning.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

20 Sorry, Councilmember. I was going
21 to take questions after
22 the testimony.

23 Okay. Hi. Good morning.

24 Please state your name for the
25 record and proceed with your

1 testimony.

2 MS. HARVEY: Yes. My name
3 is Taniya Harvey. I just want to
4 start off saying that the program
5 was a lifesaver for me and my son.
6 Unfortunately in the City, we
7 experience a lot of hardship, crisis
8 and young parents like myself are
9 facing these challenges alone with
10 no support. And I feel like this
11 program changed a lot.

12 I sat and met with the
13 counselor named Chan. He was very
14 supportive. I also was over the
15 phone with a judge and they let me
16 explain what was going on. They
17 heard both parties out. It was hard
18 communicating with the landlord
19 without this set in place. So once
20 this happened, it just made
21 everything a lot easier.

22 My original situation, I
23 was put out from L&I at my last
24 apartment. L&I shut my building
25 down and all the tenants had to

1 leave. So I used all my savings to
2 get into this place. I came into
3 this apartment short. Thank God for
4 the landlord working with me. So I
5 was playing catch-up since I moved
6 into this apartment.

7 I ended up getting my hours
8 reduced at Amazon, so it was just
9 falling short after that. And when
10 I tell you, I was so scared me and
11 my son being on the street. And
12 I've been working since 14. I'm
13 never without a job. So facing that
14 I could possibly have an eviction
15 forever was just so scary. I feel
16 like the eviction program came in
17 and saved the day.

18 And I'm pretty sure a lot
19 of young parents are facing this
20 type of situation, and I think it
21 could be a great help just to keep
22 families off the street and keep
23 them safe. And also, with
24 everyone's background too I like
25 what the gentleman said earlier, an

1 eviction is not just for the moment,
2 that's like forever. And I'm only
3 24, so it would be hard for me to
4 get a house, hard for me to boost my
5 credit, all types of things.

6 So I just appreciate the
7 program and that was a serious time
8 and need, so thank you to everyone
9 that's involved in this program.

10 Thank you. Thank you.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

12 Thank you so much for being willing
13 to come here and share your story
14 with us. I'm sorry to hear of all
15 of the struggles you've had to go
16 through, especially dealing with
17 some City systems, but I'm glad you
18 were able to access the program to
19 stay in your home and I wish you and
20 your son the absolute best.

21 MS. HARVEY: Thank you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

23 You're welcome.

24 Councilmember Gym, do you
25 have questions for the panel?

1 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes,
2 thank you so much, Madam Chair.

3 First of all, Ms. Harvey,
4 thank you so much again for your
5 very emotional and important
6 testimony and a reminder of why our
7 City exists. It's really to support
8 people like yourself through
9 circumstances beyond your control,
10 are facing things and need to keep
11 our families together, so thank you
12 so much.

13 We didn't know that this is
14 what could happen when we first
15 launched it, but we knew that
16 somewhere out there we wanted to
17 make sure it reach a mom like you
18 and we're just grateful for you, and
19 just thank you so much for taking
20 the time to testify because it
21 really brings it home that we really
22 do need to have options other than
23 an eviction within our toolbelt, and
24 that's what the City of Philadelphia
25 has figured out, how to create

1 something other than an eviction
2 that has to be available for
3 families in need. So thank you,
4 Ms. Harvey.

5 I want to ask just a quick
6 question to Mr. Pardo, and I want to
7 thank the Urban League for just
8 being an incredible partner on
9 everything. You've been
10 extraordinary advocates. You're
11 raising the alarm bell on the
12 private equity buy-up. And we have
13 been a real united front.

14 And in particular, one of
15 the things that we're deeply
16 invested in across our entire
17 Council body is the housing
18 counselors, which Urban League has
19 been very supportive of. You do far
20 more than just obviously this
21 program. You're supportive of the
22 Mortgage Foreclosure Diversion
23 Program. You're indirect connection
24 with individuals, with landlords.

25 You're creating a better

1 ecosystem for housing no matter
2 where you may be on it and showing
3 that more information and more
4 partnership is critical. I was
5 interested in asking how you see the
6 Diversion program supporting the
7 work that the housing counselors do?
8 How does the Diversion program
9 relate or enable housing counselors
10 to reach more people? And I think
11 you kind of touched on this, like
12 you're reaching out to tenants and
13 getting information, but I'd love to
14 hear more directly from you.

15 MR. PARDO: Yeah, thank
16 you. Thank you for that question.
17 As you very well pointed out, we are
18 the housing counseling agencies
19 sanctioned by the Department of
20 Housing and are tasked to provide
21 comprehensive housing counseling
22 services.

23 We knew that there was this
24 space for the type of work that we
25 are performing as part of the

1 Eviction Diversion Program. But
2 prior to the pandemic, it was --
3 there were times it would be a
4 little bit complicated to navigate
5 exactly how to find the opportunity
6 to connect with the renters.

7 We knew that there were
8 several renters that needed our
9 support and we knew that we had the
10 capacity to support their needs, but
11 what the Eviction Diversion Program
12 has done is it has created that safe
13 space where we can all meet and also
14 in bringing the landlords into the
15 equation as well. They are becoming
16 more familiar with other
17 possibilities and other style of
18 communication that maybe was not
19 available to them before.

20 Quite frankly I think a lot
21 of these cases were going straight
22 to court because there wasn't a
23 space like this before, right, and
24 proof of that I think is being
25 re-emphasized through the

1 testimonies that have already been
2 provided, that once before has now
3 created opportunity to de-escalate
4 some of those cases and communicate
5 in different terms with landlords
6 and tenants.

7 So the housing counselors
8 have the training. The housing
9 counselors have the knowledge. The
10 housing counselors are doing the
11 work. What we needed was the space
12 and the opportunity to connect with
13 these tenants.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank
15 you so much, Mr. Pardo. And please
16 let all of your housing counselors
17 know that we appreciate them. They
18 are the calvary that I think our
19 City needs to be able to reach
20 people right on the ground, so thank
21 you so much.

22 Thank you, Madam Chair.

23 MR. PARDO: Thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

25 Thank you.

1 Ms. Shearlds, would you
2 please call the next panel or
3 witness to testify.

4 THE CLERK: Andre
5 Del Valle, Sue Wasserkrug, Samia
6 Bristow.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
8 Wonderful. Mr. Del Valle, are you
9 there and connected?

10 MR. DEL VALLE: I am. Good
11 morning, Councilmember.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
13 Good morning. Please state your
14 name for the record and proceed with
15 your testimony.

16 MR. DEL VALLE: Sure. Good
17 morning, Chairperson Gauthier and
18 members of the Committee on Housing
19 and Neighborhood Development and
20 Homeless. My name is Andre
21 Del Valle. I'm the Vice-president
22 of Government Affairs for the
23 Pennsylvania Apartment Association.
24 I'd like to thank you for the
25 opportunity to testify today on Bill

1 No. 220655, which as mentioned were
2 to extend the residential Eviction
3 Diversion Program to facilitate
4 dispute resolutions between
5 landlords and tenants.

6 I'd like to begin by
7 thanking Councilmember Gym and her
8 team for the open dialogue over the
9 course of the past year as we work
10 closely with PHDC, Good Shepherd
11 Mediation, Community Legal Services,
12 Philadelphia Bar Association, HAPCO
13 and our members as well to continue
14 to improve this program to find
15 balance for landlords to recoup
16 outstanding balances while
17 preventing housing instability
18 across the City of Philadelphia.

19 This cross-collaboration
20 led to several programmatic changes,
21 a landlord liaison being hired as
22 mentioned earlier, \$30 million of
23 local rental assistance funds being
24 made available as well as a number
25 of amendments which you see before

1 you today.

2 Though we believe the
3 Reinvestment Fund's independent
4 analysis would have been more
5 helpful in crafting other amendments
6 to this legislation, this
7 cross-collaboration has a commitment
8 from all parties to continue to fix
9 the ongoing challenges to the
10 current Eviction Diversion Program
11 through regulation.

12 This commitment will ensure
13 that the Pennsylvania Apartment
14 Association, tenant advocates and
15 other appropriate stakeholders can
16 continue to work together in a
17 productive manner on a program that
18 finds equilibrium for both landlords
19 and tenants. At the onset of this
20 pandemic and before mediation was
21 created, many of our members
22 proactively met with residents who
23 are facing financial hardship and
24 began creating payment plan
25 agreements, and once the American

1 Rescue Funds were made available,
2 urged tenants to apply for these
3 ERAP funds made available by
4 President Biden's Administration.

5 These rental assistance
6 funds continue to assist landlords
7 who had not received payments in
8 over two years while also assisting
9 tenants by ensuring the tenant's
10 arrears were paid off given tenants
11 have the ability to apply for up to
12 12 months back at one point in this
13 program, six months forward for any
14 rent or utilities given financial
15 hardships brought on by the
16 pandemic.

17 The amendments before you
18 today are crucial for our industry.
19 And once again, I would like to
20 thank Councilmember Gym and her team
21 for their commitment to those
22 amendments, as we're also committed
23 to working with the City, courts and
24 other stakeholders, including PHDC,
25 Good Shepherd Mediation, Community

1 Legal Services, the Philadelphia Bar
2 Association on what the future of
3 this program looks like for both
4 tenant and landlords in the City.

5 We hope to reduce the
6 timeline and mediation in the
7 future, which has been one of the
8 biggest challenges for landlords
9 across the City while incentivizing
10 the program for both parties. We
11 look forward to working with this
12 legislative body, the current and
13 next Administration and all the
14 appropriate stakeholders in the
15 upcoming months on the future of
16 this program. Thank you for the
17 opportunity to testify today, and
18 I'm happy to answer any questions
19 you may have.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

21 Thank you, and kudos to you and your
22 organization and Councilmember Gym
23 and her team for being able to work
24 on these compromises. This is a
25 completely different tone and tenor

1 than when we were first working on
2 some of this stuff in the early days
3 of the pandemic.

4 Ms. Wasserkrug, can you
5 state your name for the record and
6 proceed with your testimony.

7 MS. WASSERKRUG: Yes. Good
8 morning. My name is Sue Wasserkrug
9 and the Director of Mediation at
10 CORA Services, and thank you for
11 this opportunity to address the
12 Committee in support of Bill 220655.

13 This bill will extend and
14 update the current ordinance that
15 provides an opportunity for all
16 landlords and tenants to participate
17 in Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion
18 Program. The program has proven to
19 be an effective way to support
20 landlords and tenants in their
21 efforts to resolve disputes without
22 resorting to litigation.

23 Diversion gives landlords
24 and tenants tools to unblock clogged
25 lines of communication that can sour

1 their relationship. These tools
2 enable landlords and tenants to work
3 together to find mutually,
4 acceptable, sustainable agreements
5 that keep tenants housed and keep
6 landlords in business.

7 The program as you've heard
8 works because of the collaborative
9 effort of many partners, including
10 the City, nonprofit organizations
11 and dozens of trained volunteer
12 mediators who facilitate dialogue
13 and assist participants in reaching
14 realistic and beneficial agreements.

15 Councilmembers, you wisely
16 created the Eviction Diversion
17 Program in September of 2020 to
18 mitigate the potentially devastating
19 impact of the COVID pandemic on our
20 City and our municipal court. And
21 based on the program's success
22 during the pandemic, you then
23 extended the program, adding
24 diversion as a prefiling step in all
25 eviction proceedings, not just cases

1 where COVID caused an economic
2 hardship.

3 The 2021 ordinance allowed
4 us to provide a variety of diversion
5 pathways to address a range of
6 situations. Despite the increase in
7 volume, we now process about 500
8 requests for diversion every week.

9 I am proud, proud to say that the
10 dedicated staff at CORA and at our
11 partner nonprofits are able to serve
12 landlords and tenants within 30 days
13 unless they request additional time.
14 And as a result, some 80 percent of
15 the landlord-tenant pairs who
16 participate in mediation reach an
17 agreement.

18 Landlords and tenants reach
19 out to me every day with feedback
20 about the program. Recently a
21 property manager who participated in
22 about a dozen or so mediations
23 commented, The mediations have
24 turned out to be a wonderful
25 experience and issues a resolve

1 where tenants would otherwise have
2 been evicted. A landlord attorney
3 once recently said to me, Thank you
4 so much, it's always great when we
5 can resolve cases without the
6 courts.

7 With the creation of new
8 diversion pathways that bolster
9 parties' ability to negotiate, we've
10 been flooded with correspondence
11 from landlords and tenants. We want
12 to share their negotiated agreements
13 with us and be counted as diversion
14 success stories.

15 When landlords and tenants
16 are empowered to tackle their issues
17 together, the result is not just a
18 win-win, but it's a win-win-win.
19 It's a win for the tenant who
20 maintains housing stability. It's a
21 win for the landlord who stays in
22 business and recoups their costs,
23 doesn't have to incur any costs of
24 turnover, and it's a win for the
25 community by reducing evictions and

1 homelessness and by strengthening
2 the local economy. And of course,
3 diversion reduces the burden on the
4 court so it's a win there too.

5 Thank you for your continued
6 support.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

8 Thank you for your important work
9 and for sharing those stories with
10 us.

11 Samia Bristow, are you
12 there and connected?

13 MS. BRISTOW: I am.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Can
15 you please state your name for the
16 record and proceed with your
17 testimony?

18 MS. BRISTOW: Sure. Good
19 morning, everyone. My name is Samia
20 Bristow, and I am the Associate
21 Vice-president of Programs at
22 Maternity Care Coalition. Each year
23 Maternity Care Coalition works with
24 thousands of family across
25 Philadelphia providing home

1 visiting, virtual supports,
2 center-based care and community
3 education services.

4 Year after year and across
5 all of the communities we serve, our
6 advocates, doulas, teachers report
7 that housing security is a top
8 concern of their families.

9 Pregnancy in the first few years of
10 a baby's life are some of the most
11 crucial for lifelong development.

12 Hardship during early childhood can
13 significantly affect brain
14 development.

15 Research shows that
16 homelessness can lead to physical
17 health problems for infants,
18 including low birth weight.

19 Unfortunately, far too many infants
20 and toddlers in Philadelphia
21 experience homelessness and housing
22 insecurity. Extending
23 Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion
24 Program is an important step to
25 ensuring families basic needs are

1 met.

2 The last time Maternity
3 Care Coalition appeared before this
4 Committee, we spoke primarily about
5 the impact of housing instability on
6 children's health and development.

7 As we know, children's health,
8 particularly infant health, is
9 linked to perinatal health, so I'd
10 like to speak to you about perinatal
11 health and housing stability.

12 The importance of housing
13 stability for Philadelphians, one
14 key benefit of this bill begins
15 during pregnancy. A study conducted
16 by the University of California San
17 Francisco Preterm Birth Initiative
18 found unstable housing during
19 pregnancy increases the odds of
20 preterm labor by 20 percent. So
21 housing instability during pregnancy
22 puts a birthing person at about the
23 same risk for preterm labor as
24 smoking does.

25 Another key finding of this

1 study was the correlation between
2 unstable housing and hospital length
3 of stay in readmission during the
4 post-partum period. For those
5 experiencing housing instability,
6 longer hospital stays were 60
7 percent more likely and there was
8 170 percent increase in readmissions
9 within three months after birth.

10 Extending the Philadelphia Eviction
11 Diversion Program aligns with the
12 recommendations made in the City's
13 most recent Maternal and Mortality
14 Review Report, which emphasizes the
15 need for stable and secure housing
16 during pregnancy and the post-partum
17 period.

18 In a city where our
19 pregnancy-related death rate is
20 higher than the national average and
21 where Black women account for less
22 than half the births but account for
23 nearly three-fourths of the
24 pregnancy-related deaths, we need to
25 leverage opportunities like the one

1 we have with this bill to create a
2 better, safer and healthier city for
3 pregnant Philadelphians and their
4 families. Thank you. I welcome any
5 questions.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

7 Thank you so much for your important
8 work, and thank you so much for your
9 testimony.

10 I see Councilmember Jones.

11 Do you have a comment?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

14 Councilmember Jones, are you there
15 or maybe that was from earlier? I'm
16 sorry.

17 Councilmember Gym.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes.

19 Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

20 I just wanted to express my
21 gratitude to this entire panel. I
22 think it's a great example of how
23 different parts of the housing
24 system are coming together to figure
25 out solutions. I really want to

1 thank Sue Wasserkrug and your team
2 of amazing housing counselors who
3 are out there delivering a message
4 of agency, of opportunity and of
5 hope that we can find a solution to
6 some of the biggest crises that most
7 people face.

8 And I especially want to
9 thank Andre Del Valle for your
10 partnership at the Apartment
11 Association. It's something that
12 we're deeply committed to on a very
13 personal level. I think we are
14 trying to, again as I said, not be
15 hyperprescriptive about legislation.
16 We want legislation to provide us
17 the opportunity to do something
18 significant and important that makes
19 a difference in people's lives and
20 we recognize the importance that
21 your members have had in adapting to
22 situations that are different than
23 the ones before.

24 But I think what we are
25 committed to, and what I appreciate

1 so much from PPA and especially
2 through your leadership now as Vice-
3 president I believe for PPA,
4 congratulations --

5 MR. DEL VALLE: Thank you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes,
7 absolutely. To find a truly
8 prosperous housing economy starts
9 with stability and the certainty
10 that landlords can stay in business
11 and that tenants have opportunities
12 to be housing stable.

13 And of course, I really
14 want to thank our partners at
15 Maternity Care Coalition. Thank you
16 so much. I think we said it before.
17 The building block of a healthy
18 city, the building block of a
19 prosperous economy and the building
20 block of public safety starts with a
21 healthy family, and Maternity Care
22 Coalition has been one of the most
23 important partners in seeing the
24 link between literally life and the
25 vitality of our City. So thank you

1 so much for being supportive and
2 being our partners through this and
3 many other things.

4 So thank you very much,
5 Madam Chair.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

7 Thank you.

8 Ms. Shearlds, will you
9 please call the next panel to
10 testify.

11 THE CLERK: The Honorable
12 Annette M. Rizzo, Barbara Amstutz,
13 Catherine Hicks.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

15 Judge Rizzo, are you there and
16 connected?

17 JUDGE RIZZO: I am, Madam
18 Chair.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

20 Wonderful. Good morning. It's such
21 an honor to --

22 JUDGE RIZZO: Hi. I don't
23 have a camera on and I don't know
24 how to activate it. For the
25 record --

1 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

2 Don't worry. We can hear you.

3 That's the most important thing.

4 JUDGE RIZZO: Yes, I can
5 see all of you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

7 Please state your name for the
8 record and proceed with your
9 testimony.

10 JUDGE RIZZO: Yeah. Thank
11 you so much. Good morning. The
12 Honorable Annette M. Rizzo and I'm
13 glad to be here. So I have to
14 echo -- you're not seeing my big
15 grin, everyone, of just how proud
16 with a capital P I am. If it was
17 not for the esteemed Committee on
18 Housing, Neighborhood Development
19 and the Homeless as well as
20 Councilmember Gym and your team and
21 your supporters of this bill, Chair
22 Gauthier, Brooks and Thomas, thank
23 you so much, but with a grin that
24 goes beyond everyone who's present,
25 I just have to stop and give a pause

1 really of how much journey you have
2 done having lived a life on very
3 parallel tracks, how successful this
4 has been with more to come. So at
5 your invitation, I am pleased to
6 weigh in and absolutely endorse of
7 course passage of Bill No. 220655,
8 and it's progeny that will come
9 after that to hopefully make this an
10 established part of Philadelphia's
11 landscape in terms of really
12 sustaining the housing for our
13 citizens.

14 I appreciate these house
15 checks on the program which
16 obviously were borne out of crisis,
17 shaped by the laser focus of the
18 needs of the moment to stabilize
19 housing for so many vulnerable
20 Philadelphians all under the
21 extraordinary stressors of a house
22 catastrophe and economic meltdown.

23 Now, you're marking a
24 two-year anniversary, pause.
25 Because of the Eviction Diversion

1 Program, we now do have the
2 opportunity to look over our
3 shoulders as to what has been
4 accomplished, what journey has been
5 done and what actual benefits have
6 been brought with the efforts and
7 energy generated from this very
8 legislative body to make eviction
9 diversion a reality. Thank you.

10 So members of the prior
11 panels of speakers have showed data
12 and also granular information of
13 day-to-day operations of the
14 program, I'm especially struck by
15 the vignette shared by Sue
16 Wasserkrug but most importantly by
17 the pointed story, her story, told
18 by Ms. Harvey. Thank you for
19 stepping up to share that.

20 So I'm not here to
21 reiterate that data, but only to
22 reflect on the data in a global way
23 what have we accomplished. Yes, the
24 culture arm has been answered. And
25 I love the idea that on each and

1 every opportunity that was shown a
2 cohort, a biosphere of certain
3 stakeholders and those who are
4 benefactors of this program on
5 coming together. It has been an
6 amazing, I call it a ballet, the
7 ballet of the amazing movements and
8 parts at the same time and yet all
9 working to produce this wonderful
10 theater that in reality has created
11 so much good.

12 It's been a path of lessons
13 learned obviously from the City of
14 the programs, with mortgage
15 foreclosure, with tax lien and with
16 other programs such as that. And
17 the DHCD under Melissa Long and her
18 team of course to put this together,
19 CLS, PLA and the stewardship of that
20 hotline, which is really the portal
21 entry for so many to really find
22 help as they get directed to the
23 vital resources of the City, and of
24 course CORA which really encompasses
25 Good Shepherd as we started this

1 program. It's an amazing, as I
2 said, portal to entry of it.

3 We see the power, the power
4 of mediation as Abraham talked
5 about. A safe space for landlords
6 and tenants to really talk and
7 dialogue face-to-face even though
8 it's not in person or even by Zoom
9 per chance, which even shows that
10 even those hurdles have not stopped
11 the success of this program, and
12 that is a huge and significant
13 accomplishment beyond all that can
14 be accomplished.

15 So where do we go?
16 Endorsement of this bill to support
17 the eviction diversion means only
18 one thing, bringing more success,
19 more stability built upon a platform
20 that has been established two years
21 ago and in particular, adding the
22 consistency and level-playing field
23 of the program. Making it mandatory
24 prefiling from the very beginning
25 has really set the stage of what has

1 been accomplished and what can be
2 accomplished. So though it has not
3 been a straight line of meeting
4 goals, it's building blocks for a
5 much stronger program in the future.

6 I would be remiss not to
7 recognize representatives of the
8 landlords and the trade associations
9 and counsel of course for them. The
10 City agencies, everyone that has
11 stepped up, our wonderful precious
12 housing counselors which really are
13 the heart of the program and really
14 are so with that epicenter so
15 faithfully and so successfully.

16 So as much as I say to you
17 all it is a time to look over our
18 shoulders as to what has been done,
19 but I respectfully suggest to you
20 don't stare. We need to plan
21 thoughtfully and strategically to
22 improve that which has been
23 developed. So I suggest my three
24 Cs.

25 First, coordinate.

1 Coordinate more systemically with
2 the courts. And I'm so actually
3 thrilled coming from the Bench to
4 see that coordination has started to
5 just reduce court docket and provide
6 a platform even when matters do have
7 to come into the court system, how
8 are they done fairly, efficiently,
9 effectively and provide an offramp
10 for distressed tenants per chance to
11 still have a chance to work out
12 sustainable deals with landlords to
13 obviously support their housing
14 situation.

15 I was just at a meeting at
16 the Bar Association. I want to give
17 a shout-out to Judge Fox who has
18 really shifted culture in the court
19 to really look at the hydraulics of
20 the court system to see if it can be
21 more responsive to all the
22 stakeholders, particularly the
23 tenants coming in with the landlords
24 to get their matters adjudicated
25 with the chance really as I said to

1 offramp and see what can be done to
2 sustain that relationship. That is
3 new and is something that should be
4 celebrated and a great salute to
5 Judge Fox and his team at the FJD.
6 We really have become a Philadelphia
7 model for the country, and I'm so
8 proud to say that.

9 Challenge, yes we are
10 challenged with this recent culture
11 shift. I have to just -- and just
12 to divert just a second, just last
13 night I attended a lecture with
14 Anita Hill, for those who may
15 remember from history. 31 years
16 ago, she testified before the U.S.
17 Senate Judiciary Committee about
18 gender issues, gender discrimination
19 and harassment. And she started a
20 movement that she talked about as a
21 culture shift for those who are in
22 distress needs to come forward. And
23 she talked about that being Step 1,
24 but that's just Step 1. So a
25 culture shift to do what she sees as

1 developed to really hopefully go on
2 a path of structural and
3 institutional changes. And I
4 suggest here we learn from that in
5 our very subject we have here today.

6 Culture has shifted.

7 Culture has shifted. So based on
8 that, let's continue to work to have
9 those institutionalized structurally
10 there present to really help all the
11 citizens of Philadelphia with again
12 this ballet of services that we've
13 talked about which is just
14 incredible.

15 Particularly dealing with
16 the challenges of private equity
17 coming into our City limits as other
18 major cities, yes, we have to take
19 pause with that. Because you know
20 what it's about, it's about
21 establishing neighborhood success as
22 well, having communities be
23 stabilized not just in the home and
24 for the families but beyond. And
25 for those in private equity may not

1 understand that Philadelphia story
2 and care enough about that to step
3 in and look at alternatives to
4 stabilize.

5 We have got to be that
6 voice, that sense of education, that
7 sense of structure to offer
8 opportunities for private equity to
9 be in partnership to stabilize our
10 housing on a city-wide basis. And I
11 know that's a challenge that rests
12 with this legislative body. You are
13 up to that challenge.

14 Commitment, we need to
15 commit our precious resources. The
16 fact that the City has stepped up
17 with of course City Council and the
18 Mayor with dedicated resources going
19 forward for rental assistance shows
20 that commitment that is so valuable,
21 so priceless for us as we move
22 forward with other initiatives as to
23 Right to Counsel, partner with our
24 local foundations, and of course the
25 TRF study that comes forward. It

1 was vital to the mortgage program.
2 It will be a guiding light to where
3 there can be opportunities of
4 modification, shift, change that
5 meets the needs and you will learn
6 much from that data. But we are all
7 data-driven. It's sort of our
8 benchmark and it's what makes us a
9 special program and one that can be
10 modeled again beyond Philadelphia
11 borders, through the Commonwealth
12 and other states. History has
13 proven that and you, in fact, will
14 step up.

15 The one issue I want to
16 talk about is we have to be
17 thoughtful in coordination, my last
18 point, with making the successes of
19 Eviction Diversion the best it can
20 be, really celebrating these
21 volunteer mediators who actually are
22 colleagues of mine from JAMS.

23 Now, doing mediation full-
24 time, we see the power of it to help
25 support that in training and

1 expansion. Also, to look at sort of
2 the distress that a tenant
3 undergoes, both from notice of the
4 landlord, informal dialogue, coming
5 into diversion, possibly being a
6 court action and what follows in
7 terms of having a record, also to
8 try to sort of again take something
9 sideways and hopefully address some
10 of the default judgment issues with
11 more notice and education throughout
12 the community, there is opportunity
13 for partnership there. We need to
14 take that up and have commitment to
15 it, to really see at all these
16 inflection points where we again can
17 help to stabilize housing.

18 So in just closing, again a
19 huge kudos and shout-out to all of
20 you, all of you on this platform for
21 all that you have done, all that you
22 have continued to do. Passage of
23 this bill will provide of course
24 that needed platform as we move
25 forward and again remain the model

1 throughout the country, not because
2 we are but because we do. So as I
3 say with every speech I make, may
4 the force be with all of us, and
5 thank you again and thank the Chair
6 for this opportunity.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

8 Thank you so much, Judge Rizzo.
9 Thank you for those important
10 insights. Thank you for your
11 endorsement of this critical
12 program, but more importantly thank
13 you for your contributions to this
14 program and to the cause of
15 affordable housing more broadly in
16 the City.

17 I have a feeling that
18 Members want to also jump in and
19 make some comments, so I'm not going
20 to make you guys wait until the end
21 of the panel. Councilmember Gym and
22 then Councilmember -- oh, sorry.
23 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson and
24 then Councilmember Gym, please.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you
2 so much, Madam Chair, and thank you,
3 colleagues.

4 First, I just wanted to
5 commend and give kudos to Judge
6 Rizzo for her testimony. I remember
7 when she worked with Councilmember
8 Jones on the Mortgage Diversion
9 Program many years ago now when I
10 was a very young legislative aide in
11 City Council, and it was just a
12 dynamic program and they were able
13 to help a number of people in the
14 midst of a housing crisis that we
15 were facing in the City at that
16 time. And so, I wanted to thank her
17 for her continued commitment and
18 involvement on this work, and also
19 for mentioning my soror Anita Hill,
20 who was here in Philadelphia last
21 night.

22 I wanted to thank my
23 colleague Councilmember Helen Gym
24 for her work in ensuring that she
25 was inclusive in the background work

1 for this bill in working with all
2 stakeholders of both internal and
3 external to get to the best space
4 and place that she can get to for
5 this legislation for your continued
6 work on this historic rental
7 assistance and housing assistance
8 for folks in Philadelphia.

9 One thing I just wanted to
10 quickly go back to, something that I
11 I think I heard mentioned a little
12 bit earlier, about the \$30 million
13 in rental assistance. I just wanted
14 to get that on the record that there
15 will be rental assistance still
16 available going forward because that
17 was one thing that we continued to
18 hear, and I just want to put that on
19 the record that we all worked very,
20 very hard to ensure that there would
21 be rental assistance available.

22 And one thing I wanted to
23 ask just for the record is around
24 the process. I'm very familiar with
25 this process now. And I will say it

1 usually takes about a month or so to
2 get through the initial part of the
3 program. So with the \$30 million
4 that was set aside, will there be
5 rental assistance for that first 30
6 days of the process? You now how
7 typically you're mandated to go
8 through that first 30 days, but will
9 there be rental assistance given for
10 that portion of the process as well?

11 MS. LONG: Do you want me
12 to respond?

13 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

14 RICHARDSON: Hey, Melissa.

15 MS. LONG: Hey, how are
16 you? So this is going to be a
17 different process, right, and it's
18 very compact, so we're very looking
19 to streamline the application,
20 right. And I just do want to add
21 while this 30 million is absolutely
22 amazing, it is going to be very
23 targeted and not as substantial for
24 each tenant, so we are working
25 through that with the partners and

1 our tech folks to try to provide
2 support so that folks can get into a
3 repayment agreement. So the
4 approval process and the application
5 will be much -- we're working to
6 make it much more streamlined.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

8 RICHARDSON: Which I certainly agree
9 with, and I think that will be
10 advantageous to assist more
11 families, right, instead of the
12 money sort of drying up really
13 quickly with the amount of
14 individuals we're seeking to assist.

15 But my question remains
16 relative to just that first 30 days
17 because you know it's mandated that
18 you have to go through that first 30
19 days in order for your application
20 to be reviewed and for the mediation
21 to be scheduled. Is there any
22 compensation for that first 30 days?
23 Do you know what I mean, Melissa?

24 MS. LONG: Yeah, yeah. So
25 I'm happy to follow up because we're

1 working through all that process,
2 right, and hopefully it won't take
3 as long, that again those that can
4 have a speedy review and quick
5 agreement and turnaround, also
6 working with PHDC, our great
7 partners in this to get payments out
8 quickly. So happy to follow up with
9 you as we get closer to having that
10 buttoned up.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

12 RICHARDSON: Okay. I just wanted
13 get that on the record --

14 MS. LONG: Of course.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

16 RICHARDSON: -- because that was a
17 lot of hard work by my colleagues to
18 ensure that it was at least \$30
19 million there for continued rental
20 assistance as this program is
21 extended because that was -- like I
22 said, the biggest thing we heard in
23 this process is that there was not
24 funding. So there is funding.
25 Funding is available. It will be

1 more astringent so that we can help
2 more families than before. And I
3 appreciate the work that you all are
4 doing there.

5 And then lastly, and I
6 thought about this listening to just
7 all the testimony and thinking about
8 how things went previously, what
9 resources will be necessary to
10 create a post-filing mediation
11 program here in the City?

12 MS. LONG: I may turn that
13 over to -- are my colleagues from
14 MDO still here, my partner in
15 everything for a very long time?
16 We've been working together for
17 decades. Eva, yup.

18 MS. GLADSTEIN: (Muted).

19 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

20 RICHARDSON: Eva, you're on mute.

21 MS. GLADSTEIN: There we
22 go. Sorry about that. Eva
23 Gladstein, Deputy Managing Director
24 for Health and Human Services.
25 We're very much looking forward to

1 the ability to create a post-filing
2 eviction diversion program, but we
3 are very concerned that we do that
4 once there is some methodology for
5 making sure that there's no record
6 that would blight the tenant's
7 opportunity going forward in the
8 future.

9 So that's going to take
10 some work with a number of partners.
11 We've begun those efforts, but I
12 would hope within this coming year
13 that that will be an opportunity
14 that we could have.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

16 RICHARDSON: Okay. And if you can
17 just keep us updated on that and
18 provide us any updates that you can,
19 particularly because of the
20 transition that's happening. We
21 just want to continue to be updated
22 going sort of into that last year.
23 Okay?

24 MS. GLADSTEIN: Absolutely.
25 And we really appreciate your

1 support and your continuing support
2 because that will be a heavy lift.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

4 RICHARDSON. Yes, agreed. Okay.
5 Thank you.

6 And thank you so much,
7 Madam Chair. Kudos to you,
8 Councilmember Gym. Okay. Thank
9 you.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

11 Thanks, Councilmember.

12 Councilmember Gym.

13 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes,
14 just a brief comment. First of all,
15 thank you so much, Councilmember
16 Gilmore Richardson, and for pointing
17 out and keeping on the record that
18 there is dedicated rental assistance
19 money for the Eviction Diversion
20 Program and it is money that unlike
21 the state and money that flowed
22 through the federal government, it's
23 one where we can actually be more in
24 control of the regulations. So as
25 you said, we can reach more

1 families, we can reach more
2 individuals and hopefully make it
3 last as long as we can.

4 I also just wanted to have
5 a brief moment of thanks for Judge
6 Rizzo. And obviously, I think Judge
7 Rizzo and Councilmember Jones
8 helping lead the Mortgage
9 Foreclosure Diversion Program
10 through our City at a time when
11 there was crisis was a great model
12 for laying the groundwork for the
13 Eviction Diversion Program as well.

14 The Eviction Diversion
15 Program that Judge Rizzo has been so
16 supportive of from the very
17 beginning serving as a key member of
18 the Anti-Eviction Task Force that
19 was led by Eva Gladstein has been
20 just a really clear voice in
21 uncertain times about how to guide
22 through the uncertainty when there's
23 chaos that's going on all around,
24 Judge Rizzo was an incredibly clear
25 and compelling and moral voice that

1 the City had to act, and actually
2 that our best most important use was
3 competency.

4 Being able to actually
5 deliver something of importance,
6 meaning and that makes a sizable
7 difference in people's lives is one
8 of our most important tasks. And so
9 often I think that there's a belief
10 or a tolerating of things when we're
11 insufficient on resources, but in
12 this particular case the
13 collaboration pushed us through and
14 the resources followed.

15 And I do think that that is
16 a lesson that Judge Rizzo kind of
17 echoed in many of her comments,
18 which is sometimes you just go have
19 to wield these things into being.
20 And certainly with someone like
21 Judge Rizzo being a force of will
22 and nature as well, those things
23 seem possible, but you've seen it
24 now through two different crises,
25 housing crises for the nation and

1 here at home. And I just want to
2 thank you for being that stable
3 anchor through both those crises and
4 for really guiding us with your
5 voice and with competency as well.

6 Thank you, Madam Chair.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

8 Thank you.

9 Barbara Amstutz, are you
10 there and connected?

11 MS. AMSTUTZ: Yes, I am.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Can
14 you please state your name for the
15 record and proceed with your
16 testimony?

17 MS. AMSTUTZ: Terrific.

18 Okay. Good morning, Councilmember
19 Jamie Gauthier and Vice-chair Jones
20 and the members of the Housing,
21 Neighborhood Development and
22 Homeless Committee. I am Barbara
23 Amstutz, a retired lawyer serving as
24 a volunteer mediator since the
25 program's inception with Good

1 Shepherd Mediation, GSM, a nonprofit
2 agency selected by the City of
3 Philadelphia implementing landlord
4 and tenant mediation for the
5 Eviction Diversion Program.

6 In partnership with
7 Community Legal Services of
8 Philadelphia and pursuant with the
9 Emergency Housing Protections Act,
10 GSM provides landlords and tenants
11 an opportunity to resolve their
12 housing issues through sustainable
13 mediated agreements. The goal, to
14 prevent the devastating consequences
15 of eviction and homelessness.

16 For decades, GSM has been
17 providing mediation for individuals
18 in need of dispute resolution and a
19 variety of settings to include
20 juvenile justice, peer mediation in
21 schools, family and custody and
22 conflict resolution with seniors.

23 Mediation is also
24 particularly effective in landlord
25 and tenant disputes because it

1 facilitates a process that reframes
2 the issues for the parties and
3 enables them to identify their own
4 solutions. The process that has
5 been set up by the City of
6 Philadelphia, Community Legal
7 Services and GSM works seamlessly.

8 GSM has done a stellar job
9 in training and assigning cases to
10 mediators. Mediators, landlords and
11 tenants receive automated notice
12 with the time and date of the
13 mediation and mediations occur via
14 conference call. Housing counselors
15 play a vital role in the process
16 too.

17 A partnership with
18 nonprofit housing counseling
19 agencies pair housing advocates with
20 tenants to support them during the
21 mediation. Housing counselors
22 provide the knowledge of where to
23 source and apply for rental
24 assistance and collaborate
25 seamlessly and closely with tenants

1 to provide advocacy and support.

2 I have been most impressed

3 with the housing counselors and

4 their work and their many

5 contributions during mediations. I

6 have mediated an extensive number

7 and variety of cases involving

8 repayment agreements, disputes over

9 utility bills, unanticipated rent

10 increases, negotiations for move-out

11 dates, new leases and redress for

12 repairs. In these situations, the

13 parties work together to establish a

14 monthly prorated payment plan for

15 the arrearages and ongoing rent and

16 address many of the nonfinancial

17 issues.

18 By diverting the case from

19 the court system, parties have

20 avoided eviction and addressed the

21 other housing issues without

22 incurring any incremental costs.

23 Due to the good faith efforts of

24 both the tenant and the landlord and

25 the many contributions of the

1 housing advocates, these cases reach
2 resolution. And in each instance,
3 the agreement came directly from the
4 self-determination of the
5 participants.

6 COVID-19 and other economic
7 factors consequently have disrupted
8 the rental housing market in
9 Philadelphia, resulting in an
10 unprecedented number of breaches of
11 lease terms, rental payments,
12 maintenance requirements and
13 move-out dates.

14 With mediation, we will
15 reduce the harm done, avoid the need
16 for court and help landlords and
17 tenants resolve their conflict on
18 their own without court
19 intervention. It is my
20 understanding since 2020 that over
21 3,319 mediations where the landlord
22 and the tenant participated, over 80
23 percent resulted in agreement on an
24 agreement to continue to negotiate.

25 Benefits of diversion and

1 mediation include helping tenants
2 avoid eviction and landlords to
3 avoid vacancies and turnover costs.
4 Based on my experience, this
5 diversion pathway is most effective,
6 reduces the backlog in housing court
7 from 90 to 30 days, reduces
8 evictions that may lead to
9 homelessness and meets the needs of
10 both the tenant and the landlord
11 with an expedient and self-
12 determined solution that includes
13 resource referrals and counseling
14 support.

15 I strongly support the
16 continuation of this Eviction
17 Diversion Program in 2023 and on to
18 2024. It is the most cost-effective
19 way to resolve landlord-tenant
20 disputes without court intervention
21 and the cost and damage of an
22 eviction filing.

23 I am most grateful to serve
24 as a volunteer in the Eviction
25 Diversion Program and to contribute

1 to helping people who have been
2 adversely affected in their housing
3 stability by COVID-19 and its
4 aftermath. Thank you very much
5 today for affording me this
6 opportunity to testify today. Thank
7 you.

8 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
9 Thank you for your testimony, and
10 thank you for all of the hard and
11 meaningful work you've done as a
12 volunteer. Thank you so much.

13 MS. AMSTUTZ: Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
15 Ms. Catherine Hicks, are you there
16 and connected?

17 MS. HICKS: I am here.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
19 Good morning.

20 MS. HICKS: Good morning.
21 Good morning.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
23 It's a pleasure to have you here
24 with us this morning.

25 MS. HICKS: Thank you. It

1 is a pleasure and I've been
2 listening to everyone and it's been
3 wonderful.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

5 Thank you. Please state your name
6 for the record and proceed with your
7 testimony.

8 MS. HICKS: Okay.

9 Catherine Hicks and Philadelphia
10 President of the NAACP. And good
11 afternoon all. Thank you,
12 Councilmembers Gym, Brooks,
13 Gauthier, Thomas, Richardson and all
14 those who continue to support this
15 bill. The Philadelphia branch NAACP
16 is in total support of Bill 220655
17 in extending the Eviction Diversion
18 Program.

19 The 2020 coronavirus
20 pandemic wreaked havoc throughout
21 the world. This was especially seen
22 with low-income families who
23 struggled to maintain jobs and
24 housing, families who rent their
25 homes, families who were in fear of

1 being evicted and the fear of
2 homelessness. Landlords were in
3 fear of not being able to receive
4 payment and losing their properties.
5 This program has helped both.

6 For the past two years, the
7 City of Philadelphia has
8 administrated a successful prefiling
9 Eviction Diversion Program launched
10 in September 2020 by providing
11 notices, resources and counseling
12 support as well as trained mediators
13 to resolve these disputes. These
14 are desperately needed in this time.

15 We have families that are
16 concerned about homeless, about
17 losing their jobs, and we find that
18 when you are in an eviction process,
19 all of these things come into
20 effect. You have the chance of not
21 only losing your home but losing
22 your job and maybe being displaced
23 as a family.

24 The program was extended
25 twice with various changes made to

1 the structure and is currently
2 authorized through December 2022.
3 We are hoping that this will become
4 more of a permanent plan, and we ask
5 that those that are involved look
6 for that and look to see that that
7 can happen.

8 The program has proven
9 dramatically to reduce evictions in
10 what was once the fourth highest
11 evicting city in the nation. The
12 Eviction Diversion Program not only
13 prevented an overwhelming number of
14 cases from reaching court, but it
15 also recently help reduce court wait
16 times from 90 days to 30.

17 By building this program's
18 success, cases which required court
19 resolutions are heard significantly
20 faster. And that is again something
21 that is very important to those that
22 are in a process of an eviction
23 because you only have a certain
24 amount of time. And in that time
25 you are trying to if not look for

1 additional housing, but hopefully be
2 in a chance to receive assistance.

3 We must continue to support
4 families with this program and
5 others to assure that families and
6 landlords can work together
7 cohesively. We have seen and heard
8 of the horror stories of what
9 happens when families are displaced
10 or put in a situation where they
11 cannot receive housing because they
12 have received an eviction on their
13 credit. I would hope that the
14 Eviction Diversion Program will be
15 extended to assure that citizens
16 eligible continue to maintain their
17 homes, family and stability.

18 I saw that Judge Rizzo was
19 on the line earlier, I'm not sure if
20 she's still there, but has been an
21 advocate for many years when I
22 worked at the Philadelphia Sheriff's
23 Office where this program -- I was
24 in contact when this program began.
25 That has just been so needed

1 throughout the City because we have
2 so many families that are in need of
3 not only a diversion program like
4 this, but an opportunity to get
5 assistance.

6 So again, with the
7 Philadelphia branch NAACP along with
8 the national, housing is one of our
9 call to actions and call to charge
10 to make sure that this is something
11 that we are looking at, so we are in
12 full support. And again, I want to
13 thank you for the opportunity to
14 speak on this.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
16 Thank you so much for your
17 testimony, and thank you very much
18 for all of your work and advocacy on
19 this important topic. We appreciate
20 you.

21 MS. HICKS: You're welcome.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: And
23 we think -- Judge Rizzo, you have a
24 comment?

25 JUDGE RIZZO: Yeah. I was

1 so glad to see you, Cathy. Proud as
2 anything. I feel like I'm the
3 mother of everyone. Am I --

4 MS. HICKS: I remember when
5 it started. And it was a wonderful
6 program and you took charge then,
7 and I just applaud you for
8 continuing to do this work because
9 it does work. And it's just
10 exciting. When I saw your name, I
11 was jumping for joy.

12 JUDGE RIZZO: Great. And I
13 just want to thank you so much and
14 for all your journey now, fantastic,
15 as well as your comments made. Big
16 shout-out to Councilmember Jones,
17 smile big. He called me a shero. I
18 call him a hero right back and all
19 of you online really amazing. I'm
20 very gratified and humbled by your
21 comments, and I'm honored to be
22 still part of this incredible team.
23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
25 Thank you. It's some powerhouse

1 women in this hearing today. I'm
2 happy to be here.

3 Okay. Are there any other
4 questions or comments for the
5 panel -- Councilmember Jones, do you
6 have a comment?

7 (No response.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

9 Okay. All righty. There being no
10 further questions from members of
11 the Committee and no other witnesses
12 to testify, I will ask if there is
13 anyone else present in this hearing
14 whose name we have failed to call
15 and who wishes to offer testimony on
16 the resolution being considered
17 today?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

20 There being no further questions
21 from members of the Committee and no
22 other witnesses to testify, I want
23 to thank all the panels and
24 witnesses for their participation
25 today. We value your opinions.

1 I now invite all panels and
2 witnesses to please disconnect
3 before we go into our public
4 meeting. We will now pause the
5 proceedings briefly as multiple
6 participants leave the hearing.

7 This concludes the public
8 hearing of the Committee. We will
9 now go into a public meeting to
10 consider the action to be taken on
11 the bills before this Committee
12 today.

13 Ms. Shearlds, will you
14 please call the roll to take
15 attendance.

16 THE CLERK: Councilmember
17 Bass.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
19 morning or good afternoon. This is
20 Councilwoman Bass. I am present
21 still.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
23 Good afternoon.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
25 afternoon.

1 THE CLERK: Councilmember

2 Brooks.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good

4 afternoon. I'm present.

5 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

6 Good afternoon.

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember

8 Gilmore Richardson.

9 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

10 RICHARDSON: Good afternoon, Chair

11 and colleagues. I am present.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

13 Good afternoon.

14 THE CLERK: Councilmember

15 Squilla.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good

17 afternoon, Madam Chair and

18 colleagues. Present.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

20 Good afternoon.

21 THE CLERK: Councilmember

22 Driscoll.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: Good

24 afternoon. Present.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

1 Good afternoon.

2 THE CLERK: Vice-Chairman

3 Jones.

4 (No response.)

5 THE CLERK: And,

6 Councilmember Gauthier.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

8 Present. Thank you. We will now go

9 into our public meeting. The Chair

10 recognizes -- oh, wait. Is

11 Councilmember Jones in the hearing

12 or meeting?

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

15 Okay. Councilmember Brooks, would

16 you be able to do the motion? I'll

17 send you the script -- oh,

18 Councilmember Jones is there.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay.

20 All right.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank

22 you, Madam Chair. I was having

23 technical difficulties. Are you

24 ready for the amendment?

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: The

1 Chair recognizes Councilmember Jones
2 for a motion on Bill No. 220655.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank
4 you, Madam Chair.

5 I offer an amendment to
6 Bill No. 220655. A copy of the
7 amendment has been circulated to all
8 members of Council. I move for the
9 adoption of the amendment.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Second.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: The
12 Chair notes for the record that
13 Councilmember Bass seconded the
14 motion. It has been moved and
15 properly seconded that the amendment
16 to Bill No. 220655 be adopted.

17 All in favor will indicate
18 by saying aye.

19 (Aye.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
21 Those opposed?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: The
24 ayes have it and the bill has been
25 amended.

1 The Chair recognizes
2 Councilmember Jones for a motion on
3 all of the bills heard today.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank
5 you, Madam Chair.

6 I move that Bill No. 220655
7 as amended be moved from this
8 Committee with a favorable
9 recommendation and further move that
10 the rules of Council be suspended to
11 allow next reading in our next
12 session of Council.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Second.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: The
15 Chair notes for the record that
16 Councilmember Bass seconds the
17 motion. It has been moved and
18 properly seconded.

19 All those in favor of the
20 motion will signify by saying aye.

21 (Aye.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

23 Those opposed?

24 (No response.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: The

1 ayes have it and the motion carries.

2 This concludes the business
3 before the Committee on Housing,
4 Neighborhood Development and the
5 Homeless. Thank you all very much
6 for your attention.

7 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank
8 you, Madam Chair.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
10 you, Madam Chair. Have a great day,
11 colleagues.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank
13 you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
15 Thank you, colleagues. And
16 congrats, Councilmember Gym.

17 (Committee on Housing,
18 Neighborhood Development and The
19 Homeless concluded at 12:40 p.m.)

20

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25

1 C E R T I F I C A T I O N

2 I, hereby certify that the
3 proceedings and evidence noted are contained
4 fully and accurately in the stenographic notes
5 taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that
6 this is a correct transcript of the same.
7

8

9

10

11

TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

12

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18 (The foregoing certification of
19 this transcript does not apply to any
20 reproduction of the same by any means, unless
21 under the direct control and/or supervision
22 of the certifying reporter.)

23

24

25

<u>WORD</u> <u>INDEX</u>					
< \$ >	94:7 98:16	acclaimed	82:10	alternative	application
\$30 50:22	31 73:15	10:23 36:6	adversely 95:2	8:13	81:19 82:4, 19
80:12 81:3	35 13:20	accomplished	advocacy 92:1	alternatives	apply 52:2, 11
83:18	37:13	68:4, 23 70:14	100:18	75:3	91:23 109:19
\$300 19:8	36 11:15	71:1, 2	advocate 99:21	amazing 63:2	appreciate
\$45 14:2	< 4 >	accomplishmen	advocates	69:6, 7 70:1	26:16 35:6, 13,
< 1 >	4 1:1	t 70:13	9:10 10:4	81:22 101:19	14 43:6 48:17
1 7:19 73:23,	40,000 8:3	accomplishmen	11:1 39:8, 15	Amazon 42:8	63:25 67:14
24	45 22:2, 9	ts 28:23	45:10 51:14	amended	84:3 85:25
1,750 19:1	46,000 19:9	account 61:21,	59:6 91:19	106:25 107:7	100:19
10:30 1:1	28:11	22	93:1	amending 5:1	appropriate
10th 19:22	< 5 >	accurate 27:2,	Affairs 49:22	amendment	51:15 53:14
12 52:12	500 56:7	4	affect 59:13	14:13 105:24	approval 82:4
12:40 108:19	< 6 >	accurately	affordable	106:5, 7, 9, 15	arm 68:24
14 7:20 42:12	60 19:17 61:6	109:1	25:23 34:5, 10	amendments	arrearages
15 22:7	< 7 >	acknowledge	37:1 78:15	50:25 51:5	19:14 92:15
1500 19:22	7th 19:11	10:2 23:20	affording 95:5	52:17, 22	arrears 52:10
15-plus 25:4	< 8 >	Act 6:8 31:20	aftermath 95:4	American	aside 81:4
16 18:19	80 19:1 56:14	39:10 88:1	afternoon	37:9 51:25	asking 20:23
170 61:8	93:22	90:9	14:11 96:11	amicable 30:2	46:5
18 14:15	< 9 >	39:17 77:6	103:19, 23, 25	33:20	aspect 8:6
180 11:14	90 9:1 13:19	103:10	104:4, 6, 10, 13,	amount 21:11	10:16
< 2 >	94:7 98:16	actions 100:9	17, 20, 24	22:9 27:7	aspects 23:2
2,000 18:24	90-day 34:20	activate 65:24	105:1	29:4 82:13	assess 23:9
20 37:7 60:20	930 19:23	actual 68:5	afternoon's	98:24	assigned 38:24
2020 6:25	9-800 5:1	adapt 12:19	14:12	amounts 23:3	assigning 91:9
18:22 31:18	< A >	27:22	agencies 11:1	Amstutz 65:12	assist 52:6
55:17 93:20	a.m 1:1	adapting 63:21	12:19 13:9	89:9, 11, 17, 23	55:13 82:10,
96:19 97:10	ability 36:18	add 81:20	18:4, 13 25:4	95:13	14
2021 37:6	38:23 52:11	adding 55:23	27:15 46:18	analysis 51:4	assistance
56:3	57:9 85:1	70:21	71:10 91:19	anchor 89:3	7:25 8:3 14:4
2022 1:1	able 8:9, 19	addition 22:7	agency 36:3	and/or 109:21	18:18 19:7, 13
18:23 98:2	27:22 43:18	additional	63:4 90:2	Andre 25:14	22:4 23:23
2023 94:17	48:19 53:23	99:1	ago 70:21	26:12 49:4, 20	32:14 50:23
2024 14:16	56:11 79:12	Additionally	73:16 79:9	63:9	52:5 75:19
94:18	88:4 97:3	5:24	agree 82:8	Anita 73:14	80:7, 13, 15, 21
22 9:6	105:16	address 31:1	agreed 86:4	79:19	81:5, 9 83:20
220655 1:1	Abraham	54:11 56:5	agreement	Annette 65:12	86:18 91:24
4:21 5:1	30:11 35:18,	77:9 92:16	19:2 34:14	66:12	99:2 100:5
17:18 20:7	23 70:4	addressed	56:17 82:3	anniversary	assistant 18:5
36:5 50:1	absolute 43:20	92:20	83:5 93:3, 23,	67:24	assisting 52:8
54:12 67:7	absolutely	adjudicated	24	announcement	Associate
96:16 106:2, 6,	22:17 24:24	72:24	agreements	2:5	58:20
16 107:6	27:21 64:7	administered	19:20, 24	answer 20:9	associated 5:7
24 43:3	67:6 81:21	10:22	34:13 51:25	53:18	Association
< 3 >	85:24	administrated	55:4, 14 57:12	answered	11:21 15:4
3,319 93:21	acceptable	97:8	90:13 92:8	68:24	25:16 49:23
30 9:1 13:20	55:4	Administration	aide 79:10	Anti-Eviction	50:12 51:14
22:8, 17 32:3	access 23:6	10:3 11:18	alarm 45:11	87:18	53:2 63:11
34:22 56:12	34:9 39:7	14:8 17:24	aligns 61:11	anybody 21:2	72:16
81:5, 8, 21	43:18	18:3 20:3	allocated 14:2	28:7	associations
82:16, 18, 22	accessing 37:1	52:4 53:13	allow 6:5 9:9	Apartment	71:8
		adopted 11:14	12:18 24:8	11:21 15:3	assure 99:5, 15
		106:16	107:11	25:15 41:24	astrigent 84:1
		adoption 106:9	allowed 56:3	42:3, 6 49:23	attendance
		advantageous	allows 12:21	51:13 63:10	2:25 3:1
			33:19 34:18	appeared 60:3	103:15
			alter 38:21	applaud 101:7	attended 73:13
				applicants 19:9	

attention 14:25 108:6	becoming 40:2 47:15	birth 59:18 60:17 61:9	64:10 108:2	certainly 82:8 88:20	chime 25:1
attorney 30:23 38:17 57:2	began 51:24 99:24	birthing 60:22	buttoned 83:10	certainty 64:9	CINDY 1:1
authorizations 5:4	beginning 2:6 7:17 36:22	births 61:22	buy-up 45:12	certification 109:18	circulated 106:7
authorized 98:2	70:24 87:17	bit 24:22 27:1 47:4	< C >	certified 39:9	circumstances 37:20 44:9
automated 91:11	begins 13:14 60:14	80:12	California 60:16	certify 109:1	cities 7:14 74:18
availability 18:17	begun 85:11	Black 61:21	call 2:24 16:19 25:19	certifying 109:22	citizens 67:13 74:11 99:15
available 6:4 19:15 23:17	belief 88:9	blight 85:6	30:8 49:2	cetera 25:9	CITY 1:1 2:9 6:24 7:5, 17
45:2 47:19	believe 51:2 64:3	block 64:17, 18, 20	65:9 69:6	CHAIR 1:1 3:10, 18 4:2	9:4 10:4, 19, 22, 25 11:6, 8, 24 12:18 13:9
50:24 52:1, 3 80:16, 21 83:25	bell 45:11	blocks 71:4	91:14 100:9	10:12, 14, 20 15:16 16:4	14:1, 19 15:9 17:14 18:3, 8 21:20 24:22
average 61:20	Bench 72:3	body 45:17 53:12 68:8	called 3:3 4:17 101:17	20:18 28:13, 19 30:4, 16	25:4, 24 27:14 28:1, 9 31:1 41:6 43:17
avoid 93:15 94:2, 3	benchmark 76:8	bolster 57:8	calvary 48:18	40:16 44:2 48:22 62:19	44:7, 24 48:19 50:18 52:23
avoided 29:22 92:20	benefactors 69:4	borders 76:11	camera 16:9 65:23	65:5, 18 66:21 78:5 79:2	53:4, 9 55:10, 20 61:18 62:2 64:18, 25
aware 5:17	beneficial 55:14	borne 67:16	capability 39:20	86:7 89:6 104:10, 17	69:13, 23 71:10 74:17 75:16, 17
aye 106:18, 19 107:20, 21	benefit 60:14	brain 59:13	capacity 47:10	105:9, 22 106:1, 4, 12	78:16 79:11, 15 84:11
ayes 106:24 108:1	benefits 68:5 93:25	branch 96:15 100:7	capital 66:16	107:1, 5, 15 108:8, 10	87:10 88:1 90:2 91:5 97:7 98:11 100:1
< B >	best 29:3 43:20 76:19	breaches 93:10 86:14 87:5	Care 58:22, 23 59:2 60:3	Chairperson 49:17	City's 5:5 8:7 9:10 13:13 23:12 61:12
baby's 59:10	better 45:25 62:2	brief 3:4 86:14 87:5	carries 108:1	Challenge 73:9 75:11, 13	city-wide 75:10
back 31:17 52:12 80:10	beyond 44:9 66:24 70:13	briefly 103:5	CARROLL 109:11	challenged 73:10	civil 36:1
101:18	74:24 76:10	bring 12:10 22:8 23:14	case 88:12 92:18	challenges 21:11 41:9	clarity 12:14
backer 37:13	Biden's 52:4	bringing 12:2 47:14 70:18	cases 13:17, 21 14:5 15:13	51:9 53:8 74:16	clear 14:8 87:20, 24
background 31:5 42:24	big 66:14 101:15, 17	brings 44:21	32:5 33:17 34:16, 22	Chan 41:13	clearer 26:25
79:25	biggest 53:8 63:6 83:22	Bristow 49:6 58:11, 13, 18, 20	47:21 48:4 55:25 57:5	chance 13:8 70:9 72:10, 11, 25 97:20 99:2	clearly 26:18
backlog 94:6	BILL 1:1 4:21, 25 10:17	broad 25:6	91:9 92:7 93:1 98:14, 18	change 76:4	CLERK 3:7, 14, 20, 24 4:4, 7, 12, 25 16:22
balance 50:15	12:12, 18, 21	broadly 78:15	catastrophe 29:21 67:22	changed 41:11	30:10 49:4 65:11 103:16
balances 50:16	15:1 17:18	BROOKS 1:1 4:5 14:22	catch-up 42:5	changes 5:7, 9 50:20 74:3	104:1, 7, 14, 21 105:2, 5
ballet 69:6, 7 74:12	20:6 29:24	15:21, 23	Catherine 65:13 95:15	97:25	clock 22:20
Bar 50:12 53:1 72:16	31:4, 6, 12, 23	66:22 96:12	96:9	chaos 87:23	clogged 54:24
Barbara 65:12 89:9, 22	35:9 36:4	104:2, 3	Cathy 101:1	Chapter 5:1	closely 50:10 91:25
based 55:21 74:7 94:4	49:25 54:12, 13 60:14 62:1	105:15, 19	cause 78:14	charge 100:9 101:6	closer 83:9
basic 38:8 59:25	66:21 67:7	108:9	caused 56:1	Charitable 37:4	closing 77:18
basis 24:3 75:10	70:16 77:23	brought 23:8 52:15 68:6	celebrated 73:4	chat 6:4, 8	
BASS 1:1 4:8 16:3, 4, 7, 8, 13	80:1 96:15, 16	budgets 38:5	celebrating 76:20	checks 67:15	
103:17, 18, 20, 24 106:10, 13	106:2, 6, 16, 24 107:6	building 13:20 35:3 41:24	center-based 59:2	child 13:6	
107:13, 16 108:12	107:3	64:17, 18, 19	centered 9:20	childhood 59:12	
	bills 29:25 92:9 103:11	71:4 98:17	certain 5:10 32:9 69:2	children's 60:6, 7	
	107:3	buildings 37:15	98:23		
	bill's 10:8	built 10:24 70:19			
	bimonthly 26:11	burden 58:3			
	biosphere 69:2	burdened 8:21			
		business 29:9 55:6 57:22			

CLS 35:13 69:19	committed 22:2 52:22 63:12, 25	comprehensive 46:21	continue 9:11 23:19 27:11	4:1 28:18 104:16, 23	22, 24 104:3, 5, 9, 12, 19, 25
coalition 35:2 58:22, 23 60:3 64:15, 22	COMMITTEE 1:1 4:16, 19 6:12 10:10, 15, 21 14:23 16:1	compromises 53:24	35:4, 8 36:11 37:21 39:25	105:21 106:3 107:4 108:7	105:7, 14, 19, 25 106:10, 11, 20, 23 107:13, 14, 22, 25
Code 5:2	17:13 20:15, 23, 25 28:20	concern 59:8	50:13 51:8, 16 52:6 74:8	Councilmember 3:14, 20, 24	108:9, 12, 14
codes 12:4	49:18 54:12 60:4 66:17	concerned 85:3 97:16	52:6 74:8 85:21 93:24	4:4, 7, 13 6:21 10:1, 7, 10	Counsel 12:3 71:9 75:23
Cohen 25:13	73:17 89:22 102:11, 21	concert 12:9	96:14 99:3, 16	14:21 15:21, 23 16:7 17:9, 10 20:20	counseling 18:4 36:3 46:18, 21
cohesively 99:7	103:8, 11 107:8 108:3, 17	concluded 108:19	continued 19:20 58:5 77:22 79:17	40:16, 20 43:24 49:11 50:7 52:20	91:18 94:13 97:11
cohort 69:2	Committees 2:9, 16	concludes 103:7 108:2	80:5, 17 83:19	53:22 62:10, 14, 17 66:20	counselor 41:13
collaborate 91:24	committing 22:6	conditions 5:11 36:13	continues 11:23 12:6, 7 20:3	78:21, 22, 23, 24 79:7, 23	counselors 32:12 39:9 45:18 46:7, 9
collaboration 15:6 21:16 88:13	common 21:21	conducted 60:15	continuing 5:21 86:1 101:8	86:8, 11, 12, 15 87:7 89:18	48:7, 9, 10, 16 63:2 71:12
collaborative 10:25 55:8	Commonwealth 76:11	conference 91:14	control 44:9 86:24 109:21	101:16 102:5 103:16 104:1, 7, 14, 21 105:6, 11, 15, 18	91:14, 21 92:3 counted 57:13
colleague 6:20 79:23	communicate 48:4	conflict 90:22 93:17	convening 26:7	106:1, 13 107:2, 16 108:16	counterparts 38:20
colleagues 3:18, 23 4:2 6:14 14:7	communicating 38:19 41:18	conflicts 9:15	coordinate 71:25 72:1	Councilmember s 55:15 96:12	country 7:19 73:7 78:1
17:19 22:5 76:22 79:3	communication 47:18 54:25	congrats 108:16	coordination 72:4 76:17	COUNCILWO MAN 1:1 2:2	couple 23:22 31:24
83:17 84:13 104:11, 18 108:11, 15	communication s 39:2	congratulations 64:4	copy 106:6	3:12, 16 4:10, 14 5:12 10:11	course 27:24 50:9 58:2
come 2:22 21:11 27:8	communities 12:11 38:1	connect 32:14 39:21 47:6 48:12	CORA 25:17 54:10 56:10 69:24	15:18 16:3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 25 17:3 20:11, 17, 19, 21 21:1, 4 22:11, 25	64:13 67:7 69:18, 24 71:9 75:17, 24
29:2 34:21 43:13 67:4, 8 72:7 73:22 97:19	Community 11:20 17:16 30:24 33:2 34:25 50:11	connected 30:14 40:14 49:9 58:12 65:16 89:10 95:16	coronavirus 96:19	24:4, 18 26:3, 15 27:12	77:23 83:14 court 11:2 13:18, 19, 22
comes 75:25	52:25 57:25 59:2 77:12 90:7 91:6	connection 45:23	correct 22:17 109:1	28:15 30:5, 12, 17 35:11 40:4, 15, 19 43:11, 22 44:1 48:14, 24 49:7, 12	18:7 32:8, 19 33:3, 22 34:15, 18, 23 38:4
coming 12:4 22:15 62:24 69:5 72:3, 23 74:17 77:4 85:12	compact 81:18	connectors 39:15	correlation 61:1	53:20 58:7, 14 62:6, 13, 18 64:6 65:6, 14, 19 66:1, 6	47:22 55:20 58:4 72:5, 7, 18, 20 77:6
commend 79:5	compelling 32:23 87:25	consenting 5:22	correspondence 57:10	53:20 58:7, 14 62:6, 13, 18 64:6 65:6, 14, 19 66:1, 6	92:19 93:16, 18 94:6, 20 98:14, 15, 18 109:12
comment 62:11 86:14 100:24 102:6	compensation 82:22	consequences 90:14	co-sponsors 14:21	78:7, 25 81:13 82:7 83:11, 15 84:19 85:15	18 94:6, 20 98:14, 15, 18 109:12
commented 56:23	competency 88:3 89:5	consequently 93:7	cost 94:21	86:3, 10, 13 89:7, 13 95:8, 14, 18, 22 96:4 100:15, 22	courts 8:16, 18, 23 13:1 52:23 57:6 72:2
comments 6:1 20:14 28:17 78:19 88:17 101:15, 21 102:4	complementary 11:25	consideration 15:1	cost-effective 94:18	101:24 102:8, 19 103:18, 20,	COVID 55:19 56:1
commit 75:15	complete 38:25	considered 102:16	costs 57:22, 23 92:22 94:3	COUNCILMA N 1:1 3:9, 22	COVID-19 7:4 93:6 95:3
commitment 14:18 21:22 27:17 51:7, 12 52:21 75:14, 20 77:14 79:17	completely 53:25	consistency 70:22	COUNCIL 1:1 2:9, 16 14:1, 7 17:14 18:3 22:5 28:9 31:1 45:17 75:17 79:11 106:8 107:10, 12		crafting 51:5 create 25:5 28:2 44:25
	complex 34:16	constant 8:11			
	complicated 47:4	contact 99:24			
	comply 6:7	contained 109:1			
		contentious 28:25			
		continuation 20:8 94:16			

62:1 84:10 85:1 created 7:5 8:13 47:12 48:3 51:21 55:16 69:10 creates 38:22 creating 39:17, 25 45:25 51:24 creation 57:7 credit 43:5 99:13 crises 63:6 88:24, 25 89:3 crisis 41:7 67:16 79:14 87:11 critical 9:19 18:20 25:22 40:12 46:4 78:11 cross- collaboration 50:19 51:7 crucial 52:18 59:11 Cs 71:24 culture 68:24 72:18 73:10, 21, 25 74:6, 7 current 2:8 12:15 19:16 24:10 31:14, 24 36:13 51:10 53:12 54:14 currently 2:4, 10 98:1 CURTIS 1:1 custody 90:21 Cydnea 2:23 < D > Daily 2:18 damage 94:21 damaging 35:15 data 68:11, 21, 22 76:6 data-driven 76:7 date 9:7 19:7, 16 91:12 dates 92:11 93:13 day 13:3, 4 42:17 56:19 108:10	days 9:1 13:19, 20 32:3 34:22 54:2 56:12 81:6, 8 82:16, 19, 22 94:7 98:16 day-to-day 68:13 deal 33:4 dealing 43:16 74:15 deals 72:12 death 61:19 deaths 61:24 decades 84:17 90:16 December 9:6 98:2 decision 38:10 decrease 7:15 decreased 6:23 8:25 decreasing 8:17 dedicated 15:12 23:4 39:7 56:10 75:18 86:18 deeply 35:6, 12 45:15 63:12 de-escalate 38:3 48:3 default 77:10 Del 25:14 49:5, 8, 10, 16, 21 63:9 64:5 deliver 13:9 88:5 delivering 63:3 Department 11:10, 11 26:17 39:10 46:19 Deputy 84:23 desperately 97:14 Despite 56:6 destabilization 7:16 destabilize 9:16 determined 94:12 devastating 55:18 90:14 developed 71:23 74:1	DEVELOPME NT 1:1 4:20 14:24 16:24 17:12, 16 49:19 59:11, 14 60:6 66:18 89:21 108:4, 18 DHCD 69:17 dialogue 50:8 55:12 70:7 77:4 difference 63:19 88:7 different 21:17 24:14 38:24 48:5 53:25 62:23 63:22 81:17 88:24 difficult 28:24 difficulties 105:23 dire 11:3 direct 109:21 directed 69:22 directly 10:17 32:7 46:14 93:3 Director 16:23 35:24 54:9 84:23 Director's 17:20 disconnect 103:2 discrimination 73:18 discuss 32:21 displaced 97:22 99:9 displayed 3:5 dispute 8:14 50:4 90:18 disputes 7:10 9:13 54:21 90:25 92:8 94:20 97:13 disrupted 13:6 93:7 distress 7:3 73:22 77:2 distressed 72:10 distributed 19:8 Diversion 5:6 6:19 7:11, 23 8:12 9:2, 9, 23	10:24 11:13 12:9, 15 13:15 14:4, 6 18:1 19:19 20:5 22:3, 24 23:13, 24 25:8 29:16 31:2, 9, 22 35:4 36:6 37:23 39:6 45:22 46:6, 8 47:1, 11 50:3 51:10 54:17, 23 55:16, 24 56:4, 8 57:8, 13 58:3 59:23 61:11 67:25 68:9 70:17 76:19 77:5 79:8 85:2 86:19 87:9, 13, 14 90:5 93:25 94:5, 17, 25 96:17 97:9 98:12 99:14 100:3 divert 73:12 diverting 92:18 Division 16:23 17:15 docket 72:5 doing 9:12, 24 24:22 33:3 40:18 48:10 76:23 84:4 dollars 8:2 doulas 59:6 dozen 56:22 dozens 55:11 dramatically 11:6 98:9 drastically 6:23 DRISCOLL 1:1 3:21, 22 104:22, 23 drying 82:12 Due 2:7 92:23 duration 14:14 dynamic 79:12 dynamics 38:22 < E > earlier 31:16 34:20 42:25 50:22 62:15 80:12 99:19 earliest 27:19	early 54:2 59:12 earned 11:17 easier 41:21 echo 66:14 echoed 88:17 echoing 28:22 economic 13:12 56:1 67:22 93:6 economy 58:2 64:8, 19 ecosystem 46:1 education 59:3 75:6 77:11 effect 7:23 9:2 97:20 effective 54:19 90:24 94:5 effectively 72:9 effects 36:12 efficient 8:19 efficiently 72:8 effort 55:9 efforts 54:21 68:6 85:11 92:23 elevate 37:21 eligible 99:16 emergency 2:8 18:18 19:6, 12 31:19 32:6 90:9 emotional 44:5 emphasizes 61:14 empowered 57:16 empty 33:14 enable 46:9 55:2 enabled 19:25 enables 91:3 encompasses 69:24 ended 42:7 endorse 67:6 Endorsement 70:16 78:11 enemy 29:14 energy 68:7 engaged 25:13 ensure 12:5 25:25 51:12 80:20 83:18 ensures 11:22 13:24	ensuring 52:9 59:25 79:24 entire 45:16 62:21 entities 21:17 entitled 5:2 entry 69:21 70:2 epicenter 71:14 equation 47:15 equilibrium 51:18 equity 37:7, 12 45:12 74:16, 25 75:8 ERAP 52:3 especially 14:20 28:8 43:16 63:8 64:1 68:14 96:21 essential 11:22 essentially 31:15 establish 92:13 established 4:16 67:10 70:20 establishing 74:21 esteemed 66:17 et 25:9 Eva 17:20 24:25 27:18, 21 84:17, 20, 22 87:19 evaluation 24:1 evaluations 23:11 everybody 6:16 everyone's 42:24 evicted 57:2 97:1 evicting 11:8 98:11 Eviction 5:6 6:18 7:8, 11, 15, 19, 20, 23 8:12, 22, 24 9:2, 8, 23 10:23 11:25 12:5, 9, 23 13:2, 4, 15 14:19 18:1 19:19 20:4
---	---	--	---	---	--

22:23 23:24 25:8 29:19 31:2, 9, 21 33:23 34:2 35:3 36:6 37:22 38:25 39:6 42:14, 16 43:1 44:23 45:1 47:1, 11 50:2 51:10 54:17 55:16, 25 59:23 61:10 67:25 68:8 70:17 76:19 85:2 86:19 87:13, 14 90:5, 15 92:20 94:2, 16, 22, 24 96:17 97:9, 18 98:12, 22 99:12, 14 evictions 6:24 8:18 11:7 29:18 35:15 57:25 94:8 98:9 evidence 109:1 evolve 12:20 24:9 evolving 36:17 Exactly 24:17 47:5 example 62:22 examples 36:20 exception 32:5 excited 25:2 exciting 6:17 25:17 101:10 existence 24:11 existing 12:13 exists 44:7 expanding 12:1 expansion 77:1 expect 22:12 23:15, 17 26:24 27:1 expectation 5:20 expectations 39:16 expedient 94:11 expense 38:13, 14 expenses 38:8	experience 41:7 56:25 59:21 94:4 experiencing 61:5 expertise 23:10 expiration 9:6 explain 41:16 express 62:20 extend 14:14 31:6, 13 36:5 50:2 54:13 extended 33:9 55:23 83:21 97:24 99:15 extending 6:18 9:5, 8, 22 59:22 61:10 96:17 extends 12:13 extension 14:17 extensive 92:6 external 80:3 extraordinary 18:20 45:10 67:21 extremely 20:5 < F > face 63:7 faces 15:9 face-to-face 70:7 facilitate 20:7 50:3 55:12 facilitates 91:1 facing 7:20 41:9 42:13, 19 44:10 51:23 79:15 fact 75:16 76:13 factors 93:7 failed 102:14 fairly 72:8 faith 32:4 92:23 faithfully 71:15 falling 42:9 familiar 47:16 80:24 families 8:4 28:11 38:6, 16 39:21 40:1 42:22 44:11 45:3 59:8, 25 62:4 74:24	82:11 84:2 87:1 96:22, 24, 25 97:15 99:4, 5, 9 100:2 family 13:7, 14 58:24 64:21 90:21 97:23 99:17 family's 13:5 fantastic 101:14 far 32:18 45:19 59:19 fashion 33:5 34:24 faster 13:23 98:20 favor 20:6 106:17 107:19 favorable 107:8 fear 96:25 97:1, 3 feasible 39:17 feature 6:4, 8 Fed 36:22 federal 86:22 feedback 56:19 feel 21:2 41:10 42:15 101:2 feeling 78:17 field 37:18 70:22 fight 36:11 figure 62:24 figured 44:25 filed 6:24 8:18, 24 filing 7:7 33:24 94:22 filings 7:16 8:22 34:2 final 18:25 finalize 23:25 Finally 34:12 finances 32:13 financial 7:3 39:12 51:23 52:14 find 33:13 47:5 50:14 55:3 63:5 64:7 69:21 97:17 finding 34:4 60:25 findings 23:15,	17 finds 51:18 firms 37:7 first 7:9 16:19 18:7, 19, 22 21:6, 24 31:20, 21 44:3, 14 54:1 59:9 71:25 79:4 81:5, 8 82:16, 18, 22 86:14 fiscal 22:18 fix 51:8 FJD 73:5 flexibility 12:19 flooded 57:10 flowed 86:21 focus 67:17 folks 9:12 27:8 80:8 82:1, 2 follow 34:2 82:25 83:8 followed 88:14 following 2:5 follows 2:7 33:24 77:6 force 78:4 87:18 88:21 Foreclosure 23:13 45:22 69:15 87:9 foreclosures 29:18 foregoing 38:11 109:1, 18 foremost 21:25 forever 42:15 43:2 format 31:24 fortunate 10:13 forward 9:20 10:19 52:13 53:11 73:22 75:19, 22, 25 77:25 80:16 84:25 85:7 found 2:21 60:18 foundation 9:18 13:10, 12 75:24 foundations 12:3 four 12:3 fourth 7:18 11:8 98:10	Fox 72:17 73:5 frames 39:3 Francisco 60:17 frankly 47:20 free 21:3 32:17 front 21:21 45:13 full 18:22 76:23 100:12 fully 109:1 Fund 23:9 funding 14:3 22:2 83:24, 25 funds 50:23 52:1, 3, 6 Fund's 51:3 further 102:10, 20 107:9 future 12:21 14:9 34:11 53:2, 7, 15 71:5 85:8 < G > Gateway 25:3 26:8 GAUTHIER 1:1 2:2 3:12 4:10, 14 5:12 14:22 15:17, 18 16:6, 11, 15, 25 17:3, 9 20:11, 19 21:1 28:15 30:5, 12, 17 35:11 40:4, 16, 19 43:11, 22 48:24 49:7, 12, 17 53:20 58:7, 14 62:6, 13 65:6, 14, 19 66:1, 6, 22 78:7 86:10 89:7, 13, 19 95:8, 14, 18, 22 96:4, 13 100:15, 22 101:24 102:8, 19 103:22 104:5, 12, 19, 25 105:6, 7, 14, 25 106:11, 20, 23 107:14, 22, 25 108:14 gender 73:18 generated 68:7	gentleman 42:25 getting 42:7 46:13 GILMORE 1:1 3:15, 16 78:23, 25 81:13 82:7 83:11, 15 84:19 85:15 86:3, 16 104:8, 9 give 31:5 66:25 72:16 79:5 given 23:10 35:7 52:10, 14 81:9 gives 54:23 glad 43:17 66:13 101:1 Gladstein 17:21 27:18 84:18, 21, 23 85:24 87:19 global 68:22 go 28:21 32:7 33:21 43:15 70:15 74:1 80:10 81:7 82:18 84:22 88:18 103:3, 9 105:8 goal 90:13 goals 71:4 God 42:3 goes 66:24 going 10:19 26:10 31:6, 13 40:20 41:16 47:21 75:18 78:19 80:16 81:16, 22 85:7, 9, 22 87:23 Good 3:9, 13, 17, 18, 22 4:1 6:14, 15 15:22 16:7, 8 17:7, 8 25:18 29:14 30:18, 25 32:4 35:22 40:18, 23 49:10, 13, 16 50:10 52:25 54:7 58:18 65:20 66:11 69:11, 25 89:18, 25 92:23 95:19, 20, 21 96:10
---	--	---	--	---	---

103:18, 19, 23, 24 104:3, 6, 10, 13, 16, 20, 23 105:1 Government 49:22 86:22 Grady 17:21 27:5 granular 68:12 grateful 44:18 94:23 gratified 101:20 gratitude 28:10 62:21 great 31:11 42:21 57:4 62:22 73:4 83:6 87:11 101:12 108:10 grin 66:15, 23 ground 48:20 groundwork 87:12 group 39:8 groups 18:13 29:2 grow 12:6 growing 35:5 GSM 90:1, 10, 16 91:7, 8 guide 87:21 guiding 76:2 89:4 guys 78:20 GYM 1:1 6:21 10:1, 7, 11 17:10 20:17, 20, 21 21:4 22:11, 25 24:4, 18 26:3, 15 27:12 40:15 43:24 44:1 48:14 50:7 52:20 53:22 62:17, 18 64:6 66:20 78:21, 24 79:23 86:8, 12, 13 96:12 108:16 < H > half 8:25 61:22 hand 32:22 33:15 HAPCO 25:14 50:12	happen 27:9 44:14 98:7 happened 41:20 happening 85:20 happens 99:9 happy 20:9 53:18 82:25 83:8 102:2 harassment 73:19 hard 10:2 18:15 41:17 43:3, 4 80:20 83:17 95:10 harder 34:6 hardest 27:20 hardship 41:7 51:23 56:2 59:12 hardships 52:15 harm 32:6 93:15 Harvey 30:11 40:13, 17 41:2, 3 43:21 44:3 45:4 68:18 havoc 96:20 health 2:8 12:12 59:17 60:6, 7, 8, 9, 11 84:24 healthier 62:2 healthy 64:17, 21 hear 5:13 43:14 46:14 66:2 80:18 heard 13:23 31:10 34:19, 20, 23 41:17 55:7 80:11 83:22 98:19 99:7 107:3 hearing 2:7, 17, 20 4:17, 18 5:17, 18 14:12 15:22 102:1, 13 103:6, 8 105:11 hearings 2:12, 15 heart 71:13 heavy 86:2 held 27:17 HELEN 1:1 79:23	help 14:5 19:13 32:13, 15 34:7 42:21 69:22 74:10 76:24 77:17 79:13 84:1 93:16 98:15 helped 13:18 18:8 28:2 29:4, 21 35:2 97:5 helpful 51:5 helping 87:8 94:1 95:1 helps 8:3 33:15 34:8 hero 101:18 Hey 81:14, 15 Hi 40:23 65:22 Hicks 65:13 95:15, 17, 20, 25 96:8, 9 100:21 101:4 high 19:17 higher 61:20 highest 7:18 11:8 98:10 highlighting 35:14 Hill 73:14 79:19 hire 38:17 hired 50:21 historic 80:6 history 73:15 76:12 hold 26:4 37:16 home 9:17 43:19 44:21 58:25 74:23 89:1 97:21 HOMELESS 1:1 4:20 10:14 14:25 17:13 40:2 49:20 66:19 89:22 97:16 108:5, 19 homelessness 8:11 58:1 59:16, 21 90:15 94:9 97:2 homes 7:6 8:4 9:12 18:10 20:1	37:8 96:25 99:17 honor 65:21 Honorable 65:11 66:12 honored 101:21 hope 11:3 53:5 63:5 85:12 99:13 hopeful 36:24 hopefully 24:2 67:9 74:1 77:9 83:2 87:2 99:1 hopes 7:15 hoping 98:3 horror 99:8 hospital 61:2, 6 Hotline 12:2 69:20 hour 2:22 hours 42:7 House 11:10 37:10 43:4 67:14, 21 housed 13:14 55:5 households 19:24 HOUSING 1:1 4:19 9:10, 19, 21 10:4, 14 11:1 12:10 14:10, 23 16:23 17:11, 15 18:4 25:24 30:23 31:19 32:11 33:16 34:5, 7, 10 35:24 36:2, 14, 19 37:21 38:10, 13 39:9, 10 40:10 45:17 46:1, 7, 9, 18, 20, 21 48:7, 8, 10, 16 49:18 50:17 57:20 59:7, 21 60:5, 11, 12, 18, 21 61:2, 5, 15 62:23 63:2 64:8, 12 66:18 67:12, 19 71:12 72:13 75:10 77:17 78:15 79:14 80:7 88:25 89:20 90:9, 12	91:14, 18, 19, 21 92:3, 21 93:1, 8 94:6 95:2 96:24 99:1, 11 100:8 108:3, 17 huge 27:4, 7 70:12 77:19 Human 16:24 84:24 humbled 101:20 hurdles 70:10 hydraulics 72:19 hyperprescripti ve 24:7 63:15 < I > idea 68:25 identify 91:3 image 3:5 imminent 32:5 impact 36:18 40:10 55:19 60:5 imperfect 29:14 implementing 10:5 90:3 importance 7:21 60:12 63:20 88:5 important 10:15 12:16 21:19 23:2, 20 44:5 58:8 59:24 62:7 63:18 64:23 66:3 78:9 88:2, 8 98:21 100:19 importantly 10:18 21:15 68:16 78:12 impressed 92:2 improve 12:14 50:14 71:22 improving 35:5 incentivizing 53:9 inception 6:25 27:19 89:25 include 90:19 94:1 included 2:16 includes 36:12 39:8 94:12	including 5:7 12:1 52:24 55:9 59:18 inclusive 79:25 increase 56:6 61:8 increased 12:10 increases 36:21 60:19 92:10 incredible 45:8 74:14 101:22 incredibly 21:14 87:24 incremental 92:22 incur 57:23 incurring 92:22 independent 51:3 indicate 3:1 106:17 indicated 37:5 indirect 45:23 individuals 28:1 45:24 82:14 87:2 90:17 industry 52:18 infant 60:8 infants 59:17, 19 inflection 77:16 informal 77:4 information 46:3, 13 68:12 initial 81:2 Initiative 60:17 initiatives 75:22 innovation 6:19 Inquirer 2:19 insecurity 59:22 insights 78:10 instability 50:17 60:5, 21 61:5 instance 93:2 institutional 74:3 institutionalized 74:9
--	---	--	---	--	---

Instructions 2:13	106:1, 3 107:2, 4 108:7	65:23 74:19 75:11 82:17, 23	lead 59:16 87:8 94:8	line 71:3 99:19	Madam 3:10, 17 4:2 10:12, 20 16:3 20:17
insufficient 88:11	Josh 17:21 27:5, 25	knowledge 48:9 91:22	leader 18:9	lines 54:25	28:13, 19 30:4
Intelligencer 2:19	journey 21:9 67:1 68:4	kudos 29:23 53:21 77:19	leadership 15:5 21:24 27:15 64:2	link 64:24	40:16 44:2
intention 37:11	101:14	79:5 86:7	League 35:25 40:7 45:7, 18	linked 60:9	48:22 62:19
interest 36:21	joy 101:11		learn 74:4 76:5	listening 6:16 84:6 96:2	65:5, 17 79:2
interested 46:5	JR 1:1		learned 69:13	literally 64:24	86:7 89:6
internal 80:2	judge 34:17 41:15 65:15, 17, 22 66:4, 10	< L > L&I 41:23, 24	lease 93:11	litigation 54:22	104:17 105:22
intervention 93:19 94:20	72:17 73:5	labor 60:20, 23	leases 92:11	little 24:21 27:1 31:5	106:4 107:5
intimidating 32:19	78:8 79:5	lack 38:16	leave 42:1 103:6	47:4 80:11	108:8, 10
introduce 14:13	87:5, 6, 15, 24 88:16, 21	Landlord 5:3, 8 19:18 23:5 25:3, 20 26:8 33:11, 21	lecture 73:13	lived 67:2	maintain 96:23 99:16
invested 45:16	99:18 100:23, 25 101:12	34:13 41:18	led 50:20 87:19	lives 8:6 33:6, 8, 9 34:3 35:17 36:10	maintaining 9:21 33:16
investment 14:9	judgment 77:10	42:4 50:21	left 36:9	63:19 88:7	34:7, 9
investors 29:8	Judicial 18:7	57:2, 21 77:4	Legal 2:19 8:20 11:18, 20	living 37:11 38:8	maintains 57:20
invitation 67:5	Judiciary 73:17	90:3, 24 92:24	18:5 30:24	local 8:2 50:23 58:2	93:12
invite 103:1	jump 78:18	93:21 94:10	33:2 34:25	75:24	major 74:18
invited 5:15	jumping 101:11	landlords 8:7, 25 9:14 13:24	50:11 53:1	location 1:1	majority 8:8
involved 43:9 98:5	June 14:16	18:6, 24 19:23	90:7 91:6	Long 15:2 16:22 17:1, 2, 7, 8, 14 21:8	making 7:7 40:11 70:23
involvement 79:18	jurisdictions 11:15	22:22 24:21, 23 25:6, 12, 22	legalese 39:2	22:10, 16	76:18 85:5
involving 92:7	Justice 11:11 90:20	31:7, 25 32:18, 20 33:4, 7	legislation 6:12 11:16 14:14 19:16	23:18 24:17, 24 26:5 27:3	manager 56:21
issue 76:15	juvenile 90:20	45:24 47:14	23:23 51:6	69:17 81:11, 15 82:24 83:3, 14 84:12, 15	managers 29:10
issues 32:22 56:25 57:16 73:18 77:10 90:12 91:2 92:17, 21	< K > KATHERINE 1:1	48:5 50:5, 15 51:18 52:6 53:4, 8 54:16, 20, 23 55:2, 6 56:12, 18 57:11, 15	63:15, 16 80:5 legislative 53:12 68:8 75:12 79:10	87:3	Managing 17:20 84:23
iteration 24:10	Kathleen 17:21 24:25	64:10 70:5	length 61:2	longer 8:21 19:14 61:6	mandated 81:7 82:17
iterations 23:22	27:5, 25	71:8 72:12, 23	lesson 88:16	longest 14:17	mandatory 70:23
its 6:25 24:10 27:19 31:16 95:3	keep 7:6 8:15 9:12 38:7 42:21, 22	90:10 91:10	lessons 69:12	look 53:11 68:2 71:17	manner 34:19 51:17
< J > JAMIE 1:1 89:19	93:16 94:2 97:2 99:6	93:16 94:2 97:2 99:6	letters 39:1	72:19 75:3 77:1 98:5, 6, 25	MARK 1:1 36:9
JAMS 76:22	44:10 55:5 85:17	landlord- tenant 7:10 8:14 32:25	level 19:3 28:2 63:13	looking 25:11 26:17 81:18	market 36:14 37:21 40:10 93:8
January 18:23 19:11, 21	keeping 18:9 86:17	33:18 56:15 94:19	level-playing 70:22	84:25 100:11	marking 67:23
job 42:13 91:8 97:22	KENDRA 1:1	landscape 67:11	levels 18:21	looks 53:3	match 12:14
jobs 96:23 97:17	Kenney 10:3 17:24 20:3	language 38:19	leverage 61:25	losing 97:4, 17, 21	matches 32:9
joined 17:19	key 60:14, 25 87:17	largest 37:14	liaison 25:20 50:21	lot 21:16 41:7, 11, 21 42:18	Maternal 61:13
JONES 1:1 3:8, 9 28:16, 18 62:10, 14 79:8 87:7 89:19 101:16 102:5 105:3, 11, 18, 21	kind 24:13 46:11 88:16	laser 67:17	license 25:7	47:20 83:17	Maternity 58:22, 23 60:2 64:15, 21
	knew 27:21 44:15 46:23 47:7, 9	lastly 84:5	lien 69:15	love 46:13 68:25	matter 46:1 109:1
	know 24:18 28:10 44:13 48:17 60:7	lauding 28:22	life 9:18 13:5 29:10 33:25 59:10 64:24 67:2	low 36:24 59:18	matters 38:3 72:6, 24
		launched 44:15 97:9	lifesaver 41:5	low-income 96:22	Mayor 75:18
		law 2:3 12:13 24:7	lift 86:2		Mayor's 11:18
		lawyer 89:23	light 20:1 76:2		MDO 26:9 84:14
		laying 87:12	limited 33:5	< M >	mean 29:6
			limits 74:17	macro 40:9	

82:23	68:10 78:18	morning 3:10,	49:14, 20 54:5,	new 22:14	52:19 57:3
meaning 88:6	89:20 102:10,	13, 17, 18, 23	8 58:15, 19	33:13 57:7	85:4 98:10
meaningful	21 106:8	4:2 6:14, 15	66:7 89:14	73:3 92:11	ones 63:23
95:11	mentioned	14:12 15:22	96:5 101:10	News 2:18	ongoing 20:2
means 8:14	21:13 50:1, 22	16:7, 9, 21	102:14	night 73:13	51:9 92:15
38:15 70:17	80:11	17:8, 9 30:18,	named 41:13	79:21	online 101:19
109:20	mentioning	25 35:23	narratives	nonfinancial	onset 51:19
measured	79:19	40:18, 23	24:13	92:16	open 50:8
29:15, 20	message 63:3	49:11, 13, 17	nation 11:9	nonprofit	opening 16:2,
mediate 38:2	met 41:12	54:8 58:19	15:15 88:25	55:10 90:1	17
mediated	51:22 60:1	65:20 66:11	98:11	91:18	operations 8:9
90:13 92:6	methodology	89:18 95:19,	national 18:8	nonprofits	28:5 68:13
mediating 9:13	24:1 85:4	20, 21, 24	37:24 61:20	56:11	opinions
mediation	MICHAEL 1:1	103:19	100:8	Notary 109:12	102:25
32:16 50:11	Microsoft	Mortality	nation's 15:10	note 2:21 6:2	opportunities
51:20 52:25	2:11 6:5	61:13	nature 88:22	22:1	39:25 61:25
53:6 54:9	Microsoft®	Mortgage	navigate 36:16	noted 109:1	64:11 75:8
56:16 70:4	1:1	23:12 45:22	38:23 47:4	notes 106:12	76:3
76:23 82:20	midst 79:14	69:14 76:1	nearly 19:8,	107:15 109:1	opportunity
84:10 90:1, 4,	million 14:2	79:8 87:8	23 37:7, 9	notice 32:1	10:7 31:1
17, 20, 23	19:8 22:3, 7, 8,	mortgages	61:23	77:3, 11 91:11	47:5 48:3, 12
91:13, 21	9, 18 50:22	37:1	necessary 9:24	notices 2:17	49:25 53:17
93:14 94:1	80:12 81:3, 21	mother 101:3	84:9	97:11	54:11, 15 63:4,
mediations	83:19	motion 29:17	need 34:17, 18,	number 6:23	17 68:2 69:1
56:22, 23	millions 8:1	36:22 105:16	22 38:2 39:23,	8:17 13:17	77:12 78:6
91:13 92:5	mine 76:22	106:2, 14	24 43:8 44:10,	50:24 79:13	85:7, 13 90:11
93:21	missing 24:25	107:2, 17, 20	22 45:3 61:15,	85:10 92:6	95:6 100:4, 13
mediator 89:24	mission 13:10	108:1	24 71:20	93:10 98:13	opposed
mediators	21:21	mouth 26:21	75:14 77:13	< O >	106:21 107:23
18:6 55:12	mitigate 55:18	move 16:17	90:18 93:15	obviously	option 12:24
76:21 91:10	model 7:13	75:21 77:24	100:2	45:20 67:16	options 44:22
97:12	11:3 15:14	106:8 107:6, 9	needed 47:8	69:13 72:13	order 4:17
meet 24:2, 23	21:15 73:7	moved 42:5	48:11 77:24	87:6	6:7 82:19
32:12 47:13	77:25 87:11	106:14 107:7,	97:14 99:25	occur 91:13	ordinance
meeting 2:10	modeled 76:10	17	needs 24:23	October 1:1	54:14 56:3
5:16, 22 26:13	moderate-	movement	26:13 47:10	odds 60:19	organization
71:3 72:15	income 36:25	73:20	48:19 59:25	offer 2:14	36:2 53:22
103:4, 9 105:9,	modification	movements	67:18 73:22	75:7 102:15	organizations
12	76:4	69:7	76:5 94:9	106:5	11:19 18:5
meetings 26:4,	modify 5:3	move-out	negotiate 32:3	offers 28:9	55:10
11	mom 44:17	92:10 93:13	57:9 93:24	Office 17:20	original 41:22
meets 76:5	moment 35:16	multi-family	negotiated	26:8 99:23	origins 28:24
94:9	43:1 67:18	37:14	57:12	offramp 72:9	31:17
Melissa 15:2	87:5	multiple 103:5	negotiations	73:1	other's 33:9
16:22 17:8, 14	money 22:12	municipal	92:10	oh 78:22	outcome 18:25
21:6 22:6	23:3 33:12	11:2 12:25	NEIGHBORH	105:10, 17	outlining
27:13 69:17	82:12 86:19,	38:4 55:20	OOD 1:1	Okay 4:15	26:18 40:8
81:14 82:23	20, 21	mute 84:20	4:19 14:24	16:12, 16 17:2,	outreach
meltdown	month 81:1	Muted 84:18	17:12 49:19	7 30:7 40:23	25:11 28:3
67:22	monthly 92:14	mutually 55:3	66:18 74:21	83:12 85:16,	outside 34:15
member 87:17	months 12:4	< N >	89:21 108:4,	23 86:4, 8	outstanding
Members 2:25	14:15 18:19	NAACP 96:10,	18	89:18 96:8	50:16
3:10 5:25 6:5	22:15 24:12	15 100:7	network 10:25	102:3, 9	overwhelming
10:9, 20 14:23	37:6 52:12, 13	NACs 18:4	32:11	105:15, 19	13:17 98:13
15:25 17:11,	53:15 61:9	name 3:2	never 42:13	once 8:23	owners 37:14
13 20:14, 22,	monumental	17:4 30:19, 21	Nevertheless	11:7 41:19	< P >
25 28:20	7:12	35:20, 23	19:15	48:2 51:25	p.m 108:19
49:18 50:13	moral 87:25	40:24 41:2			PA 25:14, 15
51:21 63:21					

paid 8:9 13:25 52:10	partner 45:8 56:11 75:23 84:14	percentage 19:17	platform 70:19 72:6 77:20, 24	precious 71:11 75:15	40:25 49:14 54:6 58:16
pair 91:19	partners 11:19 15:3 18:12 19:5, 10 22:19 25:23 26:7, 9, 11, 14 55:9 64:14, 23 65:2 81:25 83:7 85:10	perfect 29:12	play 39:14 91:15	prefiling 55:24 70:24 97:8	66:8 89:15 96:6
pairs 19:22 56:15	partnership 18:2 21:8 25:4, 15 40:7 46:4 63:10 75:9 77:13 90:6 91:17	performing 46:25	playing 42:5	Pregnancy 59:9 60:15, 19, 21 61:16	proceedings 8:20 55:25 103:5 109:1
pandemic 7:4, 18 8:5 15:8 18:10 31:18 36:9 47:2 51:20 52:16 54:3 55:19, 22 96:20	parts 32:23 62:23 69:8	perinatal 60:9, 10	please 2:24 3:1, 3 4:23 16:19 17:4 30:8, 18 40:24 48:15 49:2, 13 58:15 65:9 66:7 78:24 89:14 96:5 103:2, 14	pregnancy- related 61:19, 24	process 27:11 32:16 56:7 80:24, 25 81:6, 10, 17 82:4 83:1, 23 91:1, 4, 15 97:18 98:22
panel 16:19 30:9 43:25 49:2 62:21 65:9 78:21 102:5	passage 67:7 77:22	perseverance 18:15	pleased 17:17 20:6 67:5	presence 15:21	processes 38:24
panels 68:11 102:23 103:1	Patel 30:10, 13, 15, 21, 22	person 60:22 70:8	pleasure 95:23 96:1	PRESENT 1:1 3:2, 11, 19, 23 4:3 16:5, 10 17:17 66:24 74:10 102:13 103:20 104:4, 11, 18, 24 105:8	produce 69:9
parallel 67:3	path 69:12 74:2	personal 63:13	point 15:12 52:12 76:18	President 52:4 64:3 96:10	productive 51:17
Pardo 30:11 35:18, 22, 24 45:6 46:15 48:15, 23	pathway 9:15 94:5	Pew 37:4	pointed 27:25 46:17 68:17	Preterm 60:17, 20, 23	profile 39:13
parents 41:8 42:19	pathways 56:5 57:8	PHDC 18:3 50:10 52:24 83:6	pointing 86:16	prevention 11:25 12:6 14:19	progeny 67:8
part 33:19 35:1 46:25 67:10 81:2 101:22	Paul 25:13 26:12	PHILADELPH IA 1:1 5:2 14:1 35:25 36:15 44:24 50:12, 18 53:1 58:25 59:20 61:10 73:6 74:11 75:1 76:10 79:20 80:8 90:3, 8 91:6 93:9 96:9, 15 97:7 99:22 100:7	points 77:16	prevented 13:2, 4, 16 36:24 98:13	Program 5:6 6:19 7:12, 24 8:13 9:3, 9, 23 10:5, 24 12:15, 20, 22 13:16, 24 14:4, 6, 10, 15, 18 15:2 18:1, 19 19:7, 19 20:5 22:4, 14 23:4, 10, 13, 24 24:8, 10, 19 26:14, 19 28:5, 23 29:17, 19 31:3, 9, 14, 22 32:2, 9, 17, 23 34:6 35:4, 7, 9 36:7 37:23 39:6, 19 40:11 41:4, 11 42:16 43:7, 9, 18 45:21, 23 46:6, 8 47:1, 11 50:3, 14 51:10, 17 52:13 53:3, 10, 16 54:18 55:7, 17, 23 56:20 59:24 61:11 67:15 68:1, 14 69:4 70:1, 11, 23 71:5, 13 76:1, 9 78:12, 14 79:9, 12 81:3 83:20 84:11 85:2 86:20 87:9, 13, 15 90:5 94:17, 25 96:18 97:5, 9,
participants 5:19 19:18 39:11, 18 55:13 93:5 103:6	pause 66:25 67:24 74:19 103:4	Philadelphia's 17:25 31:8 32:10 36:5 54:17 59:23 67:10	policies 9:20	preventing 50:17	
participate 23:5 31:8 32:2 54:16 56:16	pay 19:13	Philadelphians 7:2 60:13 62:3 67:20	pool 23:7	prevention 11:25 12:6 14:19	
participated 56:21 93:22	payment 40:2 51:24 92:14 97:4	Philadelphia's 17:25 31:8 32:10 36:5 54:17 59:23 67:10	populations 36:11	previous 29:25	
participating 18:24 22:23	payments 52:7 83:7 93:11	Philadelphians 7:2 60:13 62:3 67:20	portal 69:20 70:2	previously 17:23 84:8	
participation 26:19 102:24	peer 90:20	Philadelphians 7:2 60:13 62:3 67:20	portals 28:2	priceless 75:21	
particular 31:13 45:14 70:21 88:12	Pennsylvania 11:21 15:3 49:23 51:13	Philadelphia's 17:25 31:8 32:10 36:5 54:17 59:23 67:10	portion 81:10	primarily 60:4	
particularly 12:25 60:8 72:22 74:15 85:19 90:24	people 26:22 27:6 29:1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 20 34:7, 8 35:15 37:10 44:8 46:10 48:20 63:7 79:13 95:1	Philly 12:2	positive 7:22 9:1	prior 2:20 5:24 47:2 68:10	
parties 8:16 39:17 41:17 51:8 53:10 57:9 91:2 92:13, 19	people's 63:19 88:7	PHLCouncil.co m 2:21	possibilities 47:17	prioritize 24:20	
partly 24:12	perceived 38:12	physical 59:16	possible 2:12 7:7 19:4 22:21 27:16 28:7 29:3 30:2 88:23 possibly 42:14 77:5	privacy 5:21	
	percent 19:1, 17 37:8 56:14 60:20 61:7, 8 93:23	PLA 69:19	post-filing 12:22 84:10 85:1	private 37:6, 12 45:12 74:16, 25 75:8	
		place 31:15 41:19 42:2 80:4	post-partum 61:4, 16	pro 23:11	
		plagued 8:23	potentially 36:18 55:18	proactively 51:22	
		plan 51:24 71:20 92:14 98:4	power 38:21 70:3 76:24	problems 15:11 59:17	
		plans 39:18	powerhouse 101:25	proceed 17:5 30:19 35:21	
			PPA 64:1, 3		
			praise 11:9		
			preceded 15:7		

24 98:8, 12 99:4, 14, 23, 24 100:3 101:6 programmatic 50:20 programs 7:5 11:13 12:1, 8 29:15 58:21 69:14, 16 program's 13:21 20:8 55:21 89:25 98:17 Project 25:3 prominent 37:13 proof 47:24 properly 106:15 107:18 properties 97:4 property 29:12 56:21 prorated 92:14 prosperous 64:8, 19 protect 12:11 protections 9:5 12:23 31:20 90:9 proud 6:22 35:1 56:9 66:15 73:8 101:1 proved 15:8 proven 39:19 54:18 76:13 98:8 provide 8:19 10:6 36:4 46:20 56:4 63:16 72:5, 9 77:23 82:1 85:18 91:22 92:1 provided 48:2 provides 32:20 54:15 90:10 Providing 8:1 9:14 25:25 58:25 90:17 97:10 public 2:6, 8, 14, 15, 17 4:18 5:17, 19 12:12 13:11 64:20 103:3, 7, 9 105:9 109:12	published 2:18 37:3 purchased 37:7 purpose 6:9 pursuant 90:8 pushed 88:13 put 9:20 29:10 31:15 41:23 69:18 80:18 99:10 puts 60:22 < Q > question 45:6 46:16 82:15 questions 6:1 20:10, 13, 23 25:8 28:14, 17 40:21 43:25 53:18 62:5 102:4, 10, 20 quick 45:5 83:4 quickly 22:21 80:10 82:13 83:8 Quite 47:20 quorum 4:11, 15 < R > raising 45:11 range 25:6 56:5 rate 7:19 36:21 61:19 reach 19:20 34:14 44:17 46:10 48:19 56:16, 18 86:25 87:1 93:1 reached 19:2, 24 reaching 13:18 46:12 55:13 98:14 read 4:23 reading 107:11 readmission 61:3 readmissions 61:8 ready 105:24 real 21:15, 22 45:13 realistic 39:16 55:14	reality 68:9 69:10 really 6:21 18:7, 11 25:1 27:7, 9 44:7, 21 62:25 64:13 67:1, 11 69:20, 21, 24 70:6, 25 71:12, 13 72:18, 19, 25 73:6 74:1, 10 76:20 77:15 82:12 85:25 87:20 89:4 101:19 reason 16:9 reasonable 5:20 receive 39:1 91:11 97:3 99:2, 11 received 11:9 52:7 99:12 recognize 7:22 15:20 24:9 63:20 71:7 recognized 6:7 recognizes 105:10 106:1 107:1 recognizing 5:25 recommendatio n 107:9 recommendatio ns 61:12 record 6:3 12:23 17:5 20:2 28:22 30:19 35:20 40:25 49:14 54:5 58:16 65:25 66:8 77:7 80:14, 19, 23 83:13 85:5 86:17 89:15 96:6 106:12 107:15 recorded 5:18, 23 recoup 50:15 recoups 57:22 recreated 7:14 redress 92:11 reduce 13:18 53:5 72:5 93:15 98:9, 15 reduced 11:6 42:8	reduces 58:3 94:6, 7 reducing 57:25 re-emphasized 47:25 reference 37:25 referrals 94:13 reflect 68:22 reframes 91:1 regarding 4:21 regardless 39:12 regular 24:3 regulation 51:11 regulations 26:18 86:24 Reinvestment 23:9 51:3 reiterate 34:1 68:21 relate 46:9 related 5:5 relationship 5:8 33:1, 11, 18 55:1 73:2 relative 82:16 relevance 37:22 remain 8:4 19:25 77:25 remains 82:15 remarks 6:11 10:9 16:2, 17 remember 73:15 79:6 101:4 reminder 44:6 remiss 71:6 Remote 1:1 2:6, 12 remotely 2:10 rent 40:1 52:14 92:9, 15 96:24 rental 7:24 8:2 14:4 18:18 19:6, 13, 14 22:4 23:22 25:7, 24 29:11 32:14 50:23 52:5 75:19 80:6, 13, 15, 21 81:5, 9 83:19 86:18 91:23 93:8, 11 rentals 29:7	renters 7:20 36:14, 25 47:6, 8 repair 33:10 repaired 33:19 repairing 32:25 repairs 92:12 repayment 82:3 92:8 report 37:3 59:6 61:14 Reporter 109:12, 22 representatives 71:7 reproduction 109:20 request 56:13 requests 56:8 require 13:22 required 98:18 requirements 5:4 31:7 93:12 requires 2:4 31:24 Rescue 52:1 Research 59:15 residential 5:5 50:2 residents 7:6, 25 8:10 9:3, 16, 22 51:22 resolution 4:24 8:15 90:18, 22 93:2 102:16 resolutions 13:22 50:4 98:19 resolve 54:21 56:25 57:5 90:11 93:17 94:19 97:13 resolving 9:15 resort 7:8 resorting 54:22 resource 94:13 resources 25:5 32:15 38:16 39:22 69:23 75:15, 18 84:9 88:11, 14 97:11 respectfully 71:19	respond 12:20 81:12 responding 3:4 response 4:6, 9 20:16 31:18 62:12 102:7, 18 105:4, 13 106:22 107:24 responsible 28:4 responsive 12:7 24:16, 20 72:21 rest 33:25 34:3 35:17 restricted 23:7 rests 75:11 result 56:14 57:17 resulted 93:23 resulting 93:9 retired 89:23 review 32:13 61:14 83:4 reviewed 82:20 Reyes 35:23 RICHARDSON 1:1 3:15, 17 78:23 79:1 81:14 82:8 83:12, 16 84:20 85:16 86:4, 16 96:13 104:8, 10 Right 12:3 22:13 27:6 47:23 48:20 75:23 81:17, 20 82:11 83:2 101:18 105:20 rightfully 7:14 rights 36:1 righty 30:7 102:9 risk 38:10 60:23 Rizzo 65:12, 15, 17, 22 66:4, 10, 12 78:8 79:6 87:6, 7, 15, 24 88:16, 21 99:18 100:23, 25 101:12 role 39:14 91:15 roll 2:24
---	--	---	---	--	--

103:14	46:5 50:25	Shepherd	solutions	52:24 53:14	58:1
rolling 22:14	62:10 66:5	25:18 50:10	15:13 62:25	69:3 72:22	stressors 67:21
Roper 17:22	70:3 72:4, 20	52:25 69:25	91:4	80:2	stretched 38:7
27:5	73:1 76:24	90:1	son 41:5	stare 71:20	stronger 71:5
rules 37:17	77:15 98:6	shepherded	42:11 43:20	start 26:10	strongly 17:25
107:10	101:1	6:20	soon 24:2	41:4	20:4 94:15
< S >	Seeing 9:1	Sheriff's 99:22	soror 79:19	started 26:6	struck 68:14
safe 34:4, 10	64:23 66:14	shero 101:17	Sorry 20:20	27:10 69:25	structural 74:2
38:2 42:23	seeking 82:14	shift 73:11, 21,	40:20 43:14	72:4 73:19	structurally
47:12 70:5	seen 88:23	25 76:4	62:16 78:22	101:5	74:9
safer 62:2	96:21 99:7	shifted 72:18	84:22	starting 15:11	structure
safety 13:11	sees 73:25	74:6, 7	sort 76:7	26:6 31:17	12:15 75:7
64:20	selected 90:2	shifting 24:13	77:1, 8 82:12	starts 64:8, 20	98:1
sales 37:10	self 94:11	short 23:21	85:22	state 2:3 17:4	struggled
salute 73:4	self-	33:6 42:3, 9	sour 54:25	30:18 35:20	96:23
Samia 49:5	determination	shoulders 68:3	source 25:23	40:24 49:13	struggles 43:15
58:11, 19	93:4	71:18	91:23	54:5 58:15	struggling
San 60:16	Senate 73:17	shout-out	space 32:21	66:7 86:21	39:21
sanctioned	send 31:25	72:17 77:19	46:24 47:13,	89:14 96:5	study 60:15
46:19	105:17	101:16	23 48:11 70:5	states 11:15	61:1 75:25
sat 41:12	seniors 90:22	showed 68:11	80:3	36:15 76:12	stuff 54:2
saved 42:17	sense 9:4	showing 46:2	spaces 38:2	stay 13:8	style 47:17
saves 33:11,	75:6, 7	shown 69:1	speak 3:6	43:19 61:3	subject 74:5
21, 22 34:15	September	shows 59:15	26:9 60:10	64:10	subsequently
savings 29:11	18:21 55:17	70:9 75:19	100:14	stayed 29:2	36:23
42:1	97:10	shut 41:24	speakers 68:11	stays 57:21	substantial
saw 99:18	serious 15:10	side 21:12	special 76:9	61:6	19:12 81:23
101:10	43:7	36:12	specific 14:3	stellar 9:10	success 7:13
saying 41:4	seriously 14:20	sideways 77:9	23:16	91:8	10:16 13:21
106:18 107:20	serve 56:11	significant	Specifically	stenographic	18:21 19:3
scales 11:24	59:5 94:23	38:13 63:18	19:21	109:1	20:2 28:6
scared 42:10	Services 11:20	70:12	speech 78:3	step 7:9 9:24	31:11 55:21
scary 42:15	30:24 33:3	significantly	speedy 83:4	55:24 59:24	57:14 70:11,
scenario 29:3	34:25 39:22	13:23 34:5	spend 33:12	73:23, 24 75:2	18 74:21
scenarios	46:22 50:11	37:17 38:21	spoke 60:4	76:14	98:18
36:17	53:1 54:10	59:13 98:19	sponsor 10:8	stepped 71:11	successes 76:18
scheduled	59:3 74:12	signify 6:6	sponsors 29:24	75:16	successful
82:21	84:24 90:7	107:20	SQUILLA 1:1	stepping 68:19	10:23 15:12
scheduling	91:7	similar 23:11	3:25 4:1	stewardship	21:14 67:3
26:10	serving 87:17	situation 32:7	104:15, 16	69:19	97:8
schooling 13:7	89:23	41:22 42:20	stability 12:10	stock 37:16	successfully
schools 90:21	session 107:12	72:14 99:10	14:10 38:11	stood 22:21	39:20 71:15
screen 3:6	set 29:17	situations 37:2	57:20 60:11,	stop 66:25	suddenly 13:6
script 105:17	36:21 41:19	56:6 63:22	13 64:9 70:19	stopped 70:10	Sue 25:18
seamlessly	70:25 81:4	92:12	95:3 99:17	stories 57:14	49:5 54:8
91:7, 25	91:5	six 52:13	stabilize 67:18	58:9 99:8	63:1 68:15
second 73:12	setting 39:15	sizable 88:6	75:4, 9 77:17	story 43:13	suggest 71:19,
106:10 107:13	settings 90:19	small 13:24	stabilized	68:17 75:1	23 74:4
seconded	settle 14:5	24:20 25:11,	74:23	straight 47:21	summer 31:17
106:13, 15	shaped 67:17	22 29:9	stable 9:17, 18,	71:3	Sunshine 6:8
107:18	share 24:21	smaller 8:8	21 13:3, 5, 14	strategically	supervising
seconds 107:16	43:13 57:12	24:23	61:15 64:12	71:21	30:23
secure 36:19	68:19	smile 101:17	89:2	streamline	supervision
61:15	shared 68:15	smoking 60:24	staff 56:10	81:19	109:21
security 13:12	sharing 58:9	smoothed 28:3	stage 70:25	streamlined	support 11:17
59:7	Shearlds 2:23	solution 63:5	stakeholder	82:6	20:4 26:1
see 18:11	4:22 16:18	94:12	29:1	street 42:11, 22	31:2 32:15
23:15 35:19	30:8 49:1		stakeholders	strengthening	35:6, 9 36:4
	65:8 103:13		30:1 51:15		37:24 39:7, 24

41:10 44:7 47:9, 10 54:12, 19 58:6 70:16 72:13 76:25 82:2 86:1 91:20 92:1 94:14, 15 96:14, 16 97:12 99:3 100:12 supported 6:22 supporters 66:21 supporting 35:3 46:6 supportive 41:14 45:19, 21 65:1 87:16 supports 17:25 59:1 sure 5:9 23:18 25:12 26:12 27:23 28:11 30:2 42:18 44:17 49:16 58:18 85:5 99:19 100:10 surrounding 37:20 suspended 107:10 sustain 73:2 sustainable 55:4 72:12 90:12 sustaining 67:12 system 11:2 62:24 72:7, 20 92:19 systemically 72:1 systems 43:17 < T > table 29:2 tackle 57:16 tailspin 8:7 take 2:24 27:7 40:21 74:18 77:8, 14 83:2 85:9 103:14 taken 103:10 109:1 takes 14:19 18:12 81:1	talk 29:16 31:4 70:6 76:16 talked 70:4 73:20, 23 74:13 TANEHA 109:11 Taniya 30:11 41:3 targeted 7:24 8:2 14:3 22:3, 13, 22 23:3, 7 81:23 Task 87:18 tasked 46:20 tasks 88:8 tax 69:15 teachers 59:6 team 50:8 52:20 53:23 63:1 66:20 69:18 73:5 101:22 Teams 1:1 2:11 6:5 tech 82:1 technical 5:9 105:23 tell 42:10 Tenant 5:3, 8 12:2 19:18 32:1 33:13, 23 34:14 51:14 53:4 57:19 77:2 81:24 90:4, 25 92:24 93:22 94:10 tenants 9:14 18:6, 9, 25 19:23 22:23 23:6 32:10, 12, 18, 21 33:4, 7, 15 34:2 39:6 41:25 46:12 48:6, 13 50:5 51:19 52:2, 9, 10 54:16, 20, 24 55:2, 5 56:12, 18 57:1, 11, 15 64:11 70:6 72:10, 23 90:10 91:11, 20, 25 93:17 94:1 tenant's 38:22 52:9 85:6 tenor 53:25	terminologies 39:3 terms 5:10 33:20 48:5 67:11 77:7 93:11 Terrific 89:17 testified 17:24 73:16 testify 5:16 16:20 20:6 30:9 44:20 49:3, 25 53:17 65:10 95:6 102:12, 22 testimonies 48:1 testimony 2:15 5:13 17:6, 18 30:20 35:21 36:4 40:22 41:1 44:6 49:15 54:6 58:17 62:9 66:9 79:6 84:7 89:16 95:9 96:7 100:17 102:15 Thank 4:15 10:1, 11 14:21 15:16, 19 16:12, 13 17:10 18:11, 14 20:8, 12 21:4, 7, 23 22:5 27:6, 9, 12, 14 28:12, 18, 19 30:3, 4, 6, 16, 25 35:10, 12 40:3, 5, 6 42:3 43:8, 10, 12, 21 44:2, 4, 11, 19 45:3, 7 46:15, 16 48:14, 20, 22, 23, 25 49:24 52:20 53:16, 21 54:10 57:3 58:5, 8 62:4, 7, 8, 19 63:1, 9 64:5, 14, 15, 25 65:4, 7 66:10, 22 68:9, 18 78:5, 8, 9, 10, 12 79:1, 2, 16, 22 86:5, 6, 8, 15 89:2, 6, 8, 12 95:4, 6, 9,	10, 12, 13, 25 96:5, 11 100:13, 16, 17 101:13, 23, 25 102:23 105:8, 21 106:3 107:4 108:5, 7, 9, 12, 15 thanking 50:7 thanks 14:6 19:10 22:4 27:4 37:23 40:8 86:11 87:5 theater 69:10 thin 38:7 thing 66:3 70:18 80:9, 17, 22 83:22 things 21:19 31:25 34:16 43:5 44:10 45:15 65:3 84:8 88:10, 19, 22 97:19 think 21:2, 17 23:1, 19 24:15 25:16, 18 28:9 42:20 46:10 47:20, 24 48:18 62:22 63:13, 24 64:16 80:11 82:9 87:6 88:9, 15 100:23 thinking 84:7 third 37:9 Thomas 14:22 66:22 96:13 thought 84:6 thoughtful 76:17 thoughtfully 71:21 thousands 8:22 36:24 58:24 threat 8:11 three 37:5 61:9 71:23 three-fourths 61:23 thrilled 72:3 thrown 7:2 8:5 time 6:3 7:1 8:24 11:4 23:21 33:6, 12	39:3 43:7 44:20 56:13 60:2 69:8 71:17 76:24 79:16 84:15 87:10 91:12 97:14 98:24 timeline 27:2 53:6 timely 34:19, 24 times 13:19 24:15 37:15 38:11, 25 47:3 87:21 98:16 title 4:23 today 5:15 6:13, 17 11:16 17:19 35:10 49:25 51:1 52:18 53:17 74:5 95:5, 6 102:1, 17, 25 103:12 107:3 Today's 12:12 15:1 toddlers 59:20 told 68:17 tolerating 88:10 tone 53:25 toolbelt 44:23 tools 54:24 55:1 top 59:7 topic 100:19 total 96:16 totally 27:3 touched 46:11 tracks 67:3 trade 71:8 trained 55:11 97:12 training 48:8 76:25 91:9 transcript 109:1, 19 transition 12:22 85:20 translators 39:11 Treasury 11:12 tremendous 21:10 28:10 trends 40:9 TRF 75:25 tried 24:19	true 36:8 truly 64:7 Trust 37:4 try 77:8 82:1 trying 24:16 33:13 36:16 38:7 63:14 98:25 Tuesday 1:1 turn 84:12 turnaround 83:5 turned 56:24 turnover 57:24 94:3 twice 97:25 two 10:21 11:5 52:8 70:20 88:24 97:6 two-year 67:24 type 42:20 46:24 types 43:5 typically 81:7 < U > U.S 11:10, 11 37:8 73:16 ultimately 27:24 unanticipated 92:9 unblock 54:24 uncertain 87:21 uncertainties 36:16 uncertainty 87:22 undergoes 77:3 underregulated 37:18 understand 2:3 26:16 38:23 75:1 understanding 24:5 26:25 38:18 93:20 Understood 24:5 unfamiliar 39:4 Unfortunately 41:6 59:19 Unit 30:24 33:14 united 21:21 36:15 45:13
---	--	---	--	--	--

University 60:16	volunteer 55:11 76:21	well-trained 32:11	92:4, 13 95:11
unprecedented 93:10	89:24 94:24	went 37:10	99:6 100:18
unstable 60:18	95:12	84:8	101:8, 9
61:2	vulnerable 36:10 38:1	we're 10:12	worked 21:10
upcoming 53:15	67:19	24:15 25:2, 10,	79:7 80:19
update 54:14	< W >	25 26:5, 13	99:22
updated 85:17,	wait 8:24	36:2 44:18	working 16:10
21	78:20 98:15	45:15 52:22	22:20 23:25
updates 12:12	105:10	63:12 81:18	24:14 25:13
85:18	waiting 34:21	82:5, 14, 25	42:4, 12 52:23
Urban 35:25	want 9:25	84:25 88:10	53:11 54:1
40:7 45:7, 18	10:6 14:20	we've 21:10	69:9 80:1
urged 52:2	15:20, 24	23:21 27:10	81:24 82:5
use 6:3 88:2	18:11 21:23	31:10 35:1	83:1, 6 84:16
usually 81:1	24:6 25:1, 25	57:9 74:12	works 32:24
utilities 52:14	27:9, 14 28:21	84:16 85:11	55:8 58:23
utility 92:9	29:23 34:1	White 11:10	91:7
utmost 7:21	41:3 45:5, 6	wield 88:19	world 96:21
	57:11 62:25	willing 43:12	worry 66:2
< V >	63:8, 16 64:14	win 57:19, 21,	wrecked
vacancies 94:3	72:16 76:15	24 58:4	96:20
Valle 25:14	78:18 80:18	win-win 57:18	write 37:16
49:5, 8, 10, 16,	81:11, 20	win-win-win	written 26:22
21 63:9 64:5	85:21 89:1	57:18	39:2
valuable 75:20	100:12 101:13	wisely 55:15	< Y >
value 102:25	102:22	wish 6:6	Yeah 30:21
variety 56:4	wanted 22:1	43:19	46:15 66:10
90:19 92:7	23:14 24:8	wishes 102:15	82:24 100:25
various 97:25	27:21 44:16	witness 16:20	year 7:21
version 31:14,	62:20 79:4, 16,	20:15 49:3	19:12 22:18,
21	22 80:9, 13, 22	witnesses 5:14	19 31:16
Vice 64:2	83:12 87:4	6:2, 15 102:11,	36:23 37:6
VICE-CHAIR	Wasserkrug	22, 24 103:2	50:9 58:22
1:1 28:16	25:19 49:5	women 61:21	59:4 85:12, 22
89:19	54:4, 7, 8 63:1	102:1	years 10:21
Vice-Chairman	68:16	wonder 26:23	11:5 52:8
3:7 105:2	way 22:13	Wonderful	59:9 70:20
Vice-president	54:19 68:22	17:4 49:8	73:15 79:9
49:21 58:21	94:19	56:24 65:20	97:6 99:21
view 2:14	website 25:5	69:9 71:11	young 41:8
viewers 5:19	week 18:23	96:3 101:5	42:19 79:10
vignette 68:15	56:8	wondering	yup 84:17
Vikram 30:10,	weigh 67:6	20:22	< Z >
22	weight 59:18	word 26:21	zip 12:4
virtual 59:1	welcome	words 3:4	Zoom 70:8
vision 10:19	43:23 62:4	work 9:11	
27:17	100:21	10:2, 17 11:22	
visiting 59:1	well 10:9	12:6, 8 15:5, 7	
vital 69:23	15:2 22:6	18:16 23:19	
76:1 91:15	26:2, 5 46:17	30:1, 3 35:5,	
vitality 13:13	47:15 50:13,	13 40:6 46:7,	
64:25	24 66:19	24 48:11 50:9	
voice 75:6	74:22 81:10	51:16 53:23	
87:20, 25 89:5	87:13 88:22	55:2 58:8	
volume 56:7	89:5 97:12	62:8 72:11	
	101:15	74:8 79:18, 24,	
		25 80:6 83:17	
		84:3 85:10	