

culture of deterrence:

VOICES OF NYC PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

URBAN
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CENTER



SAFETY
NET
PROJECT

Helen Strom

WITH AFUA ATTA-MENSAH, ESQ.

MAY 2014

A RESEARCH REPORT BY:

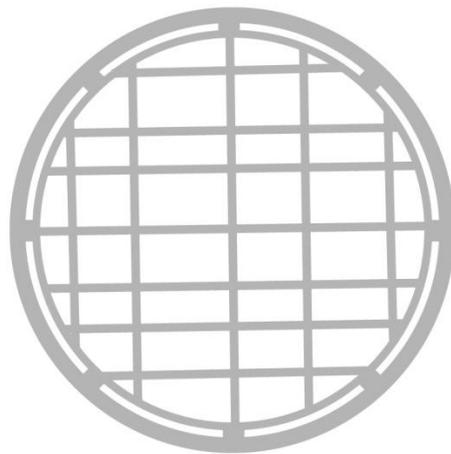
The Safety Net Project

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about the authors

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about the safety net project

CASTING A WIDER, FINER SAFETY NET

The Safety Net Project (SNP) at the Urban Justice Center is New York City's advocate for economic justice, combining direct legal services, affirmative litigation, research, and policy-making to achieve dignity for all New Yorkers. SNP strengthens the safety net by ensuring access to public benefits, nutritional assistance programs, eviction prevention services, public housing, and emergency shelter.

This report, as well as additional information about the Safety Net Project, can be found online at safetynetproject.org.

acknowledgments

We would first like to thank the members of the Public Assistance Action Committee, whose insights, experiences, and recommendations were invaluable to the development of this report. Your commitment to change, openness to sharing your experiences, and creative ideas were essential to the development of the report. We would also like to thank the 130 survey participants who shared their personal experiences at Human Resources Administration Job Centers. This information allowed us to better understand the current climate at these centers and is the basis of this report.

We are also grateful to the advocates who provided feedback on drafts: Sondra Youdelman and Jennifer Hadlock of Community Voices Heard, Louise Feld of Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, and Emily Miles of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. We appreciate your insight and your ongoing commitment to improving public assistance in New York City.

This report would not have been possible without the support of our colleagues at the Safety Net Project (SNP). We are indebted to SNP's dedicated and committed Public Assistance Advocates, led by Director of Advocacy Edwin Ortiz, who were involved with every step of the process, from survey collection to development of the report itself.

We would also like to give special thanks to Bill Bryan, Esq., Leah Goodridge, Esq., and Shaune Morgan of SNP, who contributed significantly to the writing and editing process, as well as Adrian Untermyer, who provided skilled and creative design for the final report. Interns Andrei Karneyeu and Elaine Truong also contributed essential assistance during the collection of survey data. And finally, we would like to thank SNP's Managing Director, Denise Miranda Esq., for her unstinting support and guidance in bringing this project to completion.

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executive summary

CULTURE OF DETERRENCE provides an unobstructed view of the average customer experience while seeking assistance at a New York City Human Resources Administration (“HRA”) Job Center.

In order to craft a report that reflected the experiences of this population, the Safety Net Project (SNP) surveyed a total of 130 public assistance customers across each of the twenty-five HRA Job Centers between October 2013 and February 2014.

For the purpose of this report, we use the term “customer” to refer to public assistance applicants and recipients who go to Job Centers seeking assistance.



This report illustrates both the scope and pervasive nature of the problem as well as the concrete steps that HRA must take to begin to address it. The report and its recommendations also rely upon a recently formed Public Assistance Action Committee comprised of twenty-five public assistance customers. This was an intentional method modeled on the belief that these individuals are uniquely placed to provide valuable and often concealed information gleaned from firsthand experiences. These customers offer insight and suggestions through an organic and practical approach. This process can be impossible for researchers and policy advocates to undertake alone, as they often lack firsthand experience of the problems on the ground.

The report’s findings are as follows:

1. INTERACTIONS WITH JOB CENTER STAFF ARE OFTEN HOSTILE AND CONFUSING

A vast majority of respondents reported that HRA workers spoke to them in a hostile manner, that responses to questions were often confusing, contradictory or sometimes nonexistent and that hostile security personnel often escalate problems and make customers feel unsafe rather than secure.

2. HRA FAILS TO COMPLY WITH ITS OWN PROCEDURES FOR PROCESSING DOCUMENTS

Almost two-thirds of respondents reported lost paperwork or other problems with submitting information, including failure or refusal to provide receipts and stories of multiple submissions of the same document being necessary.

3. CUSTOMERS ARE UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH HRA WITHOUT VISITING A CENTER

Despite the consensus about problems *in* the center, respondents agree that calling the center is an exercise in futility. Eighty-six percent of respondents reported that calls to their workers were rarely or never answered. In addition, submitting documents or making contact via fax or online is virtually impossible.

4. WAITS AT JOB CENTERS ARE LONG AND UNPLEASANT

Due in part to the inability to make contact through alternative means, survey results found that customers waited an average of 3.5 hours before speaking with a representative, regardless of having young children or disabilities. Long wait times are yet another method by which customers are discouraged and deterred from seeking benefits.

5. CENTER STAFF OFTEN FAILS TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES DESIGNED TO ASSIST LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY CUSTOMERS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS, AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Many survey participants indicated they do not receive services in their preferred language. Only twenty percent of individuals who indicated a Domestic Violence history were properly referred to a specialized liaison as mandated by HRA policy. Additionally, respondents reported numerous failures to provide accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

The responses here clearly demonstrate a pattern of harsh and indifferent treatment with the end result of discouraging customers from accessing crucial assistance they are entitled to and often need to survive. A culture of deterrence is still entrenched at HRA Job Centers and change is desperately needed.

With these experiences as our guide, we propose the following recommendations aimed at improving processes and conditions within Job Centers for both customers and HRA staff:

1. PROVIDE JOB CENTER STAFF WITH TRAINING DESIGNED TO IMPROVE INTERACTIONS WITH CUSTOMERS

Trainings should include cultural competency, conflict prevention, and guidance on engaging with vulnerable populations with an aim towards shifting Job Center culture away from deterrence and towards high-quality service to those eligible for assistance.

2. INCREASE TRANSPARENCY BY DEVELOPING FEEDBACK AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

The result of a center visit or required next steps should not be a mystery. Center staff should wear nametags, provide their name, title and supervisor's contact information, and provide a "Center Visit Receipt" to provide staff and customers alike with a uniform record of any visit. Additionally, HRA must create a more transparent and responsive complaint process that allows customers to track and follow up on their complaint and actively seek input from customers and advocacy organizations through questionnaires and annual surveys to improve best practices.

3. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

HRA should develop systems for customers to communicate with HRA without visiting the Job Center, including creating an online portal, staffing reception lines at each Job Center, and providing staff with time to return voicemail messages.

4. REDUCE WAIT TIMES

HRA should provide the resources and guidelines necessary to ensure each Job Center adequately staffs their facility to standardize and minimize wait times.

5. INCREASE OVERSIGHT

HRA should ensure that existing policies are being followed in all areas including receiving, scanning and indexing documents, providing receipts for document submissions, and adequately ensuring that individuals with Limited English Proficiency, Domestic Violence victims and the disabled are accommodated. We recommend that each center establish a help desk staffed by legal service organizations where customers can obtain information and assistance on their rights and obligations.

introduction

MARLENE P. spent the last three decades serving others by working in positions in the medical and social services fields. Most recently, she was a Patient Advocate at a Bronx hospital earning a \$40,000 annual salary.

In June of 2009, Marlene was laid off and joined the throngs of other unemployed Americans. Anxious to find work to support her family of four, Marlene worked on her resume and applied for as many positions as possible. However, Marlene was unable to find any full-time work.

Marlene's unemployment ran out in April of 2011, leaving her with no income to support herself or her family. Left without any further options, Marlene went to a Human Resources Administration ("HRA") Job Center to apply for public assistanceⁱ (colloquially known as "Welfare").

Dejected, tired, and anxious, Marlene, her two daughters, and her four-year old grandson waited at the Melrose Job Center in the Bronx for five hours to apply for help. When the family finally met with a caseworker and answered a multitude of questions, they were informed that their public assistance application would not

be fully processed that day due to a "computer system failure." After spending an entire day at the Job Center, the family would have to return the next day. Failure to return would result in a denial of benefits.

Desperate for assistance, Marlene and her family returned the next day and waited, again, for several hours. After providing all relevant documents and attending mandatory follow-up appointments, Marlene learned that her public assistance application was denied. She returned to the Job Center to inquire as to the reason for the denial and was told that she simply needed to apply again.

She reapplied. She was denied again. Each time Marlene returned to the Job Center to reapply for public assistance and attend subsequent mandatory appointments, her application was rejected. It did not help that Marlene experienced unsympathetic and antagonistic reactions from HRA staff members concerning her application. At one point during this process, an HRA Job Center employee asked: "What's wrong with you? If you did what you were supposed to do, you wouldn't be here again." After this experience, Marlene dreaded go-

ing to the Job Center. “I knew that it was going to turn out horrible.” But she returned anyway, not because she wanted to—but because she had to.

Marlene was eligible for public assistance: she was a U.S. citizen with zero income. Yet, Marlene’s application for public assistance was not properly processed until an Administrative Law Judge ordered HRA to follow its own procedures. It took eleven months for Marlene to finally receive her benefits. During that time, Marlene borrowed money from relatives, went to food pantries and begged for food at a nearby grocery store in order to feed herself and her family. Unable to pay rent, Marlene recalls that she “practically lived in Bronx Housing Court because I was getting eviction notices every month.” Marlene even ended up in the hospital on two occasions due to anxiety.

The story of Marlene P. is not a rare occurrence. Marlene’s experiences are an all-too-familiar reality for New Yorkers in need of public assistance benefits. This report examines and challenges the notion that the regular dehumanizing treatment that applicants and recipients endure at Job Centers is the price one must pay in order to acquire public benefits.

an early history of public assistance centers in new york city

Historically, New York led the nation in the creation of programs to serve the poor. Nevertheless, these programs were often plagued with poor implementation. In 1931, in response to the Great Depression, advocates from New York City successfully lobbied for the creation of Home Relief, a regional program by which the government provided material and cash payments to individuals unable to meet their basic needs. Home Relief represented a historic expansion in public assistance for poor families and would serve as an influential model for the New Deal.ⁱⁱ However, the process of seeking Home Relief aid at distribution centers was often humiliating and Home Relief payments to recipients fell far short of promised levels.

Shortly after New York enacted laws to provide the poor with a safety net, the concept of government-funded poverty assistance expanded to the federal level as Congress passed a series of laws in response to the Great Depression. These laws and presidential executive orders (by then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt) became known as the New

Deal. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (part of the Social Security Act of 1935) provided poor mothers with a modest stipend so that they would not need to work outside of the home. In 1938, New York went a step farther by passing a Constitutional Amendment to provide even stronger protections to the neediest.

The Amendment protected not only poor mothers, but also any poor individual: “The aid, care, and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state.”ⁱⁱⁱ Since these protections were now part of the State Constitution rather than a temporary government program, they placed affirmative obligations on New York’s government to provide long-lasting assistance. This provision was passed at the behest of New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, who convinced the State Legislature that a more effective welfare system would not only help the sick, old, and needy but would also save the government money and help the overall economy. This provision remains part of the State Constitution to this day and has served as the legal and statutory basis for many of New York’s social programs.

Although New York’s constitution allowed for public assistance for more low-income families, access to those benefits was difficult to attain in New York City. These

challenges were largely due to hurdles erected by local administrators of social services programs. In 1962, the Moreland Commission on Welfare, a New York State legislative commission, concluded in its report that “observations in the offices and evaluation of the handling of clients...reveal an attitude of annoyance and disregard of the human factors, and in many cases almost an ‘adversary’ rather than a ‘helping’ relationship.”^{iv}

“The aid, care, and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state”

– NEW YORK STATE
CONSTITUTION

A 1965 survey conducted by the Community Council of Greater New York found that many single mothers facing extreme financial hardship had not applied for assistance. The reasons given by respondents for not applying for benefits included: confusion regarding eligibility criteria, concern that the paltry amount they’d receive in benefits would not be worth the harassment, and past humiliating experiences with the welfare agency.^v

An extensive case study of the Lower Manhattan Welfare Center in 1966 further illustrated a detailed portrait of “intimidation and

deterrence” designed to discourage individuals from applying for assistance.^{vi} Other studies conducted during that period revealed that for every New York City resident receiving AFDC, there was another person who was eligible but not receiving benefits. A 1968 New York City Bureau of the Budget memo prepared for Mayor Lindsay recommended a variety of steps meant to discourage welfare applicants and therefore save on welfare costs, including shrinking the number of welfare centers to make it more difficult for people to travel to them and increasing backlog and waiting periods for benefits.^{vii}

In response to these barriers, welfare recipients, grassroots activists, and legal services groups began organizing to increase access to cash assistance in New York City during the 1960s and early 1970s. Initially organized by the Lower East Side-based nonprofit Mobilization for Youth, these protests and actions sparked a nationwide welfare rights movement. Although the welfare rights movement had largely disbanded by the mid-1970s, access to benefits in New York City continued to expand slowly in the decades that followed, in part, due to increased funding for legal services work. The number of eligible New York

ers able to access public assistance continued to increase steadily through the early 1990s.

twenty years of deterrence: the giuliani and bloomberg years

In 1995, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani embarked on a campaign to reduce the public assistance caseload to zero, at any cost. Denouncing the welfare system as too “user friendly,” Giuliani commenced an effort to aggressively “divert” and discourage individuals seeking public assistance.^{viii}

This change was accelerated and cemented by federal welfare reform in 1996, which, in addition to adding a work requirement for recipients, transformed AFDC into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. The new funding structure created incentives to cut the number of public assistance recipients. New York State would now receive the same annual block grant funding regardless of the number of families on public assistance (as opposed to the prior federal entitlement system where federal funding expanded and contracted based on the

“We’re gong to end Welfare by the end of this century completely...”

– RUDOLPH GIULIANI,
JULY 20, 1998

number of families receiving assistance). Welfare offices were transformed from “Income Support Centers” to “Job Centers” and HRA offered these new Job Centers financial incentives to cut their caseload by 10% from the previous year. A 1999 report recounted how “the Job Center staff focuses its efforts at every step on dissuading applicants from submitting an application for any assistance.”^{ix}

This philosophy of “diversion” and deterrence towards public assistance recipients continued under the Bloomberg Administration. A 2008 report by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum’s office surveyed clients about their experiences at Human Resources Administration (“HRA”) Job Centers and concluded that “clients face a range of obstacles at Job Centers,” including long wait times, documents being misplaced, miscommunication with HRA staff, or no record of a prior visit.^x

Despite these findings and two subsequent reports by the Public Advocate’s office in 2009 documenting continued systemic issues with Job Centers, the

Bloomberg administration declined to take any significant corrective action.

Today, there is an increased need for public assistance to combat the Great Recession and its continuing aftermath. Unemployment rates in New York City remain stubbornly high at 8.1% (compared with national average of 6.6%)^{xi} and an estimated 23% of New Yorkers live in poverty.^{xixiii}

Public assistance is a critical resource for New Yorkers facing temporary hardship and poverty during this time. Yet, during the height of the recession and the subsequent stagnant economy (January 2007- January 2014) the number of individuals receiving public assistance in New York City decreased by 11.4% to a meager 333,708 - its lowest level since 1964.^{xiv}

In comparison, during this same period, other safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (“SNAP,” previously referred to as Food Stamps) and Medicaid responded proportionally to the increased need.

The number of SNAP recipients in New York City rose 60% from January 2007 to January 2014^{xv} and the number of Medicaid recipients rose by over 10%.^{xvi}

today: a culture of deterrence

Our research, based on surveys with 130 public assistance recipients, confirms that the Guiliani and Bloomberg administrations were largely successful in their goal of deterring New Yorkers from seeking public assistance. Survey participants clearly

articulate a pattern of discouraging, disorganized, and degrading treatment while at HRA Job Centers. This treatment impedes New Yorkers from accessing the crucial assistance that they need to survive. The stories of Marlene P. and so many others provide a clear view of a culture of deterrence at the HRA Job Centers designed to frustrate and deny New Yorkers in need.

methodology

IN ORDER TO collect data on HRA Job Centers, the Safety Net Project surveyed public assistance customers across New York City. For the purpose of this report, we use the term “customer” to refer to public assistance applicants and recipients who go to Job Centers seeking assistance.

A total of 130 surveys were collected between October 2013 and February 2014. All of the twenty-five HRA Job Centers in New York City were sampled. **FIGURE I** provides an overview of the number of respondents sampled at each Job Center. The survey is not intended to be a representative sample but instead provides a critical, up-to-date snapshot of those issues connected to the application and retention of public assistance for the 337,400 current recipients in New York City and the thousands of New Yorkers who apply for benefits each year.

xvii

The survey was administered to individuals who currently receive public assistance or received public assistance within the past year. The survey was either orally administered by Safety Net Project advocates or individually completed by recipients on paper or electronic form. The Safety Net

Project collected responses from three sources:

1. **Randomly selected HRA customers** attending or requesting fair hearings at the Office of Administrative Hearings at 14 Boerum Place in Brooklyn
2. **Attendees of the Safety Net Project’s legal clinics**, which are located in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx
3. **Current and former clients of the Safety Net Project** who were contacted via e-mail or interviewed in person

the public assistance action committee

This report incorporates not only survey data but also the input and recommendations of current and former public assistance customers. Named the Public Assistance Action Committee (herein “the Committee”), this group of twenty five public assistance customers was central to the development of the report’s findings and recommendations. Reliance on the

Committee is based on the research and advocacy principle that stakeholders (i.e. HRA customers) are uniquely situated to contribute valuable and often hidden information due to first-hand experiences. Such organic insight has great potential to document current agency processes and produce strategies to improve policies and systems that currently do not serve the needs of

stakeholders.

In a series of meetings in March and April of 2014, the Committee drew on both survey data collected and the actual experiences of public assistance applicants and recipients as it pertains to Job Centers. The Committee's insights and experiences are included in the report's discussion of the survey findings.

FIGURE 1:

survey respondents

BY HRA JOB CENTER

	center	respondents
THE BRONX	38: RIDER	8
	40: MELROSE	5
	44: FORDHAM	7
	46: CROTONA	11
BROOKLYN AND STATEN ISLAND	63: CONEY ISLAND	1
	64: DEKALB	11
	66: BUSHWICK	9
	67: CLINTON HILL	8
	70: BAY RIDGE	1
	99: RICHMOND	1
MANHATTAN	13: WAVERLY	4
	23: EAST END	9
	35: DYCKMAN	9
QUEENS	53: QUEENS	1
	54: JAMAICA	2
	79: ROCKAWAY	1
SPECIAL NEEDS AND POPULATIONS	17: FAMILY SERVICES CALL-IN	3
	18: ST. NICHOLAS	2
	37: EAST RIVER	14
	39: UNION SQUARE	3
	47: REFUGEE	2
	52: RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT	2
	71: INTENSIVE SERVICES	4
	84: SENIOR WORKS	3
62: VETERANS	1	

findings

THE RESULTS IDENTIFY persistent problems with Job Centers across the city.

We believe that these problems have an outsized effect on individuals seeking public assistance. Interactions between Job Center staff and customers are critical since customers are required to visit Job Centers in person in order to receive benefits. There is no online application for public assistance (unlike for SNAP), so applicants must go to the center to apply for benefits and then must return to provide requested documents.

Recipients must also visit the center to fulfill a host of requirements. For example, they are required to report any changes in their circumstances immediately to their center, such as a move to a new apartment, the birth of a child, or any change in income.

Even when a change does not occur in the household composition or income, recipients must attend appointments at the Job Center to verify their continued eligibility for assistance. Additionally, recipients must report to their Job Cen-

ter to request specialized grants that they may be entitled to, such as storage fees for homeless families or rental arrears grants for families facing eviction. In general, recipients must travel to their centers if they need to resolve one of the many problems that may arise, such as an unexpected reduction or discontinuance of their benefits.



Survey participants responded in near unanimity that their experiences at Job Centers are often upsetting and unhelpful. For customers, these problems can cause frustration, anxiety, and distress, especially after spending countless unnecessary hours at the Job Centers.

Furthermore, the failure by some Job Center staff members to provide clear information to customers or follow correct procedures often results in applicants being unduly denied for necessary benefits or recipients losing benefits that are critical to their families. This in turn can lead to irreversible hardships, such as food insecurity, inability to purchase basic necessities such as formula or diapers, and eviction and homelessness.

finding one: hostile and confusing interactions

NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS WITH WORKERS

While HRA’s mission is to provide assistance to needy New Yorkers, survey respondents contend that many HRA workers are often dismissive and unhelpful. Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported that HRA workers always, often, or sometimes spoke to them in a mean, hostile, or nasty manner.

HRA’s website indicates that recipients with complaints about service may send an electronic message to the Commissioner, contact the Office of Constituent Services, or the HRA Infoline via telephone.^{xviii} However, members of the Committee noted that information about how to make complaints are not highly publicized at Job Centers.

Furthermore, those who filed complaints noted that HRA provided no mechanism for following up on the status of the complaint and that their complaints seemed to have no discernible impact on staff treatment of customers.

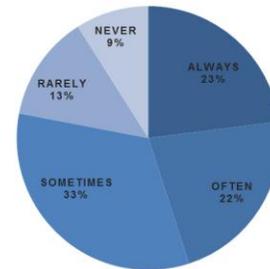


FIGURE II: DO HRA WORKERS EVER SPEAK TO YOU IN A MEAN, HOSTILE, OR NASTY MANNER?

“They treat people terribly. People leave there crying”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 44

“Going to the HRA Center for help is frustrating. The workers usually treat people as worthless”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 47

“It’s a demeaning human experience”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 64

“The workers are rude and unwilling to help, do not listen to client needs and disregard responsibility”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 38

CONFUSING INFORMATION ABOUT BENEFITS

Respondents noted overwhelmingly that they are often unable to receive clear information about their benefits when they visit the Job Center.

Many members of the Committee recounted being confused or unsatisfied by the response received from Job Center staff. When they asked for more information, they were told either to “request a[n administrative] fair hearing” or “wait for a letter in the mail.” These actions require a customer to leave the center without an explanation or resolution.

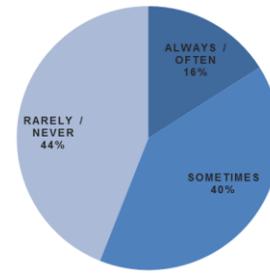


FIGURE III: WHEN YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT YOUR CASE, DO THE WORKERS PROVIDE YOU WITH ANSWERS THAT YOU CAN UNDERSTAND?

“Mostly they are vague when it comes to answering questions”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 64

HOSTILE SECURITY

Present at all Job Center offices, security personnel include members of the HRA Police Force, who are Peace Officers with arrest powers, as well as security guards independently contracted through FJC Security Services, Inc.

Ideally, security officers should help make customers feel safe in the centers and assist in resolving volatile situations. Some customers, however, do not feel safe in their centers, partially due to problems with some of the security personnel.

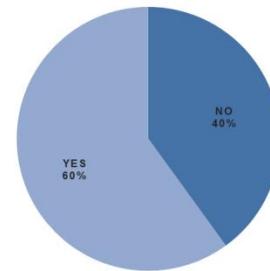


FIGURE IV: DO YOU FEEL SAFE AT YOUR CENTER?

“I don't feel safe in the center because the security guard disrespects me”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 23

The Committee voiced concerns that security personnel at some Job Centers escalated situations instead of resolving them. Security personnel

have also been accused of removing customers from Job Centers before workers can address a customer’s problems.

– See *Germaine Delaney’s Story*

finding two: misplaced and mishandled documents

As detailed above, customers are required to present Job Center staff with a wide range of documents to first establish eligibility and then to confirm continued eligibility. A resounding majority of survey participants assert that documents and paper requests they provide to workers at Job Centers are often lost.

Aside from the frustration experienced by those affected, these mistakes also have serious consequences. For example, if a customer moves and Job Center staff does not process the change in address, HRA may continue to send correspondence to the customer’s previous address.

As a result, the customer will not receive notice of an upcoming mandatory appointment since the information is mailed to the previous address. Failure to attend the meeting that the customer was unaware of would result in the loss of benefits

LOST DOCUMENTS

HRA policy directs that documents “must be scanned and indexed on the same day” whether submitted by mail, fax, or in person.^{xix} However, survey respondents indicate that this policy is not always practiced.

Almost two-thirds of respondents report that HRA has lost paperwork that they provided. Some customers may have to submit documents three or four separate times before it is finally processed.

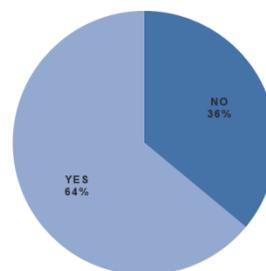


FIGURE V: HAS A WORKER AT YOUR CENTER EVER LOST PAPERWORK THAT YOU PROVIDED TO THEM?

These allegations of lost documents and the negative repercussions that they cause are widespread. Additionally, survey results and subsequent discussion of these results with members of the Committee denote that procedures for processing documentation vary widely from center to center, and even varied from worker to worker within the same center.

Committee members recounted that, depending on who they talked to in the Job Center, customers might be told to drop documents off at the Customer Service desk or leave copies for their worker. When they returned to see if the changes had been processed, they were told that there was no record of their earlier request in the system and that they should just submit the documents again.

Survey respondents and committee members' comments also suggest that these problems extend to the processing of paperwork for special allowances and grants such as those available for moving expenses, storage payments, or additional allowances for pregnant women. Customers who visit the Job Centers to request these grants are asked to complete a brief application and submit supporting documentation. However, respondents commented that this paperwork is often lost, with serious consequences.

LACK OF RECEIPTS

As protection for applicants and recipients, HRA requires that Job Centers provide same-day receipts whenever a customer submits documentation. ^{xx} Survey data shows that this policy is applied with varying degree. Some customers report that they have even been denied receipts when they explicitly asked for them.

“I had to go four or five times to the center to correct the rent amount”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 23

“Storage payments keep on being delayed; my stuff was almost auctioned multiple times”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 23

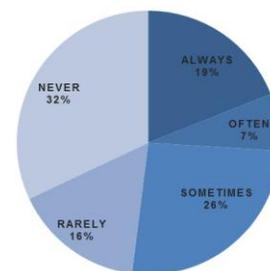


FIGURE VI: WHEN YOU PROVIDE YOUR CENTER WITH PAPERWORK, HOW OFTEN ARE YOU GIVEN A RECEIPT?

Receipts are critical for customers who must speak to Job Center supervisors or attend Fair Hearings. This occurs when they are accused of failing to provide documentation or forced to defend themselves if accused of fraudulently failing to report new information.

“I asked for a receipt and the lady told me that they don't give receipts”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 46



germaine delaney

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE ACTION COMMITTEE

“I first applied for public assistance in November 2013. At my November 26, 2013 follow-up appointment, the worker asked me to fax documentation by December 3. I faxed the requested document but later found out that they closed my case based on not receiving it.

I appeared in person with the fax receipt - proof that I had faxed the documents requested on December 2. Every Customer Service representative told me to reapply. Why should I have to reapply when it is the center’s fault? Eventually I did see a worker and she could not access what the previous worker had done so she also suggested that I reapply. At that point, I requested to see a supervisor. After waiting 20 minutes I was told by security staff that “I had been serviced” and would be escorted out without seeing a supervisor. This was said to me without any further explanation and I was not causing any disturbance.

I filed a complaint with 311 and requested a Fair Hearing. The East River Center contacted me for a Mandatory Dispute Resolution at which time I met with a supervisor, supposedly to resolve my fair hearing issue. The supervisor again refused to accept my documentation and told me to reapply. My contention is the centers do not want to resolve simple issues and prefer to force you to wait months for benefits. They are wasting clients’ time and government money. The centers should stop treating applicants poorly. Many people have worked many years and will return to being tax-paying citizens as soon as they can. Why treat applicants like an enigmatic underclass?

After winning my fair hearing, I have had to enlist the help of the Safety Net Project. For the past two months HRA has repeatedly not placed those benefits on my card. In addition, the center even cancelled my food stamps. As a result I have to wait every month to find out if benefits are on. All of this after a Judge’s Decision and Order. They are causing great and unnecessary stress to their fellow citizens.”

finding three: dysfunctional communication

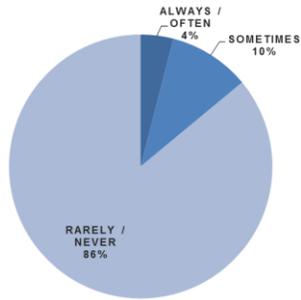


FIGURE VII: WHEN YOU CALL YOUR CENTER, HOW OFTEN IS YOUR PHONE CALL ANSWERED (ON AVERAGE)?

“No one returns their calls ever”

— RESPONDENT, CENTER 64

“When the caseworker sends you paperwork - they never put their phone number. And when you do contact them, they never contact you back. They tell you that you have no caseworker”

— RESPONDENT, CENTER 79

Customers who call to reschedule an appointment or ask questions about their case are often unable to speak with a Job Center staff member.

Ninety-two percent of survey respondents reported that they called their center to speak with a caseworker, and of those respondents, eighty-six percent reported that their call was rarely or never answered.

According to survey participants and members of the Committee, not only are the centers’ phone lines rarely answered, but messages are also not returned.

These experiences are echoed by HRA’s own internal audits. The annual audits are conducted by the Family Independence Administration (FIA) Office of Program Monitoring, which have consistently found that Job Centers across the City had an abysmal rate of answering calls and returning voicemails.

Members of legal services organizations and other advocates are given special contacts within the Director’s Office at each Job Center where they are able to speak with supervisors; however, advocates are told that they may not share these numbers with customers.

Furthermore, there is no way for customers to communicate with HRA online. While the SNAP program offers a mechanism for online applications, HRA has not expanded this option to public assistance. The result is a system where customers with hectic schedules and/or disabilities must travel to the Job Center for any information or help, or, alternatively, face the loss of their benefits.

finding four: long and unpleasant waits

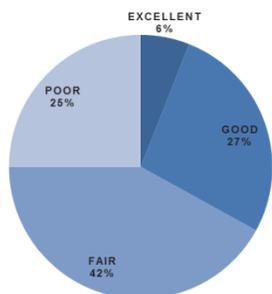


FIGURE VIII: HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE CLEANLINESS OF YOUR CENTER?

“To speak to a caseworker you literally have to wait all day. It's not clean and when you have kids they get impatient...Then the security gets mad because your kids are running around”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 64

“Sometimes you go there and after waiting five or six hours, they tell you that they can't see you that day, come another day”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 64

In 2003, HRA announced the “Model Office Initiative” in order to increase efficiency and reduce wait times at Job Centers. While over half of all Job Centers are now Model Offices, wait times remain extremely high.

Survey results found that customers waited an average of 3.5 hours before speaking with a representative. Long wait times are yet another mechanism HRA uses to discourage and deter customers from seeking benefits.

Committee members agreed that some Job Center staff seemed to believe that customers’ time was not valuable. To the contrary, many customers are juggling dozens of conflicting obligations and appointments, including employment, housing court appointments, training programs, job interviews, doctor’s appointments, and child care obligations.

Additionally, the waiting environment can be very unpleasant for those with children. Furthermore, customers are sometimes directed to a waiting area or line, only to be told later that they are in the wrong place and need to wait somewhere else.

Less than half of respondents (46%) stated that they always or often were given clear directions regarding where to go, what to do, and what line to stand in.

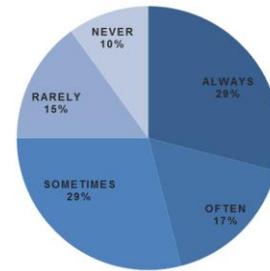


FIGURE IX: WHEN YOU GO TO THE CENTER FOR AN APPOINTMENT, HOW OFTEN ARE YOU GIVEN CLEAR DIRECTIONS REGARDING WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO DO, AND WHAT LINE TO STAND IN?

“They send you back and forth between floors”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 44

finding five: vulnerable populations ignored

HRA has clear policies established to support and serve populations with specific needs, such as domestic violence survivors, individuals with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency. Responses to the survey show that these policies are not uniformly implemented at the Job Centers.

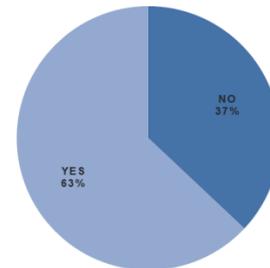


FIGURE X: IF ENGLISH IS NOT YOUR PRIMARY LANGUAGE, DOES HRA COMMUNICATE WITH YOU IN A LANGUAGE THAT YOU CAN UNDERSTAND?

CUSTOMERS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Pursuant to NYC Local Law 73, Executive Order 120, and HRA’s own policy directives,^{xxi} “applicants / participants with limited or no English-speaking ability must be provided with communication assistance in their native language.” This includes on-site translation services at Job Centers as well as document translation and telephone contact.

“They never provide a translator so I can never communicate with them”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 84

These policies are not fully implemented at HRA Job Centers. Thirty-seven percent of respondents with limited English proficiency stated that HRA staff did not communicate with them in their language.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

HRA policy mandates staff to screen customers for domestic violence at all applications or re-certifications to establish continued eligibility.^{xxii} Any time a domestic violence issue arises through this screening or in other circumstances, HRA workers must immediately recommend that the customer meet with a special Domestic Violence Liaison (DVL) at the Center.

The DVL is then able to assist the survivor by waiving or modifying public assistance requirements that may threaten their safety, such as appointments near their abuser or mandates to apply for child support. Alarming, survey respondents who mentioned domestic violence issues to their workers were only referred to the DVL twenty-three percent of the time.

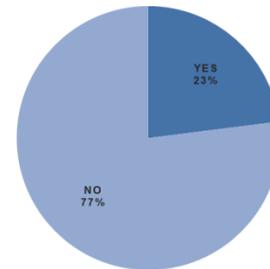


FIGURE XI: IF YOU SPOKE TO AN HRA WORKER ABOUT A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ISSUE, WERE YOU REFERRED TO THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LIAISON?

CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, HRA is required to provide individuals with disabilities equal access to all services.

HRA's written policy is to provide all customers with access to a reasonable accommodation process by which individuals with disabilities may request that HRA make an accommodation to meet their needs, such as help completing forms, priority queuing, or scheduling changes. This includes an informal process at the Job Center level as well a formal Reasonable Accommodation Request that can be pursued through HRA's Office of Constituent Services.^{xxiii}

Survey results indicate that individuals with disabilities are not being effectively served by this process at Job Centers. Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents self-identified as having a disability, and of those respondents, eighty-two percent answered that HRA did not provide services in a way that was accessible to them.^{xxiv}

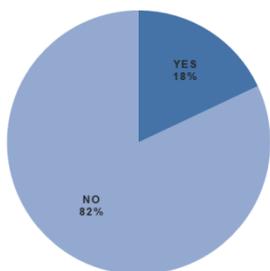


FIGURE XII: IF YOU HAVE A DISABILITY, DOES HRA PROVIDE SERVICES IN A WAY THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO YOU?

“They never answer the phone and if you can't travel because of your disability, you can't ever get anybody on the phone”

– RESPONDENT, CENTER 40

sabrina hawkins

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE ACTION COMMITTEE

“I had to apply for public assistance in 2012 because I have a temporary disability. I had been working for the City of New York at the Department of Environmental Preservation as a custodian. I worked for one year and then had to quit partially because I was having so much pain in my knees. My doctor ordered an MRI which showed that I needed surgery to have both knees replaced. For a while I just lived on the money that I had saved, thinking that this would blow over. Well I found myself applying for Public Assistance and SNAP.

At my Job Center, you are always there all day, even if you have an appointment. Once I had a recertification appointment to show that I was still eligible for benefits. I arrived at 8 a.m. and was the third person in line. They sent me upstairs and I waited for them to call me but I stayed there all day. Finally, they called me at 2:00 p.m. Even if I just go to drop off documents, I wait for three hours. Sometimes there isn't even a chair, which is a huge problem for me because I am not supposed to stand for more than 5 minutes at a time. They don't have much for the disabled. Now I bring my walker because I know that I may not get a seat. Sometimes I call to avoid taking a trip there but nobody ever picks up the phone - it just rings and rings. The voicemail is always full. You have no idea whether they got the message or just deleted the message or they just didn't care.

When you go to the Job Center, you are sent to the Customer Service window and they often don't let you see the worker. Customer Service usually has no idea what is going on with the case, and when you ask them a question, they say, 'No, I don't see that here,' or 'They'll get to you when they get to it.'

I have also noticed that they don't want you to see a supervisor. They will say, 'The supervisor is in a meeting. We don't know when they are coming out.' I have been to so many fair hearings and meetings at the Job Centers that I am just confident that they have no clue what they are doing. HRA's accomplishments in helping the poor are at an all-time low.”

agency challenges

THE SURVEY RESULTS suggest that customers often receive unhelpful and demeaning treatment at Job Centers. While Job Center front-line staff are often the agency's most visible face, this report places responsibility for systemic mistreatment and disorganization squarely with leadership of the agency. Individual workers operate and respond within the policies, systems, and organizational culture set by leadership, which for the past twenty years has focused on deterring New Yorkers from accessing the help that they need.

HRA workers have long faced a variety of challenges such as faulty computer systems and inadequate staffing. A March 2009 report by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's office surveyed HRA Eligibility Specialists charged with interviewing customers at Job Centers and found that "not enough staff" was the most difficult obstacle faced by eligibility workers. Technology issues, including "computers are not reliable," "scanners are not reliable," "unable to retrieve client's scanned electronic documents," also ranked among the top five most difficult problems faced by eligibility specialists.^{xxv} The survey results suggest that these is-

ues are still present today and may help explain why customers report such persistent problems at Job Centers.

HRA currently has 3,678 front line employees. These staff members focus primarily on public assistance (rather than SNAP staff or HRA Administration staff).^{xxvi} Despite continued issues with wait times and customer service, the Mayor's Preliminary FY 2015 budget proposed cutting 361 full-time positions from HRA Job Center staff including 49 fewer Caseworkers, 90 fewer Eligibility Specialists, and 52 fewer Public Assistance Supervisors.^{xxvii}

Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that the new mayoral administration may take a different approach towards the purpose and culture of HRA's Job Centers. Mayor Bill de Blasio and the new HRA Commissioner, Steven Banks, have publicly stated their intention to make HRA less punitive and more responsive to needy New Yorkers.

One additional significant development is that, beginning this year, HRA may face serious financial penalties from the State of New York for failing to address customers' needs at Job Centers.

When customers are unable to resolve problems with their benefits at Job Centers, they often request administrative “Fair Hearings” whereby a State Administrative Law Judge reviews whether HRA’s action was correct. Currently, HRA loses the vast majority of hearings that are held.^{xxviii} The 2014 State Budget included a

new “Fair Hearing chargeback” provision which may potentially cost the City \$10 million^{xxix} if HRA continues to lose so many hearings. It is therefore in HRA’s interest to resolve issues and improve service at Job Centers in order to avoid these hearings and therefore avoid financial penalties.

recommendations

SURVEY RESPONDENTS overwhelmingly characterize their experiences at HRA Job Centers as frustrating, hostile, and dehumanizing. Using their experiences as our guide we propose the following recommendations as tools HRA should implement to begin to transform Job Centers into offices that effectively serve New Yorkers in need. These recommendations were developed in concert with members of the Public Assistance Action Committee, who have first-hand knowledge of the hurdles associated with accessing services at HRA’s Job Centers.

If implemented, we believe these solutions will better enable New Yorkers to access the benefits that they are entitled to and desperately need. Additionally, we hope that many of our recommendations will improve processes and conditions within Job Centers for both public assistance recipients as well as for HRA staff.

one: training

a. Provide Job Center staff with training designed to improve interactions with customers

HRA must conduct training for staff with the goal of shifting Job Center culture towards providing high-quality service to its customers. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents reported that Job Center staff spoke to them in a mean, hostile, or nasty manner at least some of the time. Trainings should also incorporate a cultural competency component to acknowledge the diverse population that HRA serves. The training should also incorporate specialized instruction on how to better engage those dealing with mental-illness.

b. Require Job Center security personnel to attend conflict prevention trainings that provide guidance on engaging with vulnerable populations

Security’s primary goal is to ensure the safety of all individuals at the Job Centers. However, this goal must be balanced with HRA’s ultimate mission to provide services to needy New Yorkers. Security staff should not remove customers unless they pose a legitimate safety threat. Security staff must be provided with

tools that will better prepare them to de-escalate difficult interactions while still allowing individuals to access services.

two: transparency

a. Ensure Job Center staff members have visible nametags that display their name and title

b. Provide customers with the name and contact information of their designated worker and the worker's supervisor

This information should be included in all mailings as well as posted publicly at Job Centers.

c. Create a “Center Visit Receipt”

The receipt should include the Job Center staff member's name, contact info, and the reason for the visit. The HRA Staff member who issues the receipt should also be responsible for ensuring that the customer's visit is appropriately marked in the case file. This will provide recipients with proof of their visit and also allow HRA staff to track visits to

the center when there are questions or issues.

d. Create a more transparent and responsive complaint process

As noted in survey responses and by members of the Committee, HRA's current system for filing and following up on complaints is opaque and ineffective. HRA should clearly display information in Job Centers explaining how to make a complaint by phone or online.

Upon report, customers should be given a tracking number to track the status of their complaint. Complaints should be compiled by center and worker (if applicable) and provided to the HRA Commissioner, Center Directors, and the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare. General information about the number of complaints filed per center and type of complaint should also be made publicly available.

e. Actively seek input from customers

This input would provide valuable insight to HRA on how to improve the environment and usage of Job Centers.

f. Post placards at Job Centers informing applicants and recipients of their basic rights

These placards would inform all who enter the Job Centers of their rights and of proper procedures.

g. Partner with advocacy organizations to conduct an annual survey to collect input from Job Center staff and customers

HRA should partner with advocacy organizations, such as the Safety Net Project, to conduct surveys of participants in each Center. Job Center staff members are an integral part of this process as they can provide insight on current processes and challenges. An annual survey would serve as an important benchmark by which to measure HRA's progress.

Furthermore, a larger survey conducted in each center would allow for center-specific data whereby centers could be compared and the strengths and weaknesses of each center identified. The data would then be used to develop recommendations that incorporate input from both customers and staff.

three: communication

a. Require each Job Center to adequately staff their general reception line

Ninety-two percent of respondents reported that they had called their center to talk to a worker; however, eighty-six percent reported that their call was rarely or never answered. Job Centers should ensure that calls to their general reception line are answered or returned within 24 hours. This is crucial when customers call to re-schedule appointments, get information about general requirements, or ask questions about their case.

b. Give Job Center staff dedicated time to return voicemails from their clients

c. Make HRA's internal telephone system audits available to the public

d. Create an online portal for public assistance applicants and recipients

The portal would allow recipients to submit documents, check upcoming appointments,

view any pending case changes or closings, and ask basic questions of an online representative. Recipients and applicants could print a receipt and tracking number for any documents submitted online. This will help reduce wait times at centers as well as the number of phone calls to be returned.

four: wait times

- a. Provide the public with information on the average time customers spend waiting before they are seen by an HRA worker**

HRA should publish information on the average constituent wait times at each Job Center in order to foster accountability measures.

- b. Ensure that recipients who have a scheduled appointment are seen at their scheduled appointment time**
- c. Limit wait times for walk-ins to 60 minutes**
- d. Ensure adequate staffing levels at Job Centers**

As noted earlier, the Mayor's Preliminary FY 2015 Budget proposes cutting 361 Job Center Staff. These positions should be restored. HRA can ill-afford to cut back on staffing when wait times exceed three hours and workers cite lack of staff as a primary concern.

five: oversight

- a. Enforce current policies related to scanning and indexing of documents**

HRA's current policy indicates that all "documents must be scanned and indexed on the same day." The survey results indicate that current procedures are inconsistently implemented and often result in lost documentation. We recommend that documents be scanned and indexed while the recipient is present so that the recipient can confirm that the documents have been correctly entered into the system.

- b. Enforce the current policy of providing recipients with a receipt for all documents**

As mandated by HRA, same-day receipts must be dispensed whenever recipients provide workers with docu-

ments. The receipt should indicate the number and type of documents provided, the name and contact information of the worker who will be processing the documents, and a projected date by which the documents will be processed.

c. Train staff in existing policies regarding domestic violence to ensure that all survivors are referred to a Domestic Violence Liaison (DVL)

Ensure that each center has a DVL and that all workers screen for domestic violence at application and all face-to-face recertifications.

d. Ensure that each center has adequate interpretation services and that all Limited English Speakers receive interpretation services

e. Publicize and increase access to reasonable accommodations

Advertise the opportunity to request a reasonable accommodation clearly in each center waiting room and encourage workers to refer customers to

Supervisors and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Liaisons.

f. Establish a Help Desk in each Job Center staffed by legal services organizations where recipients can get information about public assistance

Help desks currently exist in many offices, including the Fair Hearing Office, Housing Court, and Family Court. Survey respondents and committee members suggested that access to an informed, independent, third-party at the Job Centers would provide an immeasurable system of support.

A 2008 report by the Brennan Center concurred with this opinion, finding that help desks in HRA Job Centers could significantly improve the benefits system, improve the accuracy of HRA determination, and help needy New Yorkers. These help desks would provide applicants and recipients with information on public assistance issues and may also provide referrals for other common legal issues that recipients may have, such as housing court referrals or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) referrals.

conclusion

OUR RESEARCH SEEKS to draw attention to the treatment HRA Job Center customers endure. This report illustrates both the scope and pervasive nature of the problem as well as the concrete steps that HRA must take to begin to address it.

For New Yorkers in need, these changes are urgently required. Low income individuals and families face dire consequences when the safety net fails to properly function. Barriers securing and maintaining benefits may mean hunger, hospitalization, and homelessness. A strong safety net is not only a moral imperative it is also good economic policy for New York City, especially during a time of continued high unemployment. Research shows that an effective safety net helps government avoid expensive payments such as emergency room services and homeless shelter costs.^{xxx} Additionally, effective safety net programs produce positive economic benefits by increas-

ing local spending in the community, lifting families out of severe poverty, and helping low-income children to move into the middle class.^{xxxi}

Significantly, HRA has the authority to make many immediate changes that would dramatically improve customer experiences at Job Centers. During a February 2014 press conference, at which Steven Banks was announced as the new HRA Commissioner, Mr. Banks acknowledged the current realities of the agency: “It’s there to be a helping hand and it should be a helping hand. Unfortunately, over the years, it hasn’t been a helping hand for people that desperately need help...[I want] to make sure that the agency fulfills the mission that it has.”^{xxxii}

If Mr. Banks truly wants the agency to be a helping hand, he must start by transforming Job Centers into offices that effectively and compassionately serve New Yorkers in need.

endnotes

ⁱ In this report, “Public Assistance” refers to cash assistance primarily used for shelter and basic necessities. This differs from SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps).

ⁱⁱ “Public Assistance and Social Welfare: Home Relief,” *Lower East Side Tenement Museum*, 2005, http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/social_relief.htm#four.

ⁱⁱⁱ N.Y. Const. Art. XVII, § 1.

^{iv} Quoted in *Ibid.*, 158.

^v Richard Cloward and Frances F. Piven, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*. (New York: Vintage, 1993), 151.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 157.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 160.

^{viii} Quoted in Rebecca L. Scharf, Barry Bassis, Lorraine Doran, Benjamin DeWitt Duke, Donald Friedman, Matthew Schneider, “The Wages of Welfare Reform: A Report on New York City’s Job Centers,” *Scholarly Works*, Paper 587 (1999): 472-492, url: <http://scholars.law.unlv.edu/facpub/587/>.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, “Barriers to Benefits: A Survey of Clients at the New York City Human Resources Administration Job Centers,” November 2008.

^{xi} John Aidan Byrn, “What About NYC? City Still Holds High Unemployment Rates,” *New York Post*. February 22, 2014, url: <http://nypost.com/2014/02/22/what-about-nyc-city-still-holds-high-unemployment-rates/>.

^{xii} Poverty is defined here as not having sufficient money to cover the most basic food, housing and medical needs.

^{xiii} Christopher Wimer, Irwin Garfinkel, Madeleine Gelblum, Narayani Lasala, Stephanie Phillips, Yajuan Si, Julien Teitler, Jane Waldfogel. “Poverty Tracker — Monitoring Poverty and Well-Being in NYC, Report 1.” (New York, NY: Columbia Population Research

Center and Robin Hood, 2014). url:

http://www.capitalnewyork.com/sites/default/files/PovertyTracker_Spring14.pdf.

^{xiv} “HRA Facts: February 2014,” *New York City Human Resources Administration*, http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/facts/hra_facts/hrafacts_2014/hra_facts_2014_02.pdf; and “Cash Assistance Recipients in NYC 1955 - 2010,” *New York City Human Resources Administration*. Accessed June 2, 2010, http://web.archive.org/web/20100602023945/http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/total_pann.pdf.

^{xv} The number of SNAP recipients in NYC rose from 1,096,107 to 1,821,535 during this period. See “Temporary and Disability Assistance Statistics: January 2007,” *Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance*, <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/caseload/2007/2007-01-stats.pdf>; and “Temporary and Disability Assistance Statistics: January 2014,” *Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance*, <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/caseload/2014/2014-01-stats.pdf>.

^{xvi} Medicaid enrollees increased from 2,719,730 in Jan 2007 to 3,038,658 in Jan 2014. See “Number of Medicaid Eligibles by Category of Eligibility by Social Service District – January 2007,” *New York State Department of Health*, http://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/health_care/medicaid/eligible_expenditures/el2007/2007-01_eligibles.htm; and “HRA Administered Medicaid Enrollees 2010-2014,” *New York City Human Resources Administration*, 2014, http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/facts/charts/hra_admin_med_enrollee.pdf.

^{xvii} “HRA Facts: February 2014,” *New York City Human Resources Administration*, http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/facts/hra_facts/hrafacts_2014/hra_facts_2014_02.pdf.

^{xviii} “FAQ: General Public/Clients,” *New York City Human Resources Administration*, http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/contact/faq_general_en.shtml

^{xix} Human Resources Administration, “Policy Bulletin #10-119-OPE,” December 1, 2010, 2.

^{xx} Human Resources Administration, “Policy Bulletin #07-112-OPE,” August 30, 2007, 2; and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, “Informational Letter #02 INF 33,” November 2002, 2.

^{xxi} Human Resources Administration, “Policy Bulletin #10-12-OPE,” February 16, 2010.

^{xxii} Human Resources Administration, “Policy Directive #10-08-ELI,” February 9, 2010.

^{xxiii} Human Resources Administration, “Policy Directive #12-30-OPE,” October 18, 2012.

^{xxiv} This response likely underestimates the actual percentage as the word disability is often commonly understood to include physical, but not necessarily mental, disabilities.

^{xxv} Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, “Paper(less) Jam: a survey of New York City Human Resources Administration Eligibility Specialists,” March 2009.

^{xxvi} “Departmental Estimates: The City of New York Fiscal Year 2015,” *Office of Management and Budget*, February 12, 2014, http://www.nyc.gov/html/omb/downloads/pdf/de2_14.pdf.

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} Avraham Schmeidler, letter to Ian F. Feldman, “Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) Request,” December 4, 2013.

^{xxix} “From Critic to the Man in Charge,” *WNYC: The Brian Lehrer Show*, Radio Interview, April 14, 2014, <http://www.wnyc.org/story/critic-man-charge/>.

^{xxx} Sarah Ayres, “The Safety Net is Good Economic Policy,” *Center for American Progress*, March 31, 2014, url: <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/RyanBudgetAyresStandard.pdf>

^{xxxi} Ibid.

^{xxxii} “With Three Appointments, Mayor de Blasio Builds Out Leadership Team Dedicated To Expanding Opportunity For More New Yorkers,” *City of New York*, video, February 28, 2014, <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/071-14/with-three-appointments-mayor-de-blasio-builds-out-leadership-team-dedicated-expanding#/0>