

Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs
June 21, 2021

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Monday, June 21, 2021
1:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.

RESOLUTIONS: 210128, 210372

1 - - -

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Good
3 afternoon. My name is Councilmember
4 Derek Green. We're about to call this
5 Committee to order. This is the
6 Committee on People with Disabilities
7 and Special Needs for today Monday, June
8 21, 2021.

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

18 Instructions for how the public
19 may view and offer public testimony at
20 public hearings of Council are included
21 in the public hearing notices that are
22 published in the Daily News, the
23 Philadelphia Inquirer and Legal
24 Intelligencer prior to the hearing and
25 can also be found on PHLCouncil.com. I

1 note that the hour has come.

2 Mr. Iannuzzi, will you please
3 call the roll to take attendance.
4 Members that are in attendance, please
5 indicate that you are present when your
6 name is called. Also, say a few brief
7 words when responding so that your image
8 can be displayed through Microsoft Teams
9 on screen when you speak.

10 THE CLERK: Councilmember Cindy
11 Bass.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
13 afternoon. I am present. Thank you
14 very much.

15 THE CLERK: Councilmember
16 Kendra Brooks.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good
18 afternoon. I am present.

19 THE CLERK: Councilmember Jamie
20 Gauthier.

21 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Good
22 afternoon. Present.

23 THE CLERK: Councilmember
24 Katherine Gilmore Richardson.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair
2 and colleagues. I'm present.

3 THE CLERK: And, Chair Derek
4 Green.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I am
6 present. Thank you, Mr. Iannuzzi.

7 A quorum of this Committee is
8 present and this hearing is now called
9 to order. As I said earlier, this is
10 the public hearing of the Committee on
11 People with Disabilities and Special
12 Needs regarding two resolutions, Nos.
13 210128 and 210372.

14 Mr. Iannuzzi, will you please
15 read the titles of the resolutions.

16 THE CLERK: Resolution No.
17 210128, resolution authorizing the
18 Committee on People with Disabilities
19 and Special Needs to hold hearings
20 regarding services for people with
21 disabilities in general compliance with
22 and enforcement of the Americans with
23 Disabilities Act.

24 Resolution No. 210372,
25 resolution authorizing the Committee on

1 People with Disabilities and Special
2 Needs to hold hearings regarding the
3 Community Autism Peer Specialist
4 program, also known as CAPS.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
6 Mr. Iannuzzi.

7 Before we begin to hear
8 testimony from the witnesses we have for
9 today, everyone who has been invited to
10 the meeting to testify should be aware
11 that this public hearing is being
12 recorded. Because this hearing is
13 public, participants and viewers have no
14 reasonable expectation of privacy. By
15 continuing to be in the meeting, you are
16 consenting to being recorded.

17 Additionally, prior to
18 recognizing Members for the questions or
19 comments they have for witnesses, I will
20 note for the record at this time that we
21 will use the chat feature available in
22 Microsoft Teams to allow Members to
23 signify that they wish to be recognized.
24 In order to comply with the Sunshine
25 Act, the chat feature must only be used

1 for this purpose.

2 Today's hearing will be
3 actually folks on two issues. The first
4 matter that is before us is regarding
5 Resolution 210372. That is the
6 Community Autism Peer Specialist
7 program, and we'll hear about the
8 significant progress that that program
9 has made since its inception, providing
10 ability for more seasoned individuals
11 who are on the autism spectrum to be
12 able to become employed to provide
13 mentorship and guidance for younger
14 people on the autism spectrum, and the
15 benefits of this program has provided
16 and is opportunities for expansion to
17 grow.

18 The second matter that we'll
19 discuss this morning is a continuation
20 of hearings that we've had in this
21 Committee last year regarding the
22 Americans with Disabilities Act. In
23 particular, we're going to focus on
24 issues as it pertains to the Carousel
25 House as well as the City's compliance

1 in reference to facilities being ADA
2 complaint within Parks & Recreation. So
3 we will hear testimony on these two
4 matters in that order.

5 We have a number of people that
6 are scheduled to testify this afternoon,
7 so please bear with us as we are trying
8 to work through all of the conversation
9 and important public comment that we're
10 going to have to have this afternoon.

11 Please make sure that if you
12 are not speaking because we do have a
13 number of people to testify, make sure
14 that your microphone is on mute so that
15 way we can give the full attention and
16 our full participation to those who are
17 speaking. With that, I believe we are
18 ready to begin this hearing.

19 Mr. Iannuzzi, will you please
20 call the first panel of witnesses we
21 have to testify this afternoon.

22 THE CLERK: Dr. Faith
23 Dyson-Washington, CEO of Community
24 Behavioral Health, Dr. Katy Kaplan, CBH
25 Director of Grants and Innovations at

1 DBHIDS and Dr. Lindsay Shea, Director of
2 Policy and Analytics Center at A.J.
3 Drexel Autism Institute.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: All right.
5 And we will proceed in that order.

6 Dr. Faith Dyson-Washington, if
7 you can state your name for the record
8 and then proceed with your testimony.

9 DR. DYSON-WASHINGTON: Thank
10 you. Dr. Faith Dyson-Washington. Good
11 morning, Chairman Green and Committee
12 members. I won't be able to stay for
13 the entire hearing today, but thank you
14 for the opportunity to testify at
15 today's hearing about the Community
16 Autism Peer Specialist program, also
17 affectionately known as CAPS. I'm the
18 Chief Executive Officer of Community
19 Behavioral Health, a division of the
20 Department of Behavioral Health and
21 Intellectual Disabilities Services.

22 I'm here to share our
23 commitment to both partnerships with
24 City Council and others that have
25 resulted in innovations like the CAPS

1 program. I know our members benefit
2 significantly when we work
3 collaboratively to improve their access
4 to high quality behavioral health
5 services and supports. While I've only
6 been at CBH since October 2020, it feels
7 longer, but just October 2020, I'm a
8 lifelong Philadelphian and I've worked
9 as a clinical psychologist here in the
10 City with adults and children. And as
11 most of us know, Philadelphia is
12 certainly a leader in health care and
13 has some of the best hospitals and
14 academic institutions in the country.

15 Our behavioral health provider
16 network is robust as well. It's driven
17 by many talented and committed
18 individuals. Philadelphia's also a
19 leader in developing cutting edge
20 treatments, in taking innovative
21 approaches to expanding our array of
22 services. For young adults and adults
23 on the autism spectrum, we know that
24 this is greatly needed. To date, much
25 of the emphasis within the field has

1 understandably been focused on
2 diagnosing autism as well as developing
3 treatments and programs for children,
4 but we know that we spend most of our
5 time as adults. And so, it's crucial
6 that we create services for adults and
7 individuals on the spectrum and their
8 families that really support them over
9 their lifespan. CBH and DBHIDS is
10 committed to this work.

11 In my short time at CBH, I have
12 come to know the Philadelphia Autism
13 Project well. This is a partnership
14 between City Council, DBHIDS which
15 actually started under Councilmember
16 At-Large Dennis O'Brien, and we're
17 thankful for his commitment, and
18 continues under Chairperson Green under
19 his leadership and we're thankful for
20 that as well.

21 Since 2014, the Philadelphia
22 Autism Project and partnership with many
23 others, Eastern Region Autism Services,
24 Education, Resources and Training,
25 ASERT, that's a mouthful, Drexel

1 University, DBHIDS and CBH have followed
2 through on many of the 119 initiatives
3 identified by the 100-plus stakeholders
4 as necessary for improving autism
5 services and supports in Philadelphia.
6 So that's work that should be commended.

7 I'm always impressed during our
8 quarterly progress meetings to hear
9 about the array of projects underway
10 from Parks & Recreation to trainings
11 with the Philadelphia Police Department
12 to our annual Philadelphia Autism
13 Project Conference. There was a
14 development of an autism family
15 navigator service, and of course last
16 but not least, CAPS and much more.

17 I want to thank everyone for
18 your partnership and want to confirm our
19 commitment to work together. I'm
20 confident that CAPS is just one of many
21 exciting innovations for families
22 impacted by autism and behavioral
23 health, and I believe it can be a
24 national model that highlights
25 behavioral health innovation. Thank you

1 again for the opportunity to speak
2 today.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
4 Dr. Washington.

5 We will now proceed to our next
6 witness.

7 DR. KAPLAN: Katy Kaplan. Good
8 afternoon, Chairperson Green and members
9 of the Committee on People With
10 Disabilities and Special Needs. Thank
11 you for the opportunity to participate
12 in today's hearing on the CAPS program.
13 My name is Dr. Katy Kaplan, and I'm the
14 Director of Grants and Innovations at
15 Community Behavioral Health, a division
16 of the Department of Behavioral Health
17 and Intellectual Disability Services.

18 In my role at CBH, I work to
19 identify and support the development of
20 innovative programs in autism and
21 behavioral health. This includes
22 working closely with the Philadelphia
23 Autism Project. CAPS is a wonderful
24 example of innovation, which as you will
25 hear shortly is a much-needed resource

1 in our continuum of services for young
2 adults and adults on the autism
3 spectrum.

4 Today I just want to share the
5 foundational information about the
6 Community Autism Peer Specialist
7 program. CAPS was modeled after the
8 certified peer specialist service in
9 mental health, which is now available
10 and Medicaid reimbursable in almost
11 every state in the country. Individuals
12 on the autism spectrum who are at least
13 18 years of age and meet the education
14 and employment criteria can apply to
15 become a CAPS. The criteria includes
16 having a high school diploma or GED and
17 at least 12 months of successful full or
18 part-time paid or voluntary work
19 experience or they've obtained at least
20 24 credit hours of post-secondary
21 education.

22 Those selected for the CAPS
23 training program complete a 75-hour
24 training that combines a mixture of
25 classroom instruction, self-paced

1 homework and four hours of job
2 shadowing, a mobile CPS or a CAPS in the
3 field. CAPS support individuals they
4 work with to increase personal wellness,
5 independence, enhance community
6 participation. CAPS provides support to
7 CBH members with autism who are 14 years
8 of age or older, and they work to
9 identify goals and engage in activities
10 that help participants achieve these
11 goals. Navigating personal
12 relationships, using public
13 transportation, going to school, working
14 and living independently are just some
15 of the examples of the types of goals
16 that CAPS work to support.

17 The idea for the creation of
18 CAPS came from self-advocates in autism
19 who wanted access to peer services
20 designed for individuals on the
21 spectrum. The Philadelphia Autism
22 Project started by former Councilmember
23 Dennis O'Brien who created the space for
24 CAPS to come to life. I want to thank
25 Councilmember Green for his continued

1 leadership of the Philadelphia Autism
2 Project. CAPS is a wonderful example of
3 what happens when various leaders in
4 local and state governments come
5 together as partners in innovation.

6 The CAPS service successfully
7 launched in 2019 and it continues to
8 thrive thanks to many people and
9 organizations, including the City of
10 Philadelphia's Department of Behavioral
11 and Intellectual Disability Services,
12 Community Behavioral Health, City
13 Council, the PA Office of Mental Health
14 and Substance Abuse Services, the Office
15 of Developmental Programs, Drexel
16 University, mental health partnerships,
17 the Temple University Collaborative on
18 Community Inclusion, and of course
19 members of our Steering and Advisory
20 committees.

21 Most importantly, CAPS is off
22 to a successful start thanks to the 21
23 CAPS graduates who have helped us refine
24 the training program, launch the service
25 and mental health partnerships, and

1 expand the opportunities available to
2 future CAPS through their leadership and
3 other employment opportunities. CAPS
4 creates a much-needed employment
5 opportunity for those on the spectrum,
6 while also offering a greatly needed
7 service designed specifically for young
8 adults and adults with autism.

9 Now that CAPS is Medicaid
10 reimbursable, sustainability is a
11 reality and other counties will look to
12 follow in Philadelphia's footsteps.
13 CAPS is just the beginning of what we
14 can do to realize the vision of the
15 Philadelphia Autism Project. With
16 ongoing support from City Council,
17 DBHIDS and our partners, Philadelphia
18 will be the best city within which to
19 live for individuals on the spectrum and
20 their families. Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
22 Dr. Kaplan.

23 And we'll have our last doctor,
24 Dr. Shea, with your testimony. Please
25 state your name for the record and then

1 proceed.

2 DR. SHEA: Lindsay Shea. Thank
3 you for the opportunity to be here
4 today. I'm here in my role as an
5 Associate Professor at A.J. Drexel
6 Autism Institute which is based at
7 Drexel University, and I've worked on
8 autism specific research studies and
9 community programs based in Philadelphia
10 and Pennsylvania for 17 years.

11 Generating new service models
12 for the growing number of adolescents on
13 the autism spectrum who are aging into
14 adulthood has been a repeated called
15 action issued from national and local
16 advocacy groups and the research
17 community as well. The Interagency
18 Autism Coordinating Committee is a
19 Federal Advisory Committee charged with
20 coordinating federal activities focused
21 on autism and advising the Secretary of
22 Health and Human Services about autism
23 issues.

24 The latest iteration of the
25 IACC strategic plan includes an emphasis

1 on the need for services for adults and
2 adolescents on the autism spectrum. The
3 Pennsylvania Autism Census, which was
4 conducted in 2014 and commissioned by
5 the Pennsylvania Department of Human
6 Services Bureau of Supports for Autism
7 and Special Populations found that of
8 the 187,000 Pennsylvanians, including
9 more than 20,000 Philadelphians on the
10 autism spectrum based on CDC estimates,
11 that less than 1 in 3 were receiving
12 public services or supports across
13 multiple systems. It's likely that this
14 lack of service options impacts adults
15 on the autism spectrum
16 disproportionately since research has
17 demonstrated that employment outcomes,
18 which might link this group to private
19 insurance, are poor.

20 Pennsylvania has been a leader
21 in establishing quality programs for
22 adults in the autism spectrum, including
23 the Adult Autism Waiver and the Adult
24 Community Autism Program. However,
25 reports on service needs remain here in

1 Philadelphia as well as across
2 Pennsylvania, and that reflects trends
3 that are observed at the national and
4 international levels as well. The Life
5 Course Outcomes Research Program at the
6 A.J. Drexel Autism Institute generates
7 the national autism indicator reports,
8 which use population level data to
9 identify and describe outcomes across
10 the life course for people on the autism
11 spectrum, their families and their
12 communities. Our national data continue
13 to reflect that the transition from
14 pediatric to adult health care is
15 especially challenging for autistic
16 youth and that service models that can
17 bridge this gap to support their needs
18 during this critical time are needed
19 now.

20 Reports on indicators from
21 employment to family needs parallel this
22 trend. Stakeholders who participated in
23 the community-driven prioritization
24 process for the Philadelphia Autism
25 Project initiatives issued a clear call

1 to action for supporting individuals
2 across the lifespan as they age beyond
3 childhood. It's been rewarding to
4 participate in the realization of this
5 initiative focused on creating the peer
6 support program.

7 Philadelphia has been dubbed in
8 the past the hotbed of autism research,
9 and we're fortunate to have many
10 thriving initiatives here in our City.
11 Continuing to catalyze this research to
12 support communities and to focus on
13 adolescents and adults for a dire need
14 of new service options to support them
15 should be a top priority that we tackle
16 together. I look forward to continuing
17 this work. Thank you for this
18 opportunity and your time.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
20 for your testimony. I want to thank all
21 of the witnesses for your testimony this
22 morning.

23 In particular, I wanted to get
24 some additional perspective on this new
25 authorization at the state level for the

1 Community Peer Specialist program and
2 get some real understanding of what that
3 will mean for the growth of the program
4 going forward. Any of the witnesses can
5 testify regarding that question.

6 DR. KAPLAN: Sure. Is
7 Dr. Washington still on?

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Let me
9 check. I know she said she wouldn't be
10 able to stay with us. I don't see her
11 still listed here as an attendee. Let
12 me check -- yes, that's correct. I do
13 believe she may have left because she
14 did state during her testimony that she
15 had some other engagements. So either
16 Drs. Kaplan or Shea can speak to that
17 issue.

18 DR. KAPLAN: So right now CAPS
19 is approved as a supplemental service in
20 Medicaid, which means it's approved for
21 Community Behavioral Health through the
22 provider mental health partnership. So
23 right now it's a service that's
24 available to individuals that are
25 Medicaid-eligible in Philadelphia

1 County, which would have Community
2 Behavioral Health as the behavioral
3 health insurer.

4 Our efforts were to replicate
5 the service as closely as we could to
6 what they did in mental health, with the
7 idea that we wanted to make it very
8 easily to become a Medicaid-reimbursable
9 service. So in terms of how we created
10 the requirements of what you need to do
11 to become a CAPS, that you have to have
12 a high school diploma or GED, that you
13 have to have a certain work, volunteer
14 educational experience, that you have to
15 complete a 75-hour training, so they are
16 all things that we put in place very
17 intentionally so that we align with the
18 state plan CPS service in mental health.

19 Of course, our hope is that
20 we're setting the stage for other
21 counties in Philadelphia to replicate
22 what we did and are very eager -- in
23 fact, former Acting Deputy Val Bakari
24 asked us to support other counties that
25 were interested in expanding CAPS. That

1 was a charge that she gave us when we
2 continued the project through
3 reinvestment funding, which kind of
4 functions almost like grant funding, and
5 how we piloted the service with mental
6 health partnerships. But we are already
7 receiving interest from other states, so
8 Massachusetts, New York, Florida.

9 Providers that operate in multiple
10 states have expressed interest in
11 replicating the CAPS service. And I
12 think as Dr. Shea mentioned, rates of
13 employment for adults on autism spectrum
14 are grim, even when you compare them to
15 other peers with disabilities.

16 So not only does CAPS create an
17 employment opportunity for individuals
18 on the spectrum where we know that there
19 is a great deal of struggle, but it also
20 creates a much-needed service that is
21 designed specifically for people on the
22 spectrum.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And based on
24 the approval, how do you see the CAPS
25 program growing over the next couple of

1 years in reference to those who can
2 participate?

3 DR. KAPLAN: I think a lot of
4 what we have to do and I know Mental
5 Health Partnerships has been working in
6 partnership with DBHIDS and even our
7 partners at Drexel is to raise
8 awareness. So in the autism community,
9 the notion of a peer-to-peer delivered
10 service to Medicaid is certainly newer,
11 and the language in autism is often
12 self-advocate. That's what people are
13 more familiar with. So right now we are
14 working to educate -- and when I say we,
15 I mean this giant collaborative of a
16 team that we pull together across lots
17 of organizations -- we're working to
18 educate adults with autism, young adults
19 and their family members to understand
20 what the CAPS service is and why it
21 could benefit them.

22 So I think that's going to be
23 crucial for our providers to know that
24 this a new service available, that they
25 can make referrals to Mental Health

1 Partnerships, and to be connecting
2 individuals so that our young adults who
3 are 14 and older are working towards
4 these important life goals around
5 planning for post-secondary education or
6 improving the relationships they have in
7 the community. Ideally, if you get the
8 right supports when you're a teenager,
9 it would lessen the likelihood that you
10 would need crisis services or high
11 acuity care like inpatient stays, but
12 when you are not making friends or
13 you're not going to school or you're
14 sitting at home on your parents' couch
15 because you haven't had any
16 opportunities of the support to get
17 there, it's understandable how some
18 people end up really needing high-end
19 behavioral health services, so this is a
20 proactive approach to preventing high-
21 end behavioral health services and
22 helping people get a meaningful life in
23 the community.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I know there
25 may be some additional questions for

1 this panel from Councilmembers, but I
2 have one last question and then we'll
3 open it up.

4 The City of Philadel -- well,
5 let me strike that. The School District
6 of Philadelphia partners with various
7 institutions like Drexel with Project
8 SEARCH as young people are transitioning
9 out of the education environment. What
10 conversation is occurring with the
11 School District to inform them,
12 especially now with this new approval of
13 the CAPS program and the opportunity to
14 grow and let other young people within
15 the City of Philadelphia who are still
16 attending the City of Philadelphia --
17 I'm sorry, who are still attending
18 school in the School District of
19 Philadelphia with the opportunity to
20 possibly participate in the CAPS program
21 as they end their educational period?

22 DR. KAPLAN: Well, I can say
23 that CBH and DBHIDS of course work
24 really closely hand-in-hand with the
25 School District of Philadelphia, so I

1 know there's conversations that happen
2 as part of a larger continuum of care,
3 IBHS services that individuals on the
4 spectrum receive.

5 I can also say that
6 Philadelphia Autism Project is really a
7 great sort of place that creates these
8 opportunities to share. And so, I know
9 that Michelle Nutini and others from the
10 School District of Philadelphia that
11 focus on autism support services within
12 the District are aware of the CAPS
13 program. They often come and
14 participate in the Philadelphia Autism
15 Project's annual conference. We had the
16 School District of Philadelphia teachers
17 that were on the CAPS Advisory Committee
18 to give us feedback about the curriculum
19 that was developed, about the training
20 program that was developed and to really
21 weigh in alongside with our providers,
22 parents and adults on the spectrum, so I
23 think again going back to we really need
24 to educate, and you're right, the School
25 District is an absolutely crucial

1 partner in raising awareness about this
2 important and needed service. So I
3 think we will continue to do so through
4 those mechanisms.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
6 Dr. Kaplan.

7 I'm not sure if there's any
8 additional commentary from members of
9 this panel regarding any of the
10 questions that have been raised this
11 afternoon.

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Also, are
14 there any questions from members of the
15 Committee for this panel as well?

16 (No response.)

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Seeing none,
18 we will now move on to the next panel.
19 If you can state your name for the
20 record after the full list of panels
21 have been stated by Mr. Iannuzzi, and
22 then we'll proceed with your testimony.

23 THE CLERK: Lauren Flynn, CAPS
24 Director; Alik Koumenis, CAPS
25 Developmental Assistant; and Gregory

1 Bannett, CAPS Autism Peer Specialist,
2 all from Mental Health Partnerships.

3 MS. FLYNN: Lauren Flynn.

4 So --

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. And
6 please state --

7 MS. FLYNN: -- good afternoon
8 and thank you, Councilmember Green.
9 Thank you and the Committee for the
10 opportunity to testify today. My name
11 is Lauren Flynn, and I'm the Director of
12 the Community Autism Peer Specialist
13 program or CAPS at Mental Health
14 Partnerships.

15 Our pilot program launched in
16 September of 2019 with a team of five of
17 the autistic peer specialists who had
18 completed the CAPS training. I started
19 at Mental Health Partnerships as the
20 manager of a mental health peer support
21 program for young adults. And during
22 that time, we received many referrals
23 for young adults who not only had a
24 mental health diagnosis, but were also
25 on the spectrum. And it worked out very

1 well, but sometimes the young adults
2 would say that they wished they had a
3 peer specialist who understood what it
4 was like to be autistic.

5 So when I heard about the CAPS
6 initiative, I jumped at the opportunity
7 to get involved because this was
8 something that was lacking in autism
9 services, an opportunity for autistic
10 individuals to receive support from
11 their peers. And as Katy said, the CAPS
12 program is based on a mental health peer
13 support model. A mental health peer
14 specialist is someone who uses their own
15 recovery experience to support others
16 who are struggling. It's an addition to
17 someone's support team. It's a person
18 who understands firsthand some of the
19 challenges that the participants face.
20 The peer specialist also brings hope.

21 So for the CAPS program, to
22 share this experience is autism, not
23 mental health, and the goal isn't
24 recovery, but to incorporate an overall
25 well-being in the participants' lives.

1 And to that end, community connections
2 are so important. Our staff meet
3 one-on-one with the participants in
4 their home and in their communities, and
5 we also offer small groups both in
6 person and through telehealth.

7 We have worked with over 30
8 individuals age 14 and up, there's no
9 age cap on the program, since the
10 program had launched. And the feedback
11 has been overwhelmingly positive. And
12 our hope is that the CAPS program that
13 started here in Philadelphia will expand
14 throughout the state and beyond, leading
15 the example of the power of a shared
16 lived experience to change lives for
17 autistic individuals, not just as the
18 receivers of service but through the
19 development of a new workforce. So
20 thank you for your time and support to
21 bring CAPS to the autism community.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
23 for your testimony. We will have the
24 next witness who is scheduled to
25 testify.

1 MS. KOUMENIS: Good morning and
2 good afternoon, Chairperson Green and
3 Committee members. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to speak today. My name is
5 Aliko Koumenis and I'm a Certified Peer
6 Specialist, CAPS, and I currently work
7 as the Development Assistant for the
8 program at MHP. I commend the Committee
9 for supporting the novel program for
10 autism like the CAPS that touches so
11 many lives, and I know it has certainly
12 transformed mine.

13 In my story, I was in the
14 behavioral health system for 10 years,
15 bouncing around between providers, being
16 misdiagnosed until a case manager helped
17 me get my diagnosis when I was 26 and
18 that changed my life. However, there
19 were little services available to me. I
20 wish I had a peer specialist back then,
21 and I'm thrilled that this service has
22 been improved and can change this trend.

23 In the CAPS program, I can see
24 the transformative power of peer support
25 every day. We tell each other that

1 having a different brain is not a
2 mistake and learning to understand and
3 communicate our wants and needs in a way
4 that is meant with respect. The peer
5 support principle of reciprocity and
6 mutuality is key, and I can see that our
7 participants are able to offer help to
8 one another and they can see that it's
9 also supporting us as CAPS, and this
10 creates a possibility for us to see
11 ourselves as valuable contributors to
12 our community.

13 This program is an example of a
14 systemic transformation to inclusion and
15 equity, which means that we don't just
16 need band-aid solutions. We need
17 solutions that actually address the
18 sources of our challenges which can
19 often stem from the stigma and trauma
20 inflicted by segregated systems, lack of
21 public awareness, lack of training and
22 support for providers, for individuals
23 and for families. So for this reason,
24 I'm really happy to see that the
25 promises of the Philly Autism Project

1 are coming true.

2 In fact, the first time I
3 learned the term self-advocacy was at
4 the Philadelphia Autism Project
5 conference, which was made free to
6 autistic individuals and their family
7 members. I also look forward to seeing
8 how much further we can go by continuing
9 to bring all the stakeholders to the
10 table and including autism people as
11 whole partners in the process. And this
12 is what I experienced in the creation of
13 CAPS. So I really thank everybody for
14 their time, and I'm excited to see how
15 much further we can go.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. The
17 next witness, I wasn't sure if you're
18 ready to begin your testimony, which is
19 Mr. Bannett. Gregory Bannett.

20 MR. BANNETT: Okay. Thank you,
21 Chairman Green and the Committee. So I
22 am Gregory Bannett, a Community Autism
23 Peer Specialist, working for Mental
24 Health Partnerships. So I am 28 and on
25 the autism spectrum. So I have

1 struggled to maintain meaningful work in
2 many fields, including engineering which
3 is where I got my college degree
4 originally. I and many others on the
5 autism spectrum have been laid off a lot
6 and we're rarely promoted, rarely.

7 Plus I struggle maintaining
8 social relationships. So now my job as
9 a CAPS autism peer specialist, it's
10 really the first job where I feel both
11 competent and impactful in my work. I
12 feel supported by my supervisor and my
13 CAPS coworkers which is so important,
14 you don't always get that. But it's by
15 far the most satisfying job I've ever
16 had. And CAPS does provide sustainable
17 employment for adults on the autism
18 spectrum who have been rejected by both
19 employers in society, much like I once
20 felt.

21 Now, the autistic participants
22 that I help make get many opportunities
23 that they can't get elsewhere from our
24 program. They will be listening to
25 them. We help them identify what they

1 want in life. Many of them don't even
2 know what goals are or that it actually
3 applies to them. So far we have just
4 helped people find volunteer and job
5 opportunities, school success,
6 developing some self-advocacy skills,
7 making them feel comfortable in the
8 community and even just knowing the
9 family's better, so we're creating a lot
10 of ways for participants to feel like a
11 whole person.

12 And as mentioned, we do offer
13 social groups and wellness support. And
14 we want to get more contact with
15 community resources, including the
16 schools and employment resources so that
17 others can help understand, you know,
18 what autistic people go through and, you
19 know, so they can understand better. In
20 the end, our participants want
21 meaningful and sustainable lives, and
22 this is sort of the service that really
23 should be accessible regardless of the
24 class, culture, neighborhood and ability
25 level. Well, thank you for letting me

1 talk.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
3 Mr. Bannett. I just have a quick
4 question.

5 And I would be remiss that
6 Dr. Faith Washington did express her
7 reservation that she would not be able
8 to continue to stay in the hearing due
9 to another appointment. I definitely
10 want to thank Community Behavioral
11 Health as well as Mental Health
12 Partnerships for your collaboration,
13 enabling the CAPS program to get to this
14 level and now to a level that's
15 expanding.

16 I really would like to hear
17 from both Aliko and Greg who both
18 testified in reference to your own
19 experiences. Can you provide some more
20 context from the perspective of being
21 someone who's on the spectrum? And
22 Aliko, you kind of talked about this a
23 little bit in your testimony, the real
24 benefit wishing that if you had someone
25 that could have been a CAPS specialist

1 when you were younger, but also what
2 type -- and, Greg, you also talked about
3 this as well, what type of pride that
4 you feel in getting self-advocacy
5 yourself and helping younger people
6 become self-advocates for themselves as
7 well.

8 And if you can kind of talk
9 about that perspective, because that's
10 something that we don't always focus on
11 which we should, is that how this
12 program really helps to empower
13 individuals who have a learning
14 difference like autism that is going to
15 make them an even more involved person
16 in our society.

17 MR. BANNETT: I suppose I'll go
18 first. I mean, for me I mentioned the
19 employment issues. Every single job
20 I've ever had, like sometimes it was
21 just my own, like, my slow learning,
22 because sometimes with autism we just
23 process things differently. So there's
24 really, like, sometimes you just need a
25 little clear structure of what's

1 expected of you. Or even another
2 example, I remember my first engineering
3 job I had and all I was doing was mostly
4 drafting.

5 But I remember we had one
6 person who was an engineer just a few
7 years older than I was, who was willing
8 to be a mentor. And I just remember I
9 just felt like a total failure, like I
10 didn't know what I was doing. Every job
11 took so long for me to understand. I
12 just dismissed him outright. I just
13 didn't feel like I was worthy of being
14 helped.

15 Even if we just help people on
16 the spectrum just realize, look,
17 everybody learns differently or
18 sometimes it takes a little longer, just
19 think about it and then who knows, maybe
20 six months later, because it was
21 probably two years later when that guy
22 left the company and I was like, oh,
23 that guy could have probably helped me.
24 Now, we could have saved it for a couple
25 of months or half a year or something.

1 That could make a big difference as far
2 as, you know, because that's an example
3 of a resource. We want to help make
4 connections of organizations, like
5 WorkReady or many of these organizations
6 that help employment or social skills or
7 whatever.

8 So, yeah, that's what I think
9 of it, just like if you had someone to
10 help you even just kind of think about
11 making that, reaching out, yeah, that's
12 a big difference. That's one thing I
13 think of, like, we just kind of -- I
14 don't now, it just takes us longer. I
15 think if you just cut the time in half,
16 instead of four years, two years or
17 instead a year, you get there six
18 months, it really makes a big difference
19 as far as development and confidence.

20 MS. KOUMENIS: I'm not sure if
21 there's still time to address your
22 question, Councilmember Green.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If you can
24 just touch on it very quickly and then
25 we'll move to the next panel.

1 MS. KOUMENIS: Yeah, I agree
2 with everything Greg said. I remember,
3 you know, not having a diagnosis and not
4 being acquainted with anything regarding
5 self-advocacy and really destroyed my
6 mental health, which was a big barrier
7 for me as well as not knowing that there
8 were things like accommodations. So the
9 Certified Peer Specialist program in
10 mental health is not just a service.

11 In the past 10 or 12 years that
12 it's been in Philadelphia and expanding,
13 it's also about systems transformation
14 and advocacy, and that's something that
15 it did for me. After the training
16 program, I was even able to go back and
17 earn my degree because it's just this
18 idea of not looking at myself as a
19 failure. That was just the biggest
20 damage that I had. And the only thing
21 that really cured that was peer support.
22 Having other people who are similar to
23 using you saying like Greg said, we're
24 worthy, we're worthy of being here. And
25 having being different does not mean

1 that we're less.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, thank
3 you both for your testimony.

4 I'm not sure if any members of
5 Council have any questions for this
6 panel. If you do, please signify in the
7 chat feature. If not, we will move on
8 to the next panel.

9 (No response.)

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And seeing
11 none, thank you all for your testimony
12 regarding the CAPS program.

13 Mr. Iannuzzi, if you can read
14 the names of the next witnesses for
15 Panel 3. After all the names are read,
16 we will start with the first person.
17 Please state your name for the record
18 and then proceed with your testimony.

19 THE CLERK: Angel Rios, CAPS
20 participant at CBH and Jeffrey Clouden,
21 also a CAPS participant at CBH.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN:
23 Mr. Iannuzzi, I think we also have Panel
24 3, which is Luke Tomczuk and Khyllil
25 Robinson. I know I did see Khyllil

1 signed in.

2 THE CLERK: Apologies,
3 Mr. Chair. I inadvertently skipped a
4 panel, yes.

5 Luke Tomczuk is Managing Member
6 at GG CPA Services and Khyllil Robinson
7 is CEO at COFCO. Apologies.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. While
9 don't we merge this panel together, so
10 why don't we go with Luke, Khyllil, Angel
11 and Jeffrey in that order.

12 MR. TOMCZUK: Hi, everyone.
13 Thank you, Chairman Green, for having me
14 today. So my name is Luke Tomczuk, and
15 I am a Community Officer and Peer
16 Specialist with Temple University as
17 well as Community Behavioral Health. So
18 once again, thank you for the
19 opportunity to participate in today's
20 hearing on the Community Autism Peer
21 Specialist program.

22 So at Temple, my primary
23 project involves teaching autistic
24 individuals across Philadelphia, the
25 skills they need in order to take public

1 transportation by themselves. Today I
2 would like to share a few short stories
3 about encounters I have had in both my
4 roles and the difference it made in
5 their lives. One participant had an
6 interest in sword fighting, and there
7 was a place called Battlesword located
8 in East Falls. He traveled there before
9 but never on his own.

10 Once he found out through one
11 of our travel training interventions
12 that taking SEPTA from his house to
13 Battlesword was a possibility, you could
14 tell that his life was changed. The joy
15 on his face when we went there for the
16 first time was indescribable.

17 This past spring I had another
18 participant who has unfortunately went
19 through some difficult social
20 circumstances in her life. One of those
21 instances came during a travel training
22 intervention when an individual who was
23 known for bullying here rode past us on
24 a dirt bike. I thought that this event
25 would compromise her ability to travel

1 by train, but she persisted and she
2 continued to the process towards self-
3 travel. Although her scope was limited
4 to traveling in her neighborhood, it was
5 an important step towards greater
6 community integration. More often than
7 not, it comes down to meeting people
8 where they are.

9 Speaking of meeting people
10 where they are, that is exactly what we
11 did with a young man I met at CBH.
12 While I cannot go into the details, this
13 person has suffered a lot as a
14 consequence of gun violence. On
15 September 17, 2020, CBH Member Services
16 set up a meeting with this young man and
17 his mother. The purpose of this meeting
18 was to connect him with resources both
19 inside and outside of CBH, including
20 autism support groups. None of us
21 anticipated what would happen next.

22 By hearing my story, the story
23 of someone who went on to be a CAPS,
24 this person's life has finally changed
25 for the better. Later that day, his mom

1 emailed us to show her appreciation.
2 She stated the following: I feel like
3 this may be a foot forward to him
4 finding his tribe. This statement and
5 this encounter show what CAPS is all
6 about. It is my hope that these stories
7 will show you the powerful impact that
8 peer supporters has had on young
9 autistic adults in our community.

10 In June 2020, our Advisory
11 Board at Temple decided to resume travel
12 training activities that stopped due to
13 COVID. My chief argument for restarting
14 was to shift our focus towards
15 underserved communities in Philadelphia,
16 which are studied to not recruit from us
17 heavily prior to the pandemic.

18 I'm grateful that these
19 individuals, including experts and
20 people with lived experience, agree with
21 my assessment. Without it, the stories
22 you heard today would not have been
23 possible. Today I ask that you,
24 distinguished Councilmembers, make that
25 same commitment and continue your

1 support of the CAPS program. We have
2 seen that CAPS can make a difference in
3 unexpected ways to solve other
4 disability-related issues the City
5 faces. Your support will go a long way
6 towards making these possibilities a
7 reality. Thank you very much.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
9 Mr. Robinson.

10 MR. ROBINSON: Okay. All
11 right. So hello, everyone. Hello. So
12 my name is Khyllil Robinson, and I am a
13 self-advocate for all things autism
14 aware, and would like to share the
15 impact of CAPS and what does it mean for
16 others involved for CAPS.

17 From the beginning, I learned
18 about my autism when I was about 8 or 12
19 years old. And being so, my mother was
20 advised from doctors during my birth
21 that I would not be able to talk. And
22 with that, that it was a birth defect
23 and she felt it was all her fault -- it
24 was an emotional detachment disorder and
25 it was all her fault. And because of

1 that, she didn't tell me. However, it
2 didn't take long to figure out that I
3 was unique and was longing for so much
4 more in the future.

5 At first, I thought I was in
6 school taking regular ed. classes. But
7 when I saw I was in an AS class, I was
8 confused and I didn't know what it was.
9 In fact, she told me later on that it
10 meant autism support, which is confusing
11 for a bit because I've never heard of
12 that term, especially at the tender age
13 of 8.

14 So then she followed up and
15 gave me an analogy which was compared
16 much like being Superman. Like first,
17 when you see Clark Kent, you see he's
18 like a regular person like the others,
19 but when he's out there doing his thing,
20 he just busts the S out of his chest and
21 he becomes something so much more. So I
22 just thought that was really cool. And
23 despite the fact that I started in such
24 a calm home, it impacted me to do so
25 much more, such as drawing, collecting

1 comic books, playing the viola and then
2 eventually doing self-advocacy work.

3 Self-advocacy wasn't something
4 that I could easily get myself into
5 because I couldn't really find myself as
6 a vocal person. I didn't see myself
7 (inaudible), but what made me that
8 person that said so much more for
9 himself and saw that this disability was
10 more much of a disAbility where the A is
11 uppercase, this was that kind of
12 motivation that got me involved in being
13 involved with the Philadelphia Autism
14 Project in 2014, which now to this day I
15 still have the notes.

16 And in there, I spoke up and I
17 talked about my personal experience,
18 which moved me into getting interviewed
19 by NBC10, and it got me involved into
20 being more of a blogger for #ASDNext or
21 whoever mentioned the ASERT
22 collaborative, which I know is a
23 mouthful of words, and opened up the
24 doorway with being involved with CAPS.

25 Now, when I was involved with

1 CAPS, I saw that it couldn't just be
2 like an impact to myself but also like
3 to others on the spectrum. And I felt
4 that I could lay out some of my
5 experiences in motivating others, but I
6 didn't know how this was going to affect
7 myself. So by doing so, I did all of
8 that and expressed myself via drawing,
9 which the fact that I would find out
10 that CAPS wasn't just all knowing a
11 person with autism, but it's a way of
12 growing since you too are on the
13 spectrum.

14 I would only take it from there
15 where I would be going past the first
16 cohort of the training program. And
17 about a year after I left out of that
18 program, I was involved with DBHIDS
19 working alongside the Community Wellness
20 and Engagement Unit or CWEU for short,
21 and in there I would not just help
22 individuals with autism, but I would
23 also get used to understanding wellness
24 and doing so with families and
25 individuals, and then eventually myself

1 since the thing about CAPS is that it's
2 not just a role where you talk to
3 others, but it's also a personal role
4 since you too are on the autism
5 spectrum.

6 So with everything ahead, I am
7 thankful for this role as a CAPS. And
8 it has been one of the ways where I have
9 learned about autism acceptance and
10 being involved with the autism
11 communities around Philly. I hope to
12 move forward with my role as a CAPS and
13 other cohorts ahead of mine, because I
14 personally believe that if someone on
15 the spectrum wants to strive for
16 independence, this could be one of the
17 ways to express themselves and help
18 others ahead. Other than that, thank
19 you for giving me this opportunity to
20 give out my speech and my personal
21 experience with CAPS. And if there's
22 any other questions, I will be open for
23 them. Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
25 Khyllil and Luke, for your testimony.

1 We'll now hear from Angel and Jeffrey.

2 MR. RIOS: Greetings, City
3 Councilmembers. My name is Angel Rios.
4 Thank you for this opportunity to speak
5 and it is an honor for me to be here.
6 Since I live a solitary and introverted
7 lifestyle, one of my goals in the
8 program was to meet people. And some of
9 the positive outcomes I've obtained from
10 my time with CAPS program where time to
11 socialize with others, exploring areas
12 of my community and options for future
13 jobs and interviews. It was important
14 for me to do these things because I have
15 a hard time with meeting people in
16 public, and CAPS helped me in this area.

17 During my time in the program,
18 I visited places in my community that
19 were near to me, such as the Schuylkill
20 River Park, and I got out of my comfort
21 zone by driving to far-away areas for
22 social gatherings. These social
23 gatherings were good opportunities for
24 me to become familiar with other
25 individuals on the autism spectrum, and

1 it was entertaining since gatherings
2 involved games, sports or visits to
3 malls.

4 My peer specialist also
5 accompanied me to walk through areas in
6 my own community. And through these
7 walks, I discovered stores and areas
8 that can be useful for food or shopping.
9 My peer specialist was also helpful in
10 providing me with options for solving
11 problems in future jobs and using proper
12 discussion for jobs and interviews.
13 CAPS services at times was also able to
14 accommodate services to meet my
15 individual needs, and they were polite
16 and understanding when I decided to
17 resign as a participant from their
18 services. The reason I chose to resign
19 was because I had already accomplished
20 social goals, and I am pursuing a
21 Master's degree in psychology. Once
22 again, thank you for this opportunity to
23 share my perspectives.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
25 Our next witness is Jeffrey Clouden.

1 MR. CLOUDEN: Hello, everybody.

2 My name is Jeffrey Clouden. I'm a CAPS
3 participant. I'm diagnosed with anxiety
4 and autism. What the CAPS program did
5 for me, it gave me leadership skills, it
6 teaches me how to be a leader and it
7 creates a safe space for me, and it got
8 me out of my comfort zone and it helped
9 me do things I couldn't do by myself.
10 That's it for me. Jeffrey's out. Let
11 the saga continue.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
13 Mr. Clouden.

14 As we get ready to hear the
15 next witness, I wasn't sure if there's
16 any members of Council that had any
17 questions. I just want to thank all of
18 the CAPS participants for testifying
19 this afternoon. I know for Alik, Luke
20 and Khyll, I heard you testify in the
21 past, and I can just say the growth and
22 the comfort and the self-assuredness you
23 have in your testimony in being able to
24 relay other people's stories and being a
25 self-advocate for yourself and also

1 advocating for others. I can really see
2 that growth just in the short time I've
3 seen your involvement in the CAPS
4 program, and I'm sure that's the same
5 for the others. So definitely, that's a
6 testament to the strong benefits of this
7 program.

8 This program has also supported
9 through the work that City Council has
10 done with the Philadelphia Autism
11 Project. They also along with Community
12 Behavioral Health and Mental Health
13 Partnerships, it's been a long way from
14 growing this program and getting it to
15 where it is at this point.

16 With that, Mr. Iannuzzi, can
17 you call I believe the last witness for
18 this resolution.

19 THE CLERK: Nina Wall, Director
20 of the Bureau of Supports for Autism and
21 Special Populations.

22 MS. WALL: Hi. Good afternoon,
23 everyone. And I want to thank everyone
24 who has presented testimony up to this
25 point. I have to say it is just so

1 heartening to hear these stories and to
2 hear how successful this initiative has
3 been. So good afternoon to everyone.
4 Good afternoon, Chairperson Green and
5 members of the Committee on People with
6 Disabilities and Special Needs. I
7 really do appreciate the opportunity to
8 offer some thoughts today.

9 My name is Nina Wall, and I
10 serve as the Director of the Bureau of
11 Supports for Autism and Special
12 Populations, and our office is housed in
13 the Office of Developmental Programs at
14 the Department of Human Services, and
15 the Office of Developmental Programs as
16 many of you probably know oversees and
17 administers Medicaid programs that
18 assist individuals with intellectual
19 disabilities, developmental disabilities
20 including autism.

21 The Bureau I oversee, the
22 Bureau of Supports for Autism and
23 Special Populations, is responsible for
24 overseeing ODP's Adult Autism Waiver,
25 the Adult Community Autism Program also

1 known as ACAP. And both of those models
2 provide home and community support to
3 adults with autism. We also oversee the
4 ASERT, Autism Services Education
5 Resources and Training, yes, indeed it
6 is a mouthful, extraordinary effort,
7 just doing really wonderful work
8 statewide.

9 So many of you may know that
10 ASERT provides resources and training
11 and technical assistance not only to ODP
12 programs, but to any of the systems
13 across the Commonwealth that assist
14 Pennsylvanians with autism. I will tell
15 you that many of the programs that we
16 administer are first of their kind, and
17 they're all uniformly focused on
18 bolstering opportunities for
19 Pennsylvania's growing autism
20 population. The goal of all of our
21 work, all of our efforts is to promote
22 independence, to promote inclusion and
23 ultimately to enhance quality of life.

24 So the CAPS effort, as several
25 folks have already shared, was prefaced

1 on the Certified Peer Specialist model
2 that already exists in mental health.
3 And it was many years ago, I routinely
4 attend when I'm invited to some of the
5 statewide autism self-advocate groups,
6 and it was not lost on me when I would
7 listen to individuals with autism with
8 lived experience, and they would talk
9 about the need for obviously supports
10 and services, but also they saw benefit
11 in the support they received from one
12 another.

13 And it seems -- so the idea for
14 CAPS really came from some of those
15 earliest conversations with individuals
16 living with autism. And I think there
17 was for us certainly important awareness
18 that peer-to-peer could potentially
19 provide an option for some, maybe not
20 for everyone, but an option for some
21 along a continuum of care. And also
22 too, we do unfortunately a lot of the
23 time in our work see a lot of difficult
24 outcomes for people.

25 We see trajectories that are

1 not always favorable, and this model
2 seems to provide certainly an
3 alternative to more restrictive types of
4 care. And as others have mentioned
5 already, CAPS is also going to provide
6 job opportunities to a population that
7 is historically experiencing very high
8 levels of unemployment and
9 underemployment, and certainly this
10 model will provide opportunities for
11 individuals to acquire the skills that
12 they need to access the community and a
13 better quality of life.

14 So I really have to recognize
15 the collaborative effort that went into
16 rolling this out, and this really was an
17 extraordinary partnership and I really
18 do think that's how you make things
19 happen in systems, is getting people to
20 the table around a challenge and folks
21 just come with an open mind and
22 strategies, and narratives to our self-
23 advocates were involved at every step of
24 this process, and their experiences
25 informed are thinking about this model.

1 I want to of course thank
2 Dr. Washington and Dr. Kaplan for
3 hanging in with this. This was really a
4 marathon. So I really appreciate all
5 their efforts and the dedication of the
6 team at CBH and at Mental Health
7 Partnerships, certainly the Philadelphia
8 Autism Project, City of Philadelphia
9 Department of Behavioral Health and
10 Intellectual Disability Services and the
11 teams at Drexel and Temple University,
12 my colleagues from the office of Mental
13 Health Substance Abuse Services at the
14 regional and state level, and of course
15 my colleagues in the Office of
16 Developmental Programs.

17 Again, this is what can happen
18 with teamwork and the willingness to try
19 something new, to innovate, to
20 problem-solve. And again, I think of
21 note that the CAPS model was developed
22 and implemented with consistent input
23 from individuals the model was intended
24 to support and assist.

25 I also want to recognize the

1 incredible achievement of all of the
2 CAPS graduates. Your stories give me
3 fuel, my friends. It really, really
4 does. And I just want to thank you for
5 the incredible, incredible work that
6 you're doing. And of course, thanks to
7 Councilman Green for holding this
8 hearing today and for recognizing this
9 work and bringing attention to this. So
10 thanks to all of you.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Ms. Wall, for your testimony. And as
13 you were talking, it reminded me of why
14 it was important for us to have this
15 hearing this month. This is June and we
16 are in Pride month. Earlier today I had
17 a chance to participate in the kickoff,
18 the virtual celebration for Disability
19 Pride Pennsylvania, being led by Vickie
20 Landers and Charles Horton, who is the
21 Board Chair of Disability Pride PA, and
22 it really is a collaboration.

23 And when I think about the
24 self-advocacy work that they are doing
25 as well as the Community Autism Peer

1 Specialist Program and all the programs
2 that come together to get us to this
3 point, it really provides to me with
4 great source of pride and joy.

5 I have one question for you.
6 I'm curious in reference to where you
7 see CAPS is standing. I know earlier
8 this year we had a conference that we
9 participated with, Justice Dougherty
10 from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court,
11 about autism and the criminal justice
12 community --

13 MS. WALL: Yes.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: -- criminal
15 justice system, and it really was an
16 opportunity to educate judges all around
17 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania about
18 issues and concerns for those who have a
19 physical learning difference like
20 autism, and we also talked about
21 possibly the future ability of having
22 maybe the CAPS program as part of the
23 criminal justice system in a way that
24 can provide additional employment.

25 And I think of some of the

1 challenges we've had in this City,
2 especially last fall with the tragic
3 killing of Walter Wallace, Jr. It
4 creates another opportunity need for
5 more type of engagement, especially in
6 this community as a whole. So I'm
7 curious where you see the CAPS expanding
8 outside of this region in reference to
9 what we've been able to accomplish so
10 far?

11 MS. WALL: Well, I think
12 there's interest around the state and
13 various pockets. I don't know that a
14 lot of people are necessarily aware of
15 this initiative yet, but I think there's
16 interest certainly coming from a growing
17 autism self-advocacy community. I think
18 this is something that is a benefit in
19 terms of an option on a continuum of
20 care. I don't know that this is a model
21 that is necessarily going to be desired
22 or appropriate for everyone, but I think
23 as we all know, everyone living with
24 autism is unique, right. So this I
25 think everybody involved in the

1 development of the model was aware that
2 this could very well be something that
3 could help a lot of people. So I think
4 there's a lot of opportunity here.

5 And to your point, I think
6 there's benefit to peer mentoring and
7 peer support in other systems as well,
8 right, but the model itself is one I
9 think that's portable. And I think we
10 have to certainly be open to exploring
11 that. I do want to say though, I think
12 we're still learning. And I think we
13 want to take time because this is a --
14 certified peer specialist model is not
15 new. The model being adapted for this
16 population is still relatively new, and
17 I think we want to make sure that we're
18 taking the time that we need to
19 understand the model to learn more about
20 it, to hear more of the -- receive more
21 feedback from individuals providing the
22 service and individuals receiving the
23 service. Collecting those data I think
24 are very important when we think about
25 next steps.

1 We want to always look at
2 what's working, what we want to retain,
3 things that we could improve, so it's a
4 work in progress. But again, like all
5 the work that we're doing we have to be
6 willing to try. We have to be willing
7 to learn. And obviously, there's a
8 need. I think the need is documented
9 well.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
11 for your testimony and your work not
12 only professionally, but also from a
13 personal level. You've been a strong
14 advocate for a lot of the work that
15 we've been talking about this afternoon.
16 I want to thank all of the witnesses
17 that are here for this resolution.

18 Mr. Iannuzzi, I'm not sure if
19 there's any additional witnesses that
20 you had identified for this resolution.

21 THE CLERK: That's all,
22 Mr. Chair.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
24 And I'm not sure if there's any other
25 questions for any members of Council for

1 any of the witnesses that testified this
2 afternoon on this resolution?

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Seeing and
5 hearing none, we're going to move into
6 the next resolution. I want to thank
7 all of the witnesses, all the
8 participants, all the advocates who
9 testified on Resolution 210372. I'm
10 greatly appreciative of all the hard
11 work that you've done to bring the
12 Community Peer Specialist program to
13 this level, and I just see greater and
14 greater things for this initiative, and
15 also the opportunity to continue to
16 learn and grow as people become self-
17 advocates. And then hopefully, we will
18 have another generation of advocates who
19 can then be peer specialists to a new
20 generation. And I think this is an
21 initiative that we can promote to other
22 organizations, other jurisdictions. And
23 I will use my role both in the National
24 League of Cities as well as Pennsylvania
25 Municipal League to let other

1 jurisdictions know about the Community
2 Autism Peer Specialist program.

3 With that, Mr. Iannuzzi, if you
4 will now move into Resolution No.
5 210128. This is a continuing resolution
6 from a hearing that we had last year
7 regarding the City's compliance with the
8 Americans with Disabilities Act.

9 And in that conversation, we
10 got a perspective on what steps the City
11 was taking to provide compliance. And
12 we had a roadmap for how they were doing
13 such, especially in physical
14 accommodations in buildings in the City
15 of Philadelphia as a first step. Also,
16 we went through this budget process, we
17 know that capital dollars will also be
18 allocated to other areas in reference to
19 roadways and sidewalks and another step
20 in this process.

21 But today's hearing is to talk
22 about not only the American Disabilities
23 Act but focused more specifically on the
24 Carousel House. There have been a
25 number of issues that have been raised

1 by various members of this community and
2 people around the City of Philadelphia
3 regarding some significant concerns
4 regarding Carousel House as well as what
5 services are being provided for those
6 that have a physical or learning
7 difference at Parks & Recreation
8 facilities in the City of Philadelphia.

9 So I want to thank all of the witnesses
10 who are here to testify. I know we have
11 a number of witnesses who are scheduled.

12 At this point, I would like to
13 provide an opportunity for
14 Councilmembers Bass as well as Brooks
15 for opening remarks. We'll start with
16 Councilmember Brooks first, and then
17 Councilmember Bass.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yes. I
19 wanted to take a moment to thank
20 Chairman Green for leading this hearing
21 on the closure of Carousel House. And I
22 want to thank the community members,
23 experts and advocates who are here to
24 testify today and thank the members of
25 this Committee to their dedication to

1 this issue.

2 As many of you know, I spent
3 the majority of my career in
4 Philadelphia working with parents and
5 caregivers of children and adults with
6 disabilities, and I find looking for
7 accessible spaces and appropriate
8 services to meet their needs, so working
9 in that field for over 17 years showed
10 me the dire lack of accessible safe
11 places and spaces for individuals with
12 disabilities. And it introduced me to
13 some amazing advocates who have been
14 leading this work in disability justice
15 city-wide and some of whom are here to
16 speak today.

17 Through my work, I've learned
18 that in order to make our City
19 accessible for all, we must do two
20 things. First, we must listen to the
21 people with disabilities and elevate
22 their experiences and follow through
23 with their recommendations. And second,
24 we need to put our money where our
25 mouths are and make serious concerted

1 investments in public facilities and
2 infrastructure to make Philly a place
3 where individuals with disabilities can
4 live and thrive.

5 So I see this hearing as a
6 critical step towards considering the
7 voices of those who relied on Carousel
8 House for services so that we can
9 understand what led to this closure and
10 respond to their immediate need for
11 accessible spaces city-wide. I also see
12 this hearing as a way to better
13 understand how we got here, and where
14 the only part and recreation facility in
15 the City that specifically caters to the
16 needs of this community is being closed
17 due to years of neglect and
18 underinvestment.

19 I'm especially interested to
20 better understand the relationship
21 between the closure of Carousel House
22 and a pattern of deferred maintenance.
23 And as we near the end of this budget
24 season, we are again reminded of the
25 ways that Parks & Recreation funding

1 falls short of the needs of our
2 community members, and there is no clear
3 path of this than the closure of this
4 site. This is what happens when we
5 underfund capital improvements in our
6 most vulnerable neighborhoods and fail
7 to prioritize those with the greatest
8 needs. I know that because I've seen
9 this firsthand on how individuals with
10 disabilities being the brunt of our
11 City's failure to prioritize
12 accessibility.

13 As our City plans to spend the
14 influx of funds that we receive from the
15 American Rescue Plan Act over a longer
16 span of time, we must ask ourselves is
17 this approach adequate to meet the needs
18 of community members or are we
19 continuing a dangerous pattern of
20 deferred maintenance and empty promises.
21 There has been a significant number of
22 people who will no longer have an
23 accessible space in the City with the
24 closure of Carousel House. And we as
25 City officials should see that as a

1 great failure.

2 And I hope that this hearing
3 allows us to make a shared commitment to
4 changing this cycle of chronic
5 underinvestment and moving towards a
6 model where accessibility is a norm, not
7 an exception. So I want to thank
8 everyone who is here to speak. And
9 thank you again, Councilmember Chairman
10 Green, for doing this hearing. Thank
11 you.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: No problem.
13 Thank you, Councilmember Brooks. I know
14 that we are now joined by Councilmember
15 Jones.

16 Councilmember Bass, I know you
17 had some remarks as well.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes, I do.
19 Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

20 You know, this feels like
21 Groundhog Day because we've been here
22 before. So in 2016 I offered a bill
23 which was passed into law known as the
24 Inclusive Parks and Playgrounds Bill. I
25 was honored to do the bill's signing on

1 August 24th of that year at Whister
2 Playground in Germantown, along with
3 Mayor Kenney, Managing Director Michael
4 DiBerardinis and Parks & Rec
5 Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell.

6 The idea behind this bill was
7 that every person in every neighborhood
8 should have access and amenities at all
9 of our facilities, not just a few here
10 and there. We had Carousel House and
11 this bill was meant to add to that,
12 never to subtract. This bill is like a
13 bait-and-switch, doing something you
14 already are required to do and yet
15 giving the appearance that there is some
16 level of benevolence involved; we're
17 doing something great for the entire
18 City, so don't look at the biggest and
19 most significant change. It's an
20 attempt to distract us all in a red
21 herring in my opinion.

22 To be clear, Carousel House is
23 one of a kind. This facility is the
24 premier facility for those with
25 different abilities. However, like so

1 many other City-owned properties,
2 neglect and a lack of maintenance have
3 brought us to this point. It's the only
4 municipal recreation center in the
5 United States for people with
6 disabilities, and it is slated for
7 permanent closure.

8 The City substitution plan was
9 to have accessible programming at our
10 facilities across the City. Well,
11 somehow I've heard this before. Oh, I
12 know where, maybe it's the bill I had
13 passed requiring the City to do just
14 that. But in no way, shape or form did
15 I think we could do that without
16 Carousel House, which is so much more
17 than a building. This is where bonds
18 are formed, friends are made and people
19 with disabilities will thrive and
20 flourish beyond what benefits they get
21 at their neighborhood centers. This is
22 a simple matter of addition. What we
23 will be adding for our communities,
24 specifically for those in need of
25 specific services programs and amenities

1 versus the subtraction of the Carousel
2 House.

3 Now, the Commissioner has said
4 that one of the facilities that will
5 replace the Carousel House is Gustine --
6 we used to call it Gustine Lake when I
7 was younger. The Commissioner has said
8 that Carousel House is near Gustine
9 Lake, and that's like saying City Line
10 Avenue is near Market Street or that
11 Mount Airy is near Feltonville. It's
12 not.

13 I think that there's a lack of
14 sensitivity to those with disabilities
15 around these conversions and
16 conversations, and this closure is
17 baffling. To just suggest that the
18 amount of travel is not impactful is not
19 only condescending, but in my opinion
20 shows a total lack of understanding of
21 what families and individuals with
22 disabilities endure on a daily basis.
23 People are making decisions for them and
24 they have no clue.

25 So my first question is really

1 a statement: Do not take away any
2 services from Carousel House. You must
3 add to it. Again, we are adding
4 services, programs and amenities, not
5 taking away.

6 Second, what's been done
7 regarding adding additional services and
8 amenities at City sites as per the
9 inclusive playground bill I passed six
10 full years ago. Please be specific so
11 that we can check what you say that you
12 have actually done through the Parks &
13 Rec system because we want to know. We
14 want to know and we want to make sure
15 that what is represented is accurate.

16 And third, who is the City's
17 Director of ADA Compliance and what have
18 they've been doing around this
19 particular issue. Are they on the call
20 now? I certainly hope so. This was a
21 position that was created in 2018. And
22 so as a taxpayer, we are looking for
23 results and interested in information.

24 And so, these are just a few of
25 the questions that I'll have throughout

1 the course of this hearing. And I
2 certainly hope that we can have a
3 meeting of the minds that will recognize
4 the importance and value of Carousel
5 House not just to the disabled
6 community, but to the entire City of
7 Philadelphia. The amount of work that
8 we put in, that we need to put in should
9 be a drop in the bucket compared to the
10 City's budget when you think about the
11 fact that this is something, a program,
12 a site that services the entire City of
13 Philadelphia.

14 We all know people with
15 disabilities. We all have people with
16 disabilities in our family. We have
17 them on our block in our neighborhood,
18 so why are they getting the short stick,
19 so to speak.

20 And so, Mr. Chairman, those are
21 my comments for now. I certainly hope
22 that we will have a robust conversation
23 around Carousel House and, again, have a
24 meeting of the minds at the end of this
25 conversation. Thank you.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
2 Councilmember Bass.

3 Councilmember Jones.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chairman. Can you hear me?

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: We can hear
7 you.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
9 Councilmember Bass, for your commitment
10 to people with disabilities and your
11 commitment to the recreation system.

12 I'd like to add, Mr. Chairman,
13 some insight. First, both facilities
14 that were mentioned, both Gustine Lake,
15 and I remember when it was actually a
16 cement pond, as they say, up in East
17 Falls and Carousel House on Parkside.
18 Both are in the 4th Councilmanic
19 District.

20 And one thing I've never been
21 accused of is not spending every dime I
22 had and some dimes I did not have to
23 improve rec facilities in my District.
24 I've been to Carousel House, and I
25 recognize its mission within the City of

1 Philadelphia's infrastructure to address
2 the insignificant investment in
3 facilities dedicated to people with
4 disabilities. A misnomer might be that
5 that was some mecca where people
6 actually got what they needed. I assure
7 you, Mr. Chairman, it was not.

8 I remember the pool and where
9 individuals that could be lifted in
10 wheelchairs into a pool. Well, that's
11 been broke for five years, five years.
12 How do I know? My nephew was in -- it
13 was actually pretty good -- the
14 wheelchair basketball league and played
15 there. I watched him play there. And
16 so, I understand not only to people with
17 disabilities, but just regular folks
18 looking to get a good run in basketball,
19 that has been an important facility.

20 So let me segue and say that
21 there is a vision that is inclusive,
22 which I support by the way, that a child
23 in the Northeast should not have to come
24 all the way to West Philly if they need
25 adaptive equipment to participate fully

1 in rec. A child from South Philadelphia
2 should not have to travel, their parents
3 often, to West Philadelphia in order to
4 be included.

5 We have since Member Bass'
6 regulation and interest in public policy
7 have included in all of our new
8 facilities adaptable equipment. And
9 much of it is newer and better than at
10 the Carousel House. Also, in the
11 interim, which I do support a broader
12 vision for the Carousel House, I support
13 the fact that there's a group called,
14 and you may know of them, Chairman, the
15 United Age Group Track Club Association,
16 a little known group of parents and
17 track coaches that every year for the
18 last 30 years have had track meets in
19 facilities that were not befitting the
20 talent level that those kids had. And
21 when it came to indoor track, you had to
22 go to Baltimore, you had to go to
23 Maryland, you had to go to New York to
24 the Colgate Games for Women in order for
25 them to fully showcase their talents.

1 How do I know? I'm a retired track
2 coach. How do I know? I still get the
3 itch to want to coach. And some of the
4 brightest talent -- if Member Parker was
5 on this call, she would also say that
6 that is true then and it is true today.

7 So what is the vision for
8 Parkside Avenue in the 4th Councilmanic
9 District? We hope to establish an
10 official outdoor track, eight lane --
11 give me a nod, Commissioner, if I'm
12 close -- eight lane outdoor track right
13 near the old WDAS, right. It's going to
14 have grand stands and all of that stuff
15 where a junior Olympic track meet some
16 day God-willing will be there.

17 Why do I mention that? One
18 mile down the road where the Carousel
19 House is, we hope to establish an indoor
20 track. The last indoor track I know of
21 was the old Armory. I believe you might
22 have ran there, Member Green. Did you
23 ever run there? Not very fast you said,
24 but you ran there.

25 And what we hope to do is in

1 the design, allow for the facility in
2 the infield to be adaptable so that
3 those great wheelchair basketball games
4 can still occur and that we improve the
5 outside where we have far more adaptable
6 equipment than we had at the Carousel
7 House.

8 So why do I think this is so
9 key and central? One of the issues I'd
10 like to propose, Member Green, Chairman
11 Green, is that we work with that United
12 Age Group Track Club Association to work
13 with the Special Olympics to be able to
14 do -- oh, another fine facility in my
15 District is the Overbrook School for the
16 Blind. What I'd love to be able to
17 develop is give the richness of the
18 experience of recreation in the City of
19 Philadelphia to create co-athletic
20 training with people with disabilities
21 at that facility both indoor and
22 outdoor. So members of the blind
23 community, members of the death
24 community, members who need that kind of
25 pairing in order to participate get a

1 real shot. I'm committed to this
2 notion, Mr. Chairman, but it could never
3 happen at the old Carousel facility.

4 Now, I'm not going to point the
5 finger about how that facility came to
6 be in disrepair, but I've been in there,
7 knowing it is in disrepair and that we
8 have an opportunity to look beyond what
9 exists to make what is necessary. And I
10 just think that as we talk about Junior
11 Olympics or Special Olympics, that
12 facility that we're talking about could
13 be a centerpiece for regional or even
14 national competition. That's my hope
15 and that's my vision, and that's my
16 interest today in the Carousel House
17 within the 4th Councilmanic District.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I'd like to
20 thank all the members of Council for
21 their comments this afternoon. I do
22 have to note for the record that due to
23 the Sunshine Act, the chat feature is
24 only to be used by members of Council to
25 designate their interest in raising

1 their comment or to ask a question to a
2 witness. So I just want to note that
3 for the record.

4 And also, Councilmember Jones,
5 you made reference to, I think you said
6 something about slowness. We'll just
7 have you note for the record that I'm a
8 member of the State Championship Track
9 Team and I also did run at the
10 University of Virginia, so your slowness
11 is not accurate. And, yes, also to talk
12 about that slowness also did not stay
13 just in one generation. My son
14 participates in Special Olympics as
15 well. And so, the speed continues in
16 the Green family. So --

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Mr. Chair,
18 point of information.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: So I did not
21 consider that shade as they say. My
22 nickname on Overbrook's track team --

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I know your
24 nickname.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: What was it?

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I'm not
2 going to say it publicly.

3 COUNCILMAN JONES: Turtle. So
4 that should give you some indication of
5 my athletic prowess. Thank you,
6 Mr. Chairman.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
8 But also, I have to say we had an early
9 hearing about autism and Community
10 Autism Peer Specialist program, and many
11 people on this Committee and others have
12 heard me say in the past, if you met one
13 person on the autism spectrum, that
14 means you've met one person on the
15 autism spectrum.

16 This conversation we're having
17 regarding Carousel House has a wide
18 range of perspective even from those
19 within the disability community. As
20 someone who has been mentored by my son
21 who's on the autism spectrum about
22 various activities and programs,
23 initiatives that can add value to his
24 life, as my wife and I have had to
25 travel all throughout the City of

1 Philadelphia and also outside of the
2 City for programs that allowed him to
3 participate with other peers like
4 himself.

5 This has also been a very
6 significant challenge in our City, and
7 that's why we need to continue to move
8 forward on making sure that we are
9 complying with the Americans with
10 Disabilities Act for all accommodations
11 for both those who have a physical
12 difference and those that have a
13 learning difference as well as doing
14 that within the Parks & Recreation
15 facilities, especially in reference to
16 the legislation that Councilmember Bass
17 talked about as well as Councilmember
18 Brooks and the commentary made by
19 Councilmember Jones.

20 So with that, Mr. Iannuzzi, if
21 you could read the names of the
22 witnesses for the first panel. As I
23 understand earlier, we do have a number
24 of witnesses that are here to testify.
25 And with that, we will start with our

1 Commissioner.

2 If you could, Mr. Iannuzzi,
3 state the three names and then each
4 person will testify in that order.

5 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Thank
6 you, Chairman Green.

7 THE CLERK: I'm sorry.
8 Commissioner -- the Commissioner is
9 going to be joined by David Clark, who
10 is a Departmental Aide at Philadelphia
11 Parks & Rec and Amy Mathewson Millar,
12 who is the Executive Director of the
13 Mayor's Office for People With
14 Disabilities.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
16 Please state your name for the record
17 and proceed with your testimony.

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Thank
19 you. Good afternoon, Chairperson Green
20 and members. My name is Kathryn Ott
21 Lovell. I'm the Commissioner for
22 Philadelphia Parks & Recreation. I'm
23 here to testify today on our
24 Department's plan for Carousel House on
25 the forthcoming inclusion plan as

1 requested by Chairperson Green.

2 Access to recreation is vital
3 to Philadelphians' health, well-being
4 and sense of belonging. All residents
5 including those with physical
6 disabilities and neurodivergence deserve
7 the opportunity to learn, play and grow
8 in safe spaces alongside their
9 neighbors.

10 The Carousel House facility
11 opened in 1987 to deliver on this belief
12 and was the center of an active
13 community serving Philadelphians with
14 physical disabilities for the next three
15 decades. Over time the conditions at
16 Carousel House changed and so did the
17 national best practice and the best way
18 to offer recreation services to people
19 with disabilities and neurodivergence.

20 Today Parks & Rec joined
21 disability rights advocates, educators
22 and recreation professionals across the
23 country and working towards a Parks &
24 Recreation system where all members in
25 the community can access and enjoy all

1 aspects of the Parks & Rec system in
2 their neighborhood rec center. This
3 means offering adaptive and programming
4 at more sites in every area of the City.

5 This will be a continual
6 process to offer programs that are
7 inclusive of all populations as well as
8 providing people with disabilities the
9 choice to engage in programming that is
10 specifically targeted to them. The goal
11 is for an individual with disabilities
12 to be able to participate in recreation
13 programming closer to home rather than
14 having to travel to one segregated site
15 in the City.

16 In early 2019, Parks &
17 Recreation formed an Inclusion Working
18 Group, including staff, leadership,
19 advocates and external community
20 partners. This group created an initial
21 framework for how Parks & Rec could have
22 recreation programs more relevant and
23 innovative for people with disabilities
24 across the City.

25 The framework developed by that

1 working group focused on improved
2 training for staff, including a playbook
3 of organized materials and resources
4 easily accessible to staff, increased
5 communication and collaboration among
6 staff, community members and
7 stakeholders to advance the inclusion
8 plan, expanding and enhancing inclusive
9 programming at rec centers across the
10 City and providing job pathways for
11 residents with disabilities or
12 neurodivergence.

13 We then began putting that
14 framework into practice. A highlight of
15 the work to date includes an employment
16 pilot for young adults with disabilities
17 at recreation centers with job duties
18 that match their strengths through
19 customized work opportunities. New
20 training to ensure staff are equipped to
21 support all residents and provide a
22 welcoming experience that facilitate the
23 sense of belonging. New trainings for
24 recreation staff includes mental health
25 first aid, conflict resolution, working

1 with immigrant communities to name just
2 a few.

3 Finally, the work culminated in
4 Parks & Rec Inaugural Inclusive Summit.
5 This Summit took place in the fall of
6 2019 through a partnership with
7 advocates, the Mayor's Commission on
8 People with Disabilities and the Eagles
9 Autism Foundation. The Summit was
10 attended by over 150 recreation staff
11 and provided an opportunity for
12 information and research sharing as well
13 as training sessions on creating
14 inclusive recreation centers and
15 concrete tools for recreation leadership
16 put into practice.

17 Informed by the Inclusion
18 Working Group last year, Parks & Rec
19 publicly post a Request for Proposals
20 seeking qualifying disability and
21 neurodiversity experts to help us
22 develop a system-wide blueprint to
23 building inclusive and adaptive
24 recreation services across the City.
25 Through the planning process, our teams

1 of experts worked with community and
2 stakeholders to identify how Parks & Rec
3 can build a truly welcoming community-
4 based inclusion model. How can we
5 ensure our staff are equipped with the
6 training to serve all residents who want
7 access to programming at their sites,
8 how can we build a model for unified
9 programming that is inclusive of the
10 whole community and welcoming to those
11 with physical disabilities and
12 neurodivergence.

13 How can we amplify residents'
14 voices in determining what ADA
15 improvements look like and where they
16 are focused. Led by local and national
17 experts from Carousel Connections,
18 Special Olympics of Pennsylvania and the
19 Jefferson Center for Neurodiversity, the
20 team is finalizing a comprehensive plan
21 that will address these questions and
22 further the Department's work to provide
23 a more equitable and welcoming
24 experience for all residents.

25 The inclusion plan will be

1 released this summer and will build on
2 the successful inclusive programs and
3 pilots currently under way at rec
4 centers throughout the City. The plan
5 is built around a set of commitments
6 that focus on community engagement,
7 including self-advocates or individuals
8 who identify as having a disability,
9 staff training and effective inclusive
10 practices. The plan is informed by a
11 diverse group of stakeholders, including
12 the Inclusion Working Group, experts and
13 advocates all working toward making
14 every rec center a welcoming place for
15 all residents.

16 The Carousel House facility is
17 approved to receive a multi-million
18 dollar investment through the City's
19 Rebuild program. Unfortunately,
20 building conditions worsened over the
21 last year, and repairs and maintenance
22 alone could no longer address facility
23 issues that require major capital
24 investments to resolve.

25 As a result, the Carousel House

1 is no longer safe for public occupancy,
2 particularly for a population that is
3 more physically vulnerable. This spring
4 when we knew the Carousel House facility
5 would not be able to safely reopen, we
6 met with the Carousel House Advisory
7 Council to ensure that they would be the
8 first to know and had the opportunity to
9 have their questions answered.

10 In addition, we have issued a
11 letter to all Carousel House program
12 participants and contacts with
13 information about the closure and the
14 work under way to relocate programs to
15 other accessible sites across the City.
16 We are working with Carousel House staff
17 as well as permit holders to ensure
18 relocations are practical and
19 accessible.

20 Finally, we are coordinating
21 closely with the Rebuild team to ensure
22 all members of the Carousel House
23 community are invited to be a part of
24 the community engagement process for
25 this new facility. The new Carousel

1 House facility will be an inclusive
2 accessible-to-all recreation center for
3 the East and West Parkside communities
4 and beyond.

5 Rebuild plans to begin the
6 community engagement phase of the
7 process this year, and we'll work
8 closely with Parks & Rec to invite all
9 appropriate stakeholders, including the
10 Carousel House Advisory Board and
11 community members who have used Carousel
12 House in the past.

13 Parks & Recreation is
14 incredibly optimistic about the
15 opportunity to build a more equitable
16 and accessible recreation system and to
17 incorporate the positive lessons learned
18 from the Carousel House and spread them
19 throughout the City. We also recognize
20 that this transition is difficult for
21 some and are optimistic about the
22 results of our pilot programs and new
23 training supports, which have already
24 resulted in more inclusive programming
25 coming to every part of our City.

1 This fall all Carousel House
2 programs will be located and offered at
3 other rec centers that are fully
4 accessible. Parks & Rec is putting
5 great effort into matching programs in
6 facilities that cater to the needs of
7 the Carousel House community. The
8 familiar faces of the Carousel House
9 staff will greet program participants
10 and support them through this
11 transition. I'm happy to answer any
12 questions on the details of our
13 inclusive plan and our plans for
14 Carousel House.

15 I'm now very happy to introduce
16 a coworker and staff member, David
17 Clark. David has been a member of the
18 Parks & Rec staff for a little over a
19 year and came to us as a part of our
20 workforce development program called the
21 Community Apprenticeship Program. David
22 works at the Francisville Recreation
23 Center under the direction of Recreation
24 Leader J.J. Pospiech, who is also a
25 member of our inclusion working team.

1 And I'm very, very grateful to
2 David for making time to be here today.
3 He is a part of the workforce program
4 that we've implemented for individuals
5 with special needs. David, you're up.

6 MR. CLARK: Good afternoon,
7 ladies and gentlemen. Can y'all hear
8 me?

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Hi,
10 David.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes, we can
12 hear you.

13 MR. CLARK: So again, my name
14 is David Clark. So both me and my
15 sister both have a disability. It's
16 called Fragile X syndrome, which
17 basically has to do with learning
18 issues. And so, when I first joined
19 Parks & Rec, I was about 17 so a junior
20 in high school. So I was a youth
21 worker, worked the summer camp for six
22 weeks. I mainly helped entertain the
23 kids with various games and other
24 sources of activities.

25 And the last week of camp, we

1 did what we called color wars. This was
2 at Houston Playground. It was really
3 fun. Kids enjoyed themselves. And then
4 a year, I would say a year later, I was
5 seasonal maintenance assistant, SMA for
6 short, and I was at Kendrick for the
7 majority of the day, and that lasted for
8 about six months. I mainly did the same
9 stuff and then also some more stuff.

10 And then of course, it was CAPS
11 that started two years later, the
12 Community Apprentice Program, which
13 started with about I would say 40-plus
14 people, and that ended with probably
15 less than half of it. And during that
16 time -- that lasted two years, so I was
17 at that Francisville Playground with
18 J.J., again basically the same duties
19 and everything. I answered various
20 phone calls, a lot of them being about
21 the pool.

22 And then also, I engaged more
23 with the community around the -- with
24 also, like, say hi to various people in
25 different conversations. And I don't

1 think it was anything that was
2 challenging for me. But, you know,
3 yeah, that's about it. Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
5 Mr. Clark, for your testimony. We
6 definitely appreciate it.

7 And the next witness I believe
8 is Ms. Millar.

9 MS. MATHEWSON MILLAR: Yes.
10 Good afternoon, Chairperson Green and
11 members of the People with Disabilities
12 and Special Needs Committee. My name is
13 Amy Mathewson Millar, and I am the newly
14 appointed Executive Director of the
15 Mayor's Office for People with
16 Disabilities. Additionally, I am a
17 person with disabilities myself and the
18 primary caregiver to three children with
19 disabilities. I have dedicated my
20 career to fostering equitable access and
21 opportunities for people with
22 disabilities on the local, state and
23 national levels.

24 It is my pleasure to get to
25 introduce myself today to City Council

1 in this new role. I'm here today to
2 testify on Resolution No. 210128
3 regarding services for people with
4 disabilities and Americans with
5 Disabilities Act compliance and
6 enforcement. The Mayor's Office with
7 People with Disabilities oversees the
8 Mayor's Commission on People with
9 Disabilities and the Office of ADA
10 Compliance. Together these two offices
11 help ensure those with disabilities have
12 equal access and equitable access to
13 employment opportunities, government
14 services and buildings, elementary and
15 secondary education, health care,
16 recreation, arts and culture and
17 accessible and affordable housing.

18 Our Constituent Services
19 Coordinator provides resources and
20 assist residents with accommodation
21 requests. Every engagement with City
22 departments and our residents provides
23 us an opportunity to learn, grow and
24 expand our impact. In addition, the
25 Mayor's Commission on People with

1 Disabilities conducts systematic
2 advocacy on behalf of Philadelphians
3 with disabilities within City government
4 and the city-wide disability community.

5 The Commission is responsible
6 for advising the Mayor on the
7 initiation, development and
8 implementation of policies, programs
9 throughout the City government. The
10 Commission's mission is to ensure that
11 Philadelphians with disabilities are
12 included in all facets of our community.

13 On June 15th of this year, the
14 Mayor's Commission housed an internal
15 meeting with myself with the current
16 Commissioners to get together and to
17 plan an upcoming public meeting that we
18 will hold in late July. We intend to
19 finalize and share the details of that
20 meeting with the public very shortly.

21 The Office of ADA Compliance,
22 which is also in the Mayor's Office for
23 People with Disabilities, writes
24 policies and develops resources to
25 ensure equal access to City-provided

1 services, programs and activities for
2 people with disabilities. The Office of
3 ADA Compliance has been working on the
4 implementation of the ADA Transition
5 Plan for the City.

6 Prior to my appointment, the
7 Office successfully launched the ADA
8 liaison program throughout City
9 departments. Since my arrival, I have
10 worked closely with ADA Director
11 Adrienne Ewing, who provided a detailed
12 testimony to this Committee in March of
13 2021 on the updated -- on an update for
14 the City's ADA Transition Plan. We look
15 forward to continuing to implement this
16 plan together.

17 Supporting the implementation
18 of the ADA Transition Plan and
19 increasing the engagement of our Office
20 are two of my main priorities as the new
21 Executive Director. Since my
22 appointment on May 17th of this year, I
23 have been actively meeting with
24 Department heads, community advocates as
25 well as the Mayor's Office for People

1 with Disabilities Commissioners and
2 staff. Next week I will be meeting with
3 the City's ADA liaison and will continue
4 to provide this program with training
5 and support.

6 The Mayor's Office for People
7 with Disabilities will continue to
8 support City departments and our
9 community intentionally and mindfully as
10 we implement the ADA Transition Plan for
11 Philadelphia. While we cannot erase the
12 wrongs of the past, we do not have to
13 remain there. We can listen. We can
14 grow and may we not just talk about
15 access and equity, but propel action
16 towards equitable spaces in every place
17 for every resident across our City.

18 People with disabilities have
19 human rights and needs just like
20 everyone else. Accessibility is about
21 encompassing more than just a doorway.
22 It's about meaningful participation,
23 inclusion and the sense of belonging.
24 When we put accessibility at the
25 forefront rather than an afterthought,

1 everyone wins. We must be mindful that
2 the needs and experience of those in the
3 disability community are as diverse as
4 this great City. And therefore, all
5 policies and plans must strive to
6 include diverse voices from the
7 disability community.

8 There is a saying among
9 disability advocates, Nothing about me
10 without me. As the Executive Director
11 for the Mayor's Office for People with
12 Disabilities, I will continue to strive
13 to ensure that their voices are heard
14 and honored not just in how we implement
15 policies and plans, but in how we engage
16 our residents with disabilities and
17 neurodiversity on a human level.

18 The Mayor's Office for People
19 with Disabilities is committed to
20 working with all City departments, City
21 Council and our communities around
22 accessibility and equity for people with
23 disabilities. We look forward to
24 partnering together on this ongoing
25 process to create an equitable,

1 accessible and inclusive City for all
2 residents in Philadelphia.

3 When we put inclusion and
4 accessibility at the forefront of how we
5 as a City engage with one another, we
6 can achieve what once was thought as
7 impossible and forge a truly equitable
8 community for all. I am happy to answer
9 any questions that the Committee may
10 have at this time. Thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Ms. Millar, Mr. Clark and Commissioner
13 Ott Lovell, for your testimony. I do
14 want to ask one question initially.

15 And, Commissioner, you talked
16 about the Inclusion Summit. And it made
17 me reflect on not only personal
18 experiences that I've had with my son,
19 but just also those with the disability
20 community. And coming out of that
21 summit, I see both issues being raised.
22 Those that have a physical learning
23 difference wanting to be with others,
24 that similar dynamic because of their
25 history of going to maybe other

1 recreation centers and not feeling
2 included, not feeling involved or being
3 excluded, just not even coming into the
4 facility.

5 I'm very familiar with the
6 looks and stares that people give
7 because we have a very ableist
8 environment, a very ableist perspective
9 in this country and in this City. So I
10 can imagine how someone may feel coming
11 into a recreation center that is
12 traditionally used by those that don't
13 have a physical learning difference, and
14 having one that specifically caters to
15 your community is something that is very
16 inclusive and welcoming.

17 But also, I understand the
18 perspective by those in the disability
19 community saying, we should not be
20 segregated in just one location and we
21 should have the ability to go to any
22 recreation facility regardless in the
23 City of Philadelphia and be able to use
24 those facilities like any other person
25 who do not have a physical learning

1 difference. So I hear those two twin
2 issues. And you talked about your
3 inclusion plan. So how do we address
4 that within this conversation because I
5 hear both sides of that concern?

6 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Thank
7 you, Chairman. Your analysis just then
8 of the twin issues is spot-on and is, I
9 think, really insightful. You know, the
10 Inclusion Summit was like one of our
11 very first baby steps that we made to do
12 better and do more in this work. I
13 mean, the truth is that we were doing
14 very little for a long time. And sort
15 of to be completely candid, putting all
16 our eggs in the Carousel House basket
17 and saying, that's where we do that
18 work. And over the first few years of
19 my tenure in this position it became
20 very clear to me that that wasn't
21 enough. I mean, that wasn't even nearly
22 enough. And what we really needed to be
23 doing was a pretty thorough assessment
24 of what we were doing and then a plan
25 for what we needed to do moving forward.

1 And so, the Inclusion Working
2 Group and the Inclusive Summit were
3 really I think sort of our training
4 wheels to get us moving into this space
5 to begin to shift that narrative and
6 that culture within our own internal
7 staff and leadership. And then when we
8 did the RFP for our inclusion plan, the
9 first ever inclusion plan for our
10 Department, that was that effort of
11 identifying that team of experts and
12 bringing them on and then over the last
13 year working with them to develop our
14 goals and objectives in how we want to
15 work with the disabilities that the
16 community as a whole, but also the
17 factions within it. And it was clear
18 through that planning process that there
19 is a massive amount of work for us to
20 do. And we have a plan, but the truth
21 is we have to implement that plan.

22 And one of the first things
23 that the plan calls for or that will
24 call for, and again it will be public,
25 we're still in the draft version, but

1 hopefully over the next weeks, if not a
2 month or so, is to hire a Director of
3 the Inclusion Services, which we have
4 made room in our budget for and will be
5 posting that position some time before
6 the fall. And that that is someone who
7 will drive this work moving forward.

8 If that's still not enough, we
9 can use that level of a person in every
10 district of every department. But for
11 starters, we want to hire someone who
12 can help implement this plan on a macro
13 level, but also working on a very hyper
14 local level with individual staff
15 members, building that training
16 curriculum so that we can make sure
17 individual staff members understand this
18 new way of working and this new way of
19 doing business at Parks & Recreation to
20 make sure that we're engaging
21 stakeholders at a very grassroots level
22 to make sure that the types of
23 programming that we're providing are not
24 just inclusive, but truly relevant to
25 the communities that we're serving. So

1 it will involve hiring this leadership
2 position, engaging staff members through
3 a new training curriculum, providing
4 resource guides and making sure that we
5 have a great Inclusion Working Group
6 that continues to work with us to hold
7 us accountable to that work.

8 So I think we're just at the
9 very beginning right now of a commitment
10 that we're making. I think a new
11 understanding of what we weren't doing,
12 a better understanding of what we want
13 to do and a commitment to implement this
14 plan. But we have a lot of work to do
15 and we want people to hold us
16 accountable to that.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
18 Commissioner.

19 I see Councilmember Brooks and
20 I believe Councilmember Jones have some
21 questions.

22 And as you were talking and I
23 was listening, and I'm struggling with
24 this issue because the analogy you can
25 also make for those in higher education,

1 especially in the African-American
2 community, my father attended Morgan
3 State University and my sister attended
4 Spelman College, and the ability to have
5 Historically Black Colleges and
6 Universities provide education options
7 because it provides that type of
8 awareness and cultural connection within
9 the community, but at the same point
10 being able to have other institutions
11 like Temple University and University of
12 Virginia to be able to be totally
13 inclusive for all people regardless of
14 your background, and I see a similar
15 perspective in this conversation.

16 That's why I really struggle with the
17 issue because we need to have a
18 welcoming environment for those who have
19 a similar perspective, but also be able
20 to participate in activities like any
21 other able-bodied person to be able to
22 do so as well.

23 With that, I will have
24 Councilmember Brooks -- and I'm sorry.
25 I was incorrect. We'll go with

1 Councilmember Brooks first, and then I
2 did see Councilmember Bass and
3 Councilmember Jones.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
5 you, Chairman Green.

6 So I want to just kind of
7 preface my question around about eight
8 years ago when my programs closed, I
9 used to run a camp recreation programs
10 for Easterseals Southeastern
11 Pennsylvania, and my primary audience
12 were school-aged children to adulthood.
13 And adulthood, we had weekend programs
14 where we would invite a group of younger
15 people to come out, and we would take
16 over the town, like out in the City.

17 So my understanding of
18 accessibility is hands-on. If you can
19 imagine, three people that used
20 wheelchairs, three to four adults with
21 autism and various disabilities, maybe
22 someone with visual impairment or
23 hearing impairment, trying to go into
24 Center City out to dinner or to an
25 amusement park, so this is where my

1 experience is coming from.

2 So my question is centered
3 around my concern about the timing of
4 the closure. The reason I say that is I
5 have parents to this day that have yet
6 to find a replacement for the programs
7 that I offered eight years ago. And the
8 realization that some of the when I say
9 babies in my program, folks that were
10 like 8 are now 16, and don't have the
11 options that we offered, so the fact
12 that there are so few alternatives for
13 people with disabilities in the City and
14 navigating any level of recreation and
15 activity in the City can be very
16 difficult.

17 So, Commissioner Ott Lovell,
18 for the record can you explain what is
19 the loss when the only inclusive safe
20 place for people with disabilities is
21 closed and then suddenly no longer an
22 option for people, particularly young
23 people and some parents with
24 disabilities, parents of children with
25 disabilities or parents with

1 disabilities?

2 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure.

3 It's our intent over the next few weeks,
4 we're just about finalizing this
5 process, to create a new home for each
6 of the programs that were happening in
7 Carousel House. So there were dozens of
8 programs that happened at Carousel
9 House, some on a weekly basis, some on a
10 monthly basis, some on an annual basis,
11 more special events. So we're working
12 to rehouse all of those programs to make
13 accessible in facilities in our system,
14 and we're going to have to work with the
15 individual staff -- we're working with
16 individual staff members that led those
17 programs, and then we'll be soon working
18 with the permit holders. Some programs
19 were run by our staff. Some programs
20 were run by external organizations that
21 permitted our space and run the program.
22 So our staff are helping us identify
23 what would be the best facilities to use
24 to rehouse those programs and for any
25 externally-permitted programs, we will

1 be working with them over the next few
2 weeks to identify what would be the best
3 location for their programs to take
4 place elsewhere in our system. So
5 that's how we will be making sure that
6 individuals who participate in those
7 programs can continue to participate in
8 those programs during the closure and
9 before the new facility is built.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: So is
11 there going to be a full accessibility
12 upgrade needed to those facilities, if
13 needed? Because some of the
14 significants are the widths of the
15 stalls in the bathroom, the thresholds
16 and how hard it is for a wheelchair user
17 to open the thresholds and high the
18 sinks are. So --

19 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
20 That's all the things we're taking into
21 consideration for those specific
22 audiences of those programs. Every
23 program is unique and different and the
24 audience for those programs are
25 different. So what we're doing is

1 working with the Carousel House staff
2 who still work with us and will still be
3 helping to lead these programs, you
4 know, really helping to identify what
5 are the needs and then making sure that
6 we identify facilities where those needs
7 can be met, including all accessibility
8 needs.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay. My
10 second question is I'm interested to
11 know more about the City's decision to
12 move those targeted programs to Gustine
13 Recreation Center and other facilities
14 in the fall. So on my one question, has
15 Gustine in particular housed any of
16 these programs for the disability
17 community in the past? Is the staff at
18 Gustine trained to welcome a large group
19 of people with disabilities,
20 particularly young people with
21 disabilities and their parents? And
22 does this facility have a pool that will
23 be able to accommodate those who would
24 use the pool recreationally or for
25 physical therapy?

1 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure.

2 There were a few questions, so just tell
3 me if I missed one. So Gustine is just
4 one of the facilities. The reason we're
5 looking at Gustine is, A, for its
6 proximity, B, because it is accessible
7 and, C, because it has parking. Many of
8 our facilities, as you know, are pretty
9 landlocked and there isn't much parking
10 available, and we know that parking is
11 really critical, so that's one reason
12 that we're looking at Gustine.

13 Our goal is to actually have --
14 now, the staff at Gustine will be a part
15 of our trainings of course as part of
16 our inclusion plan, but our goal is to
17 actually move the Carousel House staff
18 that were there and have some of them go
19 with the programs so that there are some
20 familiar faces there as those programs
21 happen at those new facilities, so that
22 will be one of our goals.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: So would
24 that number change the number of rec
25 leaders or rec staff that are available

1 into a site? I know you guys were
2 moving to make sure there are two --

3 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes.
4 Yes.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Would
6 that be two in addition to the --

7 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes,
8 perhaps. It will depend on what other
9 programs are happening at that center at
10 that time. Then that helps determine
11 what our staffing levels need to be at
12 that center. But we would always have
13 the appropriate number of staff members
14 in the facility, yes. To answer your
15 question, yes. And I think your next
16 question was about the pool?

17 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yes.

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes.
19 So we don't have any other functioning
20 indoor pools at this time. We are
21 hopeful that the School District will
22 allow us access to their pools again at
23 some point in the near future. But
24 since the beginning of COVID, we have no
25 indoor pools besides Carousel House, but

1 we would program and staff three School
2 District pools. Unfortunately, two of
3 those School District pools are not
4 functioning and have not been -- repairs
5 have not been made to them.

6 One School District pool is
7 functioning, but we haven't been able to
8 use that pool since the beginning of
9 COVID. So we would very much like to
10 have indoor pools that could perhaps
11 have chair lifts and other mechanisms to
12 make them accessible. But at this time,
13 we don't have any other indoor pools.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: What
15 about the outdoor pools? Are all the
16 pools in the City fully accessible that
17 have working pool lifts?

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I'd
19 have to check into all of them. I know
20 most of them do, and that's something we
21 check into. But I would have to check
22 into that. And we're right now
23 assessing our pools as we prepare them
24 for pool season.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I have a

1 few more I'm going to try to go through.
2 Many attributed the success of Carousel
3 House to be the competence of the staff
4 and their willingness to go out of their
5 way to make sure each constituent has
6 their needs met, whether that means
7 coordinating rides, calling parents or
8 similarly providing a welcoming space to
9 prioritize each individual's need.

10 So my question is that many
11 also have reported that the conditions
12 of Carousel House facility have been
13 poor for many years, even decades. And
14 since your time with the City, did the
15 Department submit maintenance requests
16 as part of their yearly City budget
17 cycle when the roofs were leaking as
18 they were being reported by participants
19 or staff?

20 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Okay.
21 I don't think I caught the first end,
22 but I can answer the second part around
23 the maintenance. So we've known that
24 Carousel House has significant capital
25 needs since I took this job quite

1 frankly. We every year have presented a
2 capital budget to the Planning
3 Commission and the Budget Office, and
4 the budget is usually much larger than
5 the allocation that we receive just
6 based on what the City finances are able
7 to lend to us. So we have done our best
8 to patch and repair the leaks to the
9 roof specifically. And the
10 dehumidification system to the pool,
11 we've done our best to repair them. But
12 at this point, there are no other
13 further repairs we can do to make them
14 safe. So we've known about it for a
15 long time. We have our skills trades
16 team. We have a great skills trades
17 team who can fix almost anything.
18 They've fixed it many, many, many times.
19 But it is at a point where it is in need
20 of a multi-million dollar capital
21 investment. And at the same time, we
22 knew that this, and quite frankly we
23 advocated for this facility to be
24 included in the Rebuild initiative,
25 because we knew that the capital needs

1 were such that within our very limited
2 capital budget it was not something that
3 we thought would be prioritized. So we
4 advocated to have this included in the
5 Rebuild program as we did in the first
6 round. So it's one of the first round
7 sites. But unfortunately, the timing of
8 the Rebuild initiative hasn't lined up
9 with our need to close the facility due
10 to the safety issues.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Are there
12 any other facilities slated for closure
13 this year or was Carousel House the only
14 facility in the Department unsafe to
15 reopen?

16 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: So
17 Vare Recreation Center was closed. I
18 don't know if you remember that, about
19 two and a half, maybe three years ago
20 now. The roof, the ceiling in one of
21 the rooms actually collapsed and we had
22 to close there for a few months. We had
23 a structural team come in and do an
24 assessment, and they were able to create
25 a steel superstructure at Vare. We

1 actually still have the second floor
2 closed, but we were able to reopen the
3 first floor.

4 We have structural engineers
5 going back into Vare every couple of
6 months to make sure that we can continue
7 to keep it open. We are hopeful that
8 Vare will be able to remain open until
9 the new building is created at Vare.
10 That is also part of the Rebuild
11 initiative, but I can't promise that
12 right now. But those are the two
13 biggest issues right now.

14 Other issues that we have --
15 I'll be honest. Some of our buildings
16 are so old and have such needs that we
17 have to make decisions probably once a
18 week on whether we can repair something
19 or whether it needs to be closed
20 temporarily. And usually, 9 times out
21 of 10, we have some pretty incredible
22 tradesmen who can figure out how to
23 extend the life of a boiler, extend the
24 life of a roof, to keep that building
25 open. But it is a challenge. It's a

1 massive challenge in a system.

2 We're very blessed with the
3 size of our recreation system. We have
4 more rec centers than any city. We have
5 more pools than any city. We have
6 double the number of pools of New York
7 City. We're really lucky, but we don't
8 typically have the capital resources to
9 manage and maintain and invest in the
10 buildings the way that we should. And
11 quite frankly, I'm not sure we ever
12 have.

13 We haven't made decisions that
14 other cities have made, which is to
15 close pools and to close recreation
16 centers at the same rate as other
17 cities have made. And I would never
18 advocate for that. I love our
19 recreation centers, every single one of
20 them, and they are deeply personal to
21 residents. So we have a -- to quote the
22 Chairman, we have a twin issue here,
23 right. We're blessed with this massive
24 system, and yet it's a burden in a lot
25 of ways because we are a poor city that

1 hasn't had the funds to properly
2 maintain a system of this size.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And you
4 may have already answered this question,
5 but it's back to the ADA-compliant
6 pools, and you said you're not really
7 sure --

8 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
9 got -- actually staff are texting me,
10 Councilwoman. So we actually only have
11 seven pools with lifts. Only seven
12 pools with lifts.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And prior
14 to the summer season the ones that have
15 a lift, will they be actively working
16 for folks to be able to utilize over the
17 summer, and adequate staff trained to
18 operate those lifts during that time?

19 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: We
20 will absolutely work on that to make
21 that our goal.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
23 so much, Council -- I mean, Mr. Chair.
24 That answers my questions. Thank you.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,

1 Councilmember Brooks.

2 Councilmember Bass.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
4 Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

5 I just have a few follow-up
6 questions, and I wanted to start -- let
7 me just start by saying this because I
8 think in the beginning I said this felt
9 like Groundhog Day, but actually it
10 feels a little bit more like the
11 twilight zone right now. Because,
12 Commissioner, we had a very public well-
13 advertised, well-publicized event,
14 ribbon-cutting, bill signing at Wister
15 Playground, which I mentioned earlier,
16 around this bill around inclusion and
17 adding inclusive play spaces, adding or
18 making sure it was more accessible. And
19 nowhere in your conversation have I
20 heard you mention anything about that.
21 Is there any reason why or did you -- I
22 was just wondering why we're not saying
23 that some of the things that we're doing
24 we're required to do by law, like we're
25 mandated to do. This is the law, and

1 it's been so since 2016 that we do this.

2 So now we're saying we're going
3 to get rid of Carousel House and we're
4 going to do all these other things. But
5 under the umbrella of all of these other
6 things, we were supposed to be doing
7 these anyway. So can you talk about
8 that a little bit?

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure,
10 as best I can understand it. We have
11 the resources we're given in a capital
12 budget to make the investments that we
13 can make. And between the capital
14 budget that we're given and then the
15 ITEF allocations made by Councilmembers,
16 we make investments as we're given the
17 resources.

18 All of the investments that
19 we've made since the bill that -- the
20 really great bill that was introduced
21 around inclusive playgrounds, every
22 capital investment that we've made,
23 we've included those accessible features
24 in all of our playgrounds. So I think
25 we said in our budget hearing at your

1 request that it was 54 sites, I believe,
2 where investments have been made to make
3 a playground fully accessible, to
4 include that accessible playground
5 equipment as well as adult fitness
6 equipment and that since the bill was
7 introduced.

8 And again, every single one of
9 our projects where we received funding,
10 whether it's City capital or ITEF
11 funding, we make sure that those
12 projects are 100 percent inclusive and
13 all of the Rebuild projects will be as
14 well. What we haven't had access to is
15 going back for projects where there are
16 not capital funds available, and that is
17 something that again gratefully to the
18 City's ADA assessment that was done in
19 Ms. Millar's office prior to her joining
20 the Administration, we have that
21 assessment. So we are fully aware of
22 more of those needs to make sure our
23 facilities, all of the City facilities
24 are accessible. But at this point with
25 limited resources in the City, we

1 haven't had the ability to make those
2 investments.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I'm sorry.
4 You just said something that drew my
5 attention. So, Ms. Millar, are you
6 responsible for the report for Milligan
7 and Company? Is that the report you're
8 referring to, Commissioner?

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes,
10 ma'am.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So we
12 issued -- so we contracted out an RFP
13 I'm assuming for this report to be
14 completed by the City of Philadelphia.
15 And it was Ms. Millar's organization
16 that received the contract. And later,
17 Ms. Millar, you came to work for the
18 City; is that what you're saying?
19 Please correct me. Please correct me.

20 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: No.
21 I'm sorry. I was just saying the
22 previous person in her role in the
23 Administration did that assessment and
24 all of the City's departments
25 participated in that assessment. And

1 now I'm assuming Ms. Millar has the
2 great responsibility to make sure we
3 implement as we do capital improvements.

4 We haven't even met yet, so
5 it's nice to meet you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I
7 thought you were saying something
8 different here, like she's the hook-up.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If I can
10 interject, a point of information. What
11 had transpired is that prior to
12 Ms. Millar coming into the office, the
13 previous person in this role was
14 responsible for shepherding the ADA
15 Transition Plan, which took the City of
16 Philadelphia some years to complete. It
17 was an RFP issued to Millar &
18 Associates --

19 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Right.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: -- you
21 talked about, and then that report was
22 completed at the end of --

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: 2018.

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: -- last
25 year. Then we had hearings in this

1 Committee last spring about the ADA
2 Transition Plan in reference to going
3 forward.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
5 Yeah. I'm sorry. It was, I guess,
6 started in 2018, and I think it was done
7 December 30, 2020, but okay. I just
8 wanted to clarify that.

9 So, Commissioner, in that
10 report that we're referencing on this
11 Transition Plan, one of the things it
12 says or reads in terms of where all of
13 the facilities are, they did a self-
14 evaluation of facilities city-wide. And
15 when it came to Parks & Recreation, it
16 said, Recently renovated playgrounds
17 throughout the Parks system are not only
18 accessible by the 2010 ADA standards,
19 but also provide a more inclusive play
20 experience, including sensory and
21 interactive elements for all abilities.
22 And I'm assuming that that is a result
23 of the bill that we passed in 2016?

24 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
25 Absolutely.

1 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
2 Great. I just wanted to add that and
3 make sure that we are on the right
4 track. So anything that we are touching
5 now we are proceeding in a way that is
6 above standards, above industry
7 requirements and standards. So you're
8 saying it's just a question of going
9 backwards to those that haven't been
10 touched, but making sure that it fits
11 the same standard?

12 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
13 Correct. And we're also because of that
14 bill, that all of our staff, all of our
15 capital staff, our designers, our
16 engineers, our project managers receive
17 the training to understand what that
18 means, what are the best practices and
19 innovative equipment that can be used
20 for whether it's physical needs,
21 neurodivergent needs, et cetera. Our
22 staff need to be consistently trained
23 because that is changing all the time as
24 well, so we're also working with various
25 associations and groups across the

1 country and funding training for our
2 staff to make sure they can have the
3 most up-to-date information as they're
4 designing and managing these projects to
5 make sure that they are the most
6 inclusive that they can be.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: And
9 you all in Council are generously
10 funding those investments.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. All
12 right. But I do think that as you are
13 having this conversation about the
14 larger plan to address this in the City
15 of Philadelphia, you can't have a
16 conversation sort of about half of the
17 system and what you're doing going
18 backwards and not acknowledge that some
19 of the work that's already been done
20 around this issue.

21 So it almost feels a little
22 disingenuous because it makes it seem as
23 if we're starting fresh, we don't have
24 anything that we've already done around
25 this issue. When we've got a lot that

1 we've done, but we're just not talking
2 about it for some reason or it seems to
3 me at least acting as if it's not in
4 existence.

5 Can you -- also, I know that
6 Councilwoman Brooks mentioned this to
7 some degree, but I wanted to just add
8 this question in a little bit different
9 light. And, that is, can you tell me
10 what other facilities are slated for
11 permanent closure and without
12 replacement because of building
13 conditions?

14 And I know you mentioned Vare,
15 but a new building is being built at
16 Vare. You didn't mention Waterview,
17 which is in the 8th District which is
18 closed because of building conditions,
19 but Waterview is slated to be repaired.
20 So can you tell me what other facilities
21 in the system are slated for permanent
22 closure and without replacement because
23 of building conditions?

24 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure.
25 The only other facility that I can think

1 of is Monkiewicz. And Monkiewicz is not
2 necessarily for building conditions as
3 much as site conditions, and that's
4 because of the I-95 project that is
5 happening there. It's along Richmond
6 Street in Councilman Henon's District,
7 so Monkiewicz is currently closed.
8 And --

9 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Is it being
10 replaced?

11 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
12 What's that -- no. Actually, we're
13 unsure at this point, Councilwoman.
14 We've been working with PennDOT as well
15 as Councilman Henon's office to
16 determine exactly what's going to happen
17 with that facility, because the I-95
18 project has been so delayed, if you
19 will. And then --

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So we don't
21 know if it's going to be replaced or not
22 right now?

23 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
24 Correct, we don't know. But it is
25 closed and has been closed for some

1 time. And I'd get back to you. Off the
2 top of my head, that's the only one I
3 can think of, but I'd have to get back
4 to you to see if there's any others that
5 I might be forgetting.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. So
7 right now as far as we know in the City
8 of Philadelphia, we are slating to close
9 the only facility in the country, that
10 is municipal run, that is for people
11 with different abilities and is slated
12 for permanent closure and without
13 permanent replacement because of the
14 building conditions?

15 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Well,
16 there will be a new facility built at
17 that site.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, it
19 will have a different function though.
20 It will have a different function.

21 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: It
22 will have a broader function.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. So
24 it won't have the function that it had
25 previously.

1 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: It
2 will certainly have dedicated programs
3 for people with various needs, yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: It will
5 have all of the same programs?

6 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes,
7 that is our hope and more, many, many
8 more, because it will be a much larger
9 facility. So my hope is that -- we're
10 limited at Carousel House with the
11 number of programs that we can have as
12 well because it's not that large of a
13 facility. I don't think it -- as
14 Councilman Jones said earlier, I also
15 don't think it accommodates all of the
16 needs. It's antiquated in many ways.

17 So the new facility would have
18 the opportunity for many, many more
19 programs. And that's our commitment, is
20 to make sure that it is all inclusive,
21 but will continue to have those historic
22 programs that have been at that site for
23 the past 20, 30 years. We want it to
24 have every program we can possibly have
25 there, inside and out.

1 We're also planning outside --
2 the playground at Carousel House is
3 pretty antiquated as well, so our hope
4 is to have state of the art play
5 equipment that will be fully accessible
6 as well.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I just want
8 to make a faux pas here because I know
9 that particularly when we talk about
10 certain things, they're only to be used
11 in that particular context, and I'm
12 going to say for example the Civil
13 Rights Movement. And I think Chairman
14 Green referenced this earlier when he
15 spoke about the option of attending
16 let's say a non-HBCU University
17 sometimes was not on the table for
18 African-Americans. That didn't mean
19 that you didn't want HBCUs or you didn't
20 want to support the HBCU community, but
21 what it meant is you wanted to have
22 other options.

23 You may want to support what's
24 in your community and what is specific
25 to what your needs are or what your

1 interests are, but that doesn't mean
2 that you don't want to go to some of the
3 other places that exist. And so, that's
4 something that I think that we need to
5 be mindful of here.

6 I think it's great to have a
7 recreation facility that everyone can
8 attend, but with the exception of
9 Carousel House. Right now anyone can
10 attend any of these facilities. And so,
11 I think that there's something really
12 special and unique about having a
13 Carousel House that's really just for
14 the disabled community, and I think that
15 that's something that is certainly worth
16 taking a second glance at in my opinion.

17 And I want to know also, if you
18 can just go through -- I heard you and I
19 also heard Councilman Jones speak
20 briefly about the conditions of Carousel
21 House, and I've been in Carousel House
22 and it's been many, many moons, but I
23 was in Carousel House and I know it was
24 in pretty bad shape. But can you go
25 through some of the conditions that were

1 existing in the facility?

2 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: The
3 biggest issue is the roof. The roof has
4 been failing for many years. It's a
5 multi-million dollar investment to
6 replace the roof at Carousel House, and
7 because the roof has been failing,
8 there's been multiple leaks in the
9 facility that has caused damage as well
10 as mold, so that's the biggest issue.

11 The other issue is the
12 dehumidification system in the building.
13 I'm not an architect, but I know our
14 skilled trades and capital staff say
15 that the building was probably flawed
16 since it was built. There were probably
17 issues when it was built. We can't
18 really speak to that not knowing the
19 intent of the engineers and architects
20 who worked on it, but we've always had
21 issues as far as our skilled trade can
22 remember with the pool and with the
23 dehumidification system in the pool.
24 It's been a chronic issue for us that
25 has just been really challenging for us

1 to maintain.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: So
4 that's the main issue. And the roof
5 leaking issues and the dehumidification
6 issue just caused cosmetic problems in
7 the building, right, so stains on the
8 walls and the ceiling tiles and things
9 like that.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. Now,
11 from your description I'm just going to
12 talk a little bit about some of the
13 problems at other recreation centers
14 that we're not contemplating closing
15 that have those issues and far and above
16 many others. So I have rec centers I
17 know with asbestos, water damage,
18 inadequate space and layout design
19 issues, outdated and inadequate bathroom
20 facilities, roof issues, pool issues. I
21 can't speak to a dehumidification system
22 because I'm not sort of an engineer and
23 don't exactly know what causes what,
24 what came first, chicken or the egg in
25 these dehumidification issues. But I

1 can tell you that out of the issues that
2 you listed, they exist in abundance at
3 most of our recreation centers in the
4 City, and we're not talking about
5 closing or repurposing any of them, so I
6 do think that this really does require a
7 second look.

8 And so, the last question I
9 had -- and I don't know if you want to
10 speak to that, if you want to address
11 that, Commissioner.

12 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Sure.
13 Just to say that I agree with you, we
14 have issues throughout our system and we
15 prioritize -- again, we prioritize them,
16 we make requests as part of our annual
17 budget cycle, and we fix what we can
18 fix. And what we can't fix, we can't
19 and that's the very challenging
20 situation that we've been in. And I'd
21 love to have enough funding to manage
22 all of those issues. But fortunately,
23 we haven't had too many that have forced
24 us to close those facilities, so I think
25 that's a miracle in many ways and a

1 tribute to our skilled trade staff who
2 are able to remedy the situations and
3 keep those buildings going year after
4 year.

5 You look at our swimming pools,
6 some of which are 50, 60, 70 years old
7 and we cross our fingers. We're
8 crossing our fingers right now because
9 they're out there right now getting
10 those puppies working for the next two
11 weeks when we open them, and it's always
12 a prayer that they can get that 70-year-
13 old pool working again or fix that leak
14 one more season, or again for some of
15 these facilities patch that roof. It's
16 a huge challenge and we have a really
17 talent skilled trade staff and dedicated
18 that are able to fix some of those, so
19 it's not a good situation. I feel
20 really sad that we haven't -- that we
21 couldn't align the closure of this
22 facility and the new facility coming to
23 perfectly line up. That's my biggest
24 regret in this.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. One

1 other quick question since you brought
2 up pools and to go off course a little
3 bit, I noticed that pools are right now
4 because of the shortage in staffing,
5 that we only expect to open half of the
6 pools in the City right now and the
7 other half will remain closed. Is there
8 any consideration to instead of closing
9 half and keeping half open, but maybe
10 sort of doing a rolling opening. So
11 some pools in some neighborhoods are
12 open these days and other pools in other
13 neighborhoods are open the other days,
14 and that way you can have more pools
15 open throughout the entire City instead
16 of just saying, all right, half of you
17 guys are just going to be closed for the
18 duration?

19 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah,
20 I saw your tweet about that,
21 Councilwoman. It is off-topic, but I'm
22 glad you raised it. It's definitely
23 something that we've considered. It's a
24 big logistical lift for us with the
25 limited staffing to move staff around

1 like that, but it is something that
2 we're looking at. We're looking at
3 shared staffing models, reduced hours to
4 be able to open pools in close proximity
5 to each other, to be able to open joint
6 pools.

7 We're looking at partnerships
8 with community organizations. I was
9 just on a call today with a community
10 organization in West Philly that raised
11 their hand and said, we have lifeguards,
12 we're going to bring them in from the
13 suburbs and we're going to help you. So
14 we are open to any and all ideas.

15 Council President brought up a
16 great idea last week, let's try and find
17 other cooling options for some
18 neighborhoods where pools aren't going
19 to open like giant water slides, we're
20 looking at it all right now. We will
21 have a little more than half open, but
22 this is really one of the worst staffing
23 situations we've ever been in at Parks &
24 Rec. And I spend every waking second
25 working on it. So PPID is coming.

1 We're looking at all those options.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: All right.

3 Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Thank
5 you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
7 Mr. Chairman.

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
9 Councilmember Bass.

10 Councilmember Jones, I believe
11 you had a point.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: I have
13 several points. Thank you,
14 Mr. Chairman.

15 Commissioner, I have 38 rec
16 centers in my District, I believe. And
17 we as District Councilpeople get an
18 allocation every year to do the
19 maintenance for those rec centers,
20 correct?

21 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes,
22 sir. You also have 66 percent of a park
23 plan.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: Tattoo that
25 somewhere. But my point is do you think

1 that's enough? Historically has it been
2 enough to take care of the over 300 rec
3 centers we have in the City?

4 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: No.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: Okay.

6 One-word answer is fine. I don't want
7 to get you in trouble. So it is
8 incumbent upon our District
9 Councilpeople to kind of spread love
10 around in a way, right. But if you look
11 at the natural aging infrastructure, if
12 I spent my whole allocation for a year
13 at one rec center, right, it would take
14 38 more years for me to swing back
15 around, correct?

16 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:

17 Correct.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: So is that
19 why many people thought that this was
20 hustling backwards, a quick sand of
21 capital dollars, and isn't that kind of
22 why we developed the soda tax?

23 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes.

24 COUNCILMAN JONES: See, I love
25 your one-word answers. All right. And

1 so, the Carousel House was placed on one
2 of the lists to say that this is not
3 just a 4th District facility, this is
4 actually a regional city-wide facility,
5 correct?

6 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: To be
7 clear, Councilman, you made sure
8 Carousel House was on the list.

9 COUNCILMAN JONES: Hold on --

10 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: And
11 you had a lot of -- it was a hard spend
12 decision. It was a very hard decision
13 because you had 38 recreation centers in
14 your District, yes.

15 COUNCILMAN JONES: And so, I
16 say all of this to say that I don't mind
17 Carousel House being a crown jewel, but
18 it cannot be the only jewel in the box.
19 It's just unfair to the City to be able
20 to say, yeah, you got -- it almost
21 reminds me when my grandfather used to
22 talk about that green book.

23 Mr. Chairman, you know a little
24 bit about that green book, in the South
25 where you could only go to certain

1 facilities that were for us. And the
2 objective in today's society should be
3 inclusion of all everywhere. And like I
4 said, I don't mind being a crown jewel.
5 So what is the possibility -- you said
6 there are eight outdoor pools with
7 lifts, correct?

8 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
9 Seven.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: Seven. How
11 many pools within reasonable maintenance
12 are in the City of Philadelphia today?

13 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: We
14 have 70 -- 1 is being completely
15 renovated through Rebuild, that's
16 Fishtown. And 1 pool is not going to
17 open this summer because of structural
18 issues, so we have 68 -- actually we
19 have 66 that can potentially open this
20 summer, but 70 total outdoor pools.

21 COUNCILMAN JONES: So how much
22 does a pool lift cost if one of your
23 staff can provide that?

24 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: We
25 can provide that. I can't give that to

1 you today. I don't know the answers to
2 that off the top of my head, but I can
3 get that to you.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: So inclusive
5 in your plan this summer, I'd like to
6 see how we can in the next two years at
7 least double the amount of accessible
8 pools through lifts by District, and be
9 able to as a goal say that we're going
10 to double that in two years and maybe
11 even triple it if we get lucky. And so,
12 those District Councilpeople that want
13 to truly be inclusionary can put a
14 little bit of that money towards that.

15 I remember Chairwoman of
16 Recreation Bass shaming me and shaming
17 all of us about not having enough
18 cameras. And I swore to my staff that
19 we would put more cameras in rec
20 centers. Well, it might be time for us
21 to do that challenge for pool lifts in
22 pools in Philadelphia.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Point of
24 information. I remember it a little bit
25 differently. I remember Councilman

1 Jones willingly and openly being very
2 interested in providing cameras
3 throughout his District.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: I remember
5 the gun under the desk, Madam Chair. I
6 was afraid not to, but I was glad to do
7 it.

8 So I want to look at that plan
9 with an eye towards how we can over the
10 next couple of years increase the number
11 of lifts regional.

12 All right. Thank you,
13 Mr. Chairman.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
15 Councilmember Jones.

16 And with that, I don't see
17 there's any questions for this panel,
18 but please stay on the call because
19 there are a number of witnesses that are
20 scheduled to testify that I would like
21 you to hear their perspective.

22 With that, Mr. Iannuzzi, if you
23 can call the next panel.

24 THE CLERK: Mr. Chair, Cecelia
25 Thompson has some issues that if she's

1 on the line with us now, she should be
2 joining this panel.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay.

4 THE CLERK: She should be
5 joining Anna Perng, Amy McCann, Chase
6 Trimmer and Sabra Townsend.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And then
8 Cecelia Thompson, if she's available as
9 well.

10 Okay. If you can proceed in
11 that order. Ms. Perng, you are first.
12 If you can just state your name for the
13 record and then proceed with your
14 testimony.

15 MS. PERNG: Thank you,
16 Chairperson Green. My name is Anna
17 Perng. I'm the Cofounder of the
18 Chinatown Disability Advocacy Project.
19 I really appreciate your leadership and
20 the esteemed members of this Committee.
21 When my group learned that according to
22 one study 46 percent of unintentional
23 injury deaths with those with autism
24 occurred by drowning, we wanted to teach
25 our children with disabilities to swim,

1 but sadly for 150 years, Chinatown has
2 never had its own publicly funded pool,
3 rec center or even a library.

4 Our families traveled 45
5 minutes via SEPTA to a privately run Y
6 only to be turned away as others were
7 led in. So when Rebuild's first
8 eligibility map excluded Chinatown and
9 other neighborhoods, we organized. And
10 during our 2018 Inclusion Summit with
11 you, Parks & Rec Commissioner Ott Lovell
12 and Rebuild, diverse residents with
13 disabilities and caregivers shared
14 painfully how historic disinvestment led
15 to automatic segregation that prevented
16 us from forming community connections in
17 our own neighborhoods.

18 The Commissioner promised
19 change. Parks & Rec leaders like Bill
20 Salvatore, inclusive rec leaders across
21 the City teamed up with disability
22 advocates. We trained hundreds of staff
23 on the City's Americans with
24 Disabilities Act policy evolving best
25 practices and launched an employment

1 pilot, PPR, purchase adaptive equipment
2 with more changes to come.

3 The ADA became law 31 years
4 ago. Yet the City's ADA Transition Plan
5 concluded that out of 537 facilities
6 assessed, only 55 were found to have no
7 accessibility issues. From inaccessible
8 parks to rec centers, schools to
9 workplaces and a lack of accessible and
10 affordable housing and services to allow
11 us to age in place with our friends and
12 neighbors, generations of disabled
13 Philadelphians and caregivers have
14 really had enough.

15 As Councilmember Brooks said,
16 the City has received a once-
17 in-a-lifetime infusion of funding
18 through the American Rescue Plan. PPR
19 has proven to be essential during the
20 pandemic, feeding and vaccinating
21 residents, providing safe public spaces
22 and programs of its soaring gun
23 violence. Imagine the impacts PPR could
24 make if it had the funding, facilities
25 and increased staff necessary to

1 equitably serve disabled residents and
2 caregivers across the City. Budgets are
3 moral documents. It's time to spend,
4 not stash. I urge our government to
5 invest in PPR and fulfill the promise of
6 full inclusion and participation for
7 people with disabilities and caregivers
8 in every neighborhood. Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: The next
10 witness can proceed with your testimony.

11 MS. McCANN: Hi. Good
12 afternoon, Chairperson Green and members
13 of the City Council Committee on People
14 with Disabilities and Special Needs. My
15 name is Amy McCann and I'm the Founder
16 and CEO of Carousel Connections, which
17 continues to evolve to support
18 individuals with disabilities as valued
19 and contributing friends, colleagues and
20 neighbors. We use a skill-building
21 approach to increase independence
22 through choices in housing, volunteer
23 and employment opportunities and social
24 and recreational experiences. We
25 believe in choice and the dignity of

1 opportunity, and we appreciate the
2 strengths, perspectives and challenges
3 that we all experience.

4 Several years ago I was
5 introduced to Kathryn Ott Lovell through
6 an Inclusion Working Group. This was a
7 small group of the advocates and
8 professionals that met to plan forward
9 on how best to create an inclusive
10 practice within the PPR system. This
11 led to the summer training that you've
12 heard a little bit about today for RSI
13 staff and Inclusion Summit at Lincoln
14 Financial Field where rec leaders
15 appreciated the opportunity to join and
16 learn together and also a little bit of
17 time on the field and determination to
18 keep the momentum going.

19 Carousel Connections was
20 excited to offer and have their proposal
21 accepted for the inclusion plan. Since
22 this past August, we collaborated with
23 PPR staff to engage in productive
24 conversations with community partners
25 and stakeholders, training on exclusive

1 programming for all staff members and
2 produce an inclusion inventory of
3 resources and can-do projects in pilot
4 sites that can be replicated across the
5 system.

6 We were mindful that this plan
7 be manageable within the current budget,
8 but recognize that there was capital
9 funds needed for larger infrastructures
10 for accessibility. A plan was created
11 as a result of that work and provided
12 the Department a set of recommendations
13 and resources from the synergy of the
14 year. During the year of incredible
15 change and collective stress with the
16 COVID-19 pandemic and racial social
17 justice movement in the City, we work
18 towards developing a process. Through
19 quarterly meetings, community
20 stakeholders came together to
21 brainstorm, share resources and network
22 and creating a vision.

23 We engaged in conversations to
24 describe what is relevant and important
25 to the communities and how to embrace

1 inclusion within the rec centers
2 themselves. Rec leaders, self-
3 advocates, community members and
4 administration opened their doors and
5 their minds to learn and expand
6 inclusion design-thinking. As an
7 inclusion consultant that works with a
8 variety of organizations and settings to
9 promote what we call universal design
10 and inclusion, I left each PPR
11 conversation inspired. There is an
12 incredible amount of work still to be
13 done and finances that are needed to do
14 so. Yet opportunities for voices to be
15 heard, learning and sharing and
16 connections continue to grow.

17 This past March I was
18 particularly drawn to the community
19 conversation for Carousel House prior to
20 the awareness that Carousel House
21 programming would need to be moved to
22 other settings for a short duration. A
23 community conversation is a way to bring
24 a diverse set of voices together to
25 brainstorm strategies and resources that

1 can be used to address challenges facing
2 the community.

3 In short, it provides a fun way
4 to find local solutions and new partners
5 to address issues that matter most. The
6 Carousel House community conversation
7 noted that the personnel welcome all.
8 There's always a welcoming presence.
9 Dale is an ambassador and greets
10 everybody at the door. Everybody knows
11 his name. There are activities that
12 promote teamwork and sportsmanship and
13 varied levels sports team. Regular
14 calendared activities such as bingo
15 night, field trips and dances are a hit.

16 The Carousel House community
17 noted the importance of staff dedication
18 and commitment as folks have shared a
19 little bit about today, accommodating
20 materials such as bingo cards that are
21 offered in Braille, empathy and a need
22 for city-wide training related to
23 disability awareness. They noted that
24 individuals in the Special Olympics
25 program would like to have sports teams

1 closer to their home and not necessarily
2 travel to Carousel or outside of their
3 neighborhood. And if those were to
4 happen, dedicated space and time would
5 need to be available in other sites.

6 It was also discussed that the
7 physical infrastructure needed
8 considerable maintenance, particularly
9 because there are individuals that
10 attend Carousel events with medical
11 concerns. This year was also important
12 to us to hear from the voices from rec
13 leaders. Rec leaders were surveyed
14 throughout the year and noted the
15 following: They needed more staff to
16 run programming, they needed more
17 diverse programming overall, not only
18 for sports. They needed more volunteers
19 and committed community members to come
20 and participate, and they often noted
21 over and over again that they were ready
22 for more opportunities to promote
23 acceptance and inclusion.

24 We talk a lot in our Carousel
25 work about establishing roles, thinking

1 about your role as a neighbor, thinking
2 about your role as a community member,
3 thinking about your role as a worker.

4 And I really appreciated Chairperson
5 Green noting your son, how does he feel
6 welcome. Well, if you see other people
7 working in that site, that helps.

8 If you see your picture and
9 folks that are represented within the
10 walls of the rec center, that helps. So
11 some of those layers are built within
12 our inclusion inventory. But we also
13 wanted to be sure that PPR had an
14 established commitment statement with
15 measurable actions. These include
16 employing a neurodiverse and physically
17 diverse workforce of staff and
18 volunteers that focus on contributions,
19 skilled development and reciprocity,
20 ensuring that all Parks & Rec spaces are
21 working towards meeting the standard of
22 the ADA, creating programming and
23 experiences that cater to a diverse
24 population by seeking input from our
25 neuro and physically diverse community,

1 we call them self-advocates, and
2 empowering individuals with safety and
3 belonging in all centers while infusing
4 trauma-informed care practice into
5 everyday experiences. Building
6 community partnerships that promote
7 sharing resources and educating and
8 training staff on creating atmospheres
9 of inclusion.

10 The plan also notes the need of
11 physical infrastructure to be accessible
12 and the need for capital funds in order
13 to make this happen. We were really
14 honored to be able to work closely with
15 Chase Trimmer, who you'll hear from in a
16 bit from Special Olympics and Sabra
17 Townsend of Jefferson Center for
18 Neurodiversity, particularly because
19 this type of work is not a silo. We
20 need multiple layers within our
21 resources.

22 Research demonstrates that for
23 individuals with disabilities what
24 matters most to the quality of life is
25 the number of people who they regularly

1 connect, build trust and get involved
2 with another. With small to big
3 actions, we can promote connections and
4 social inclusion within a neurodiverse
5 community. Inclusion has evolved, from
6 exclusion to segregation to integration
7 to inclusion. We recognize the
8 incredible barriers of the system,
9 community interpersonal and personal
10 levels towards inclusion. But
11 Philadelphia Parks & Rec now has the
12 opportunity to develop inclusive
13 practices and strategies as a model for
14 other cities and push the evolution
15 towards belonging.

16 And I'm going to introduce
17 Chase Trimmer, Special Olympics.

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Chase, if
19 you can state your name for the record
20 and then proceed with your testimony.

21 MR. TRIMMER: Absolutely. Good
22 afternoon, Chairperson Green and members
23 of City Council Committee. I am Chase
24 Trimmer, Director of the Philadelphia
25 Program for Special Olympics,

1 Pennsylvania. I'm also a resident of
2 Philadelphia. I'm in the 1st
3 Councilmanic District, and thank you so
4 much for sharing -- or sorry, thank you
5 for the opportunity to share testimony
6 today. Certainly grateful to be
7 recognized as an organization that can
8 be a partner in this effort among so
9 many really great and strong partners
10 across the spectrum of providers in the
11 City of Philadelphia.

12 My main goal is to share today
13 that Special Olympics Pennsylvania and
14 our Philadelphia program stand ready to
15 continue to support this work. Special
16 Olympics Pennsylvania is certainly proud
17 to be a pioneer in a movement for social
18 change through transformative and
19 inclusive power of sports. Our goal is
20 to help people with intellectual
21 disabilities develop essential life
22 skills and lead healthier lifestyles,
23 whether that be through health and
24 fitness or through the connectedness to
25 their peers of similar backgrounds and

1 lived experience as well as experiences
2 unlike their own.

3 Our goal is to help folks
4 become more productive and accepted
5 members of the communities where they're
6 not only represented visually, but they
7 feel that sense of belonging. But
8 people with intellectual disabilities
9 continue to face multiple challenges,
10 especially in cities like Philadelphia.
11 An inclusive city is one that ensures
12 people of all abilities are involved in
13 their communities. They are able to
14 effectively pursue those opportunities
15 and contribute to safely express
16 themselves and exercise their rights.
17 These cities provide access and
18 opportunities for everyone to take part
19 in employment, education, housing,
20 health and similarly critical to access
21 community services like parks and
22 recreation in their neighborhood.

23 The Philadelphia Program for
24 Special Olympics, we serve over 1,000
25 individuals with intellectual

1 disabilities through partnerships with
2 community organizations, the School
3 District of Philadelphia and
4 Philadelphia Parks & Recreation. For
5 over 30 years, PPR centers have hosted
6 Special Olympics programming, including
7 the Carousel House Recreation Center.

8 Many Special Olympics athletes
9 have had the opportunity to train in
10 sports like basketball at Carousel House
11 and many go on to be in state and
12 national levels, Special Olympics
13 competitions. Carousel House has
14 provided certainly an affirming,
15 accessible and sacred space for many
16 people with disabilities, including
17 those beyond the constituency that
18 Special Olympics primarily serve, those
19 with intellectual disabilities, but the
20 broader group.

21 We also hear however from many
22 people with intellectual disabilities
23 throughout the City who question the
24 need to travel outside of their own
25 community across the City to play on a

1 team and experience the joy of sports
2 that many are able to do within blocks
3 across this really comprehensive system
4 here in the City. In the City with the
5 highest disability rate among the
6 largest U.S. cities, this barrier to
7 access and inclusion certainly needs to
8 change. There is much work to be done
9 to remove these barriers, but the safe
10 space that people with disabilities have
11 experienced at Carousel House must be
12 prioritized within a community-based
13 model of inclusion.

14 The 2018 Special Olympics has
15 also been involved in an inclusion pilot
16 work group with many of our friends and
17 contacts and collaborators testifying
18 today. We work closely with Parks &
19 Rec's staff to address programmatic
20 accessibility and specifically
21 supporting an inclusion organizational
22 culture, which I think is identified as
23 a very key foundational step for this
24 process.

25 Special Olympics is committed

1 to continuing our collaboration with
2 Philadelphia Parks & Recreation to
3 provide inclusive sports and rec
4 opportunities within every neighborhood
5 through sports training for teams of
6 people with intellectual disabilities to
7 get the need to provide that safe-
8 created affirming space for people with
9 physical and learning differences to
10 share experiences together, but also are
11 unified sports programs that bring
12 people with and without intellectual
13 disabilities together to experience
14 meaningful involvement on a team.
15 That's something that I believe that
16 Ms. Millar has mentioned before about
17 meaningful involvement, and we stand
18 ready including it in our strategic plan
19 as a statewide organization not only in
20 our goals, but in dedicating resources
21 to support this growth and this
22 increased experience that the City of
23 Philadelphia provides for all residents.
24 So thank you again for the opportunity
25 to share the testimony and for your

1 committed actions to promote equity and
2 inclusion for all Philadelphians.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
4 Chase.

5 Ms. Townsend.

6 MS. TOWNSEND: (Muted).

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN:

8 Ms. Townsend, I believe you are on mute.

9 MS. TOWNSEND: Good afternoon,
10 Councilmember Green and members of the
11 City Council Committee on People with
12 Disabilities and Special Needs, our
13 hearing attendees and fellow
14 Philadelphians. Thank you for the
15 opportunity to testify. I am Sabra
16 Townsend and while I have lived other
17 places, Philadelphia is home.

18 Today I represent the Jefferson
19 Center for Autism and Neurodiversity.
20 I'm also the mother of a young adult who
21 has participated in unified sports
22 through the School District and Special
23 Olympics and numerous activities at the
24 many rec centers and playgrounds
25 throughout the City. At the Jefferson

1 Center for Autism and Neurodiversity,
2 JEF CAN, our mission is to be a thought
3 leader and a creator force behind
4 interdisciplinary solutions that enable
5 individuals with autism and other
6 neurodiverse conditions to participate
7 more fully in the world at large through
8 the development of a new universal
9 design.

10 We take into account the
11 continuation of care over time, the
12 patient's role in the family and school
13 and the community, and we're searching
14 for interventions that best suit the
15 needs of our patients. In short, we
16 don't look at this as an either-or
17 situation. We look at it as and-both.
18 At JEF CAN, we've served alongside
19 Special Olympics PA to provide
20 consulting services to the Philadelphia
21 Parks & Recreation Department, on that
22 work to create an increased inclusive
23 programming across the City. The work
24 efforts have included meetings,
25 conversations, trainings and pre-COVID

1 onsite activities with stakeholders,
2 self-advocates, community members and
3 staff.

4 As we aspire to a healthier,
5 more equitable City, we are heartened to
6 hear the spirited conversations about
7 how to serve all Philadelphians. We ask
8 people what matters to them. We educate
9 anyone within earshot who will listen.
10 We measure outcomes to see what changes
11 can happen, and we create opportunities
12 for all to participate. We listen for
13 life lessons and we consider the built
14 environment. This is challenging,
15 necessary work and we're very glad to be
16 an ongoing part of it in Philadelphia
17 with Parks & Rec and our Councilmanic
18 support. Thank you so much.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
20 Ms. Townsend.

21 Cecilia Thompson.

22 MS. THOMPSON: Thank you,
23 Councilman Green and members of the
24 Committee on People with Disabilities
25 and Special Needs, for this opportunity

1 and thank you, Chairperson Green, for
2 the accommodation. My name is Cecelia
3 Thompson and I'm testifying as a
4 community person on Resolution 210128,
5 specifically pertaining to the Carousel
6 House and ADA compliance at Parks & Rec
7 facilities in Philadelphia.

8 My now 22-year-old living with
9 autism unfortunately had bad experiences
10 when he was younger at the Carousel
11 House. I want to be clear, I love the
12 idea of the Carousel House, that it was
13 started for individuals with physical
14 needs, but my son doesn't have a
15 physical need. Again, he lives with
16 severe autism and this were his
17 experiences as someone living on the
18 spectrum.

19 When he was younger in
20 elementary school, we participated in
21 the Carousel House summer camp, which at
22 that time we spent two weeks based on
23 your zip code. At first we were denied
24 due to his autism. However, after
25 advocating for him, he got into the

1 two-week summer program. However,
2 initially he was ostracized from many of
3 the activities because the staff then
4 did not know how to address individuals
5 living with autism.

6 However, his TSS worker
7 provided the support he needed so that
8 he was not mistreated and participated
9 in activities. Throughout his years
10 whenever we would have activities --
11 whenever I wanted him to participate in
12 activities inside the facility and
13 shared that he was on the spectrum, I
14 was always told that the facility was
15 for those with physical disabilities.

16 Again, I want to be clear, I
17 have friends who have children with
18 physical disabilities, and to me a
19 disability is a disability. Their
20 challenges are different from mine, but
21 we all have challenges with our children
22 in their respective exceptionality.
23 Again, when I would advocate and state
24 that this is for individuals with all
25 disabilities, while the pushback was

1 unpleasant, he would participate with
2 the help of his support person.

3 Finally, when he became 18
4 years old, we attended a few of the
5 dances. Again, for him we were always
6 told we don't have the support for
7 individuals living with autism, but I
8 always had a support person with me to
9 help him participate. After the third
10 time, I just said we will find some
11 place where my child is welcome. And as
12 a parent, I don't always want to be
13 advocating or I don't want to be in
14 advocacy mode, and I definitely didn't
15 want to be in advocacy mode at the
16 Carousel House, which I thought was for
17 all exceptionalities. But again, I am
18 for the idea of the Carousel House. So
19 families like me who have children
20 living on the spectrum or those with
21 intellectual developmental disabilities
22 can go somewhere where you don't have to
23 be on advocacy mode, but where you can
24 just be a parent of a child or a parent
25 of an individual.

1 Furthermore, I understand
2 there's going to be a new advisory group
3 for the Carousel House, and I'm
4 requesting that this information be
5 known for the public and consist of a
6 variety of stakeholders, including those
7 who live in the neighborhood and also
8 have individuals with all types of
9 disabilities, including those living
10 with autism, living with intellectual
11 disabilities and living with
12 developmental disabilities.

13 The only place that the
14 Department of Recreation Facility that I
15 found welcoming to my son was the Mill
16 Creek Playground on 48th and Brown. It
17 was under a different site director.
18 They have a pool and the lifeguard was
19 trained on interacting with individuals
20 with autism. For three years that was
21 the place that my son and his support
22 person and myself sometimes went to
23 utilize the pool during the hot summers
24 in Philadelphia.

25 Again, I love the idea of the

1 Carousel House. And I'm going there at
2 different stages in my son's life, and
3 it appears that the staff feel that was
4 presented to me that and other people
5 who had the same challenge but are
6 working right now could not be here to
7 testify, that if you have an individual
8 living with autism, you're given the
9 spill that this is a facility for
10 individuals with physical disabilities
11 only.

12 I hope in the future when you
13 get the new Carousel House building,
14 that there's a new idea among the staff,
15 that this is for everyone and not just
16 given the spill that this is only for
17 people with disabilities when there's a
18 disability that you may not understand.
19 And if staff need training, all staff in
20 all rec facilities need to be trained on
21 all disabilities or at least know who to
22 contact when a particular individual
23 with an exceptionality is partaking in
24 our parks and recreations. Thank you
25 for the opportunity again to speak this

1 afternoon.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
3 Ms. Thompson, for your testimony and
4 your advocacy, not only for the work
5 you've done and advocating on behalf of
6 your son, but also within the School
7 District prior to becoming a member of
8 the School Board and for advocating for
9 children around the City that have a
10 physical and/or learning difference as
11 well as, Ms. Perng, for your testimony.
12 You've always been an advocate on these
13 issues in a lot of different respects.

14 And both of you, I kind of
15 follow your leadership in so many ways.
16 Both of you have been able to advocate
17 regarding these issues on behalf of not
18 just your children but children
19 throughout the City of Philadelphia.

20 Chase, thank you for the work
21 that you do at Special Olympics. You
22 continue to work hard. You make the
23 City of Philadelphia the city of
24 inclusion by providing opportunities for
25 people all around the City of

1 Philadelphia.

2 Sabra, we've known each other
3 for a long time, and also the advocacy
4 that you've done not only for your son,
5 but for children around the City of
6 Philadelphia now working with Dr. Wendy
7 Ross at Jefferson, definitely looking
8 forward to ongoing work that you've been
9 doing.

10 And, Ms. McCann, it was a
11 pleasure to see you once again. Thank
12 you for your work at that Inclusion
13 Summit.

14 I do have a question for
15 Commissioner Ott Lovell, especially in
16 response to the comments that were made
17 by Ms. Thompson. The legislation that
18 was introduced and passed by
19 Councilmember Bass makes reference to
20 people with differences, both physical
21 and nonphysical differences. And so,
22 some of the things that Ms. Thompson
23 spoke to are concerning in reference to
24 some of the statements that were made
25 that she had stated and I have also

1 heard that from some others as well.
2 Can you give some perspective on that
3 issue?

4 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Well,
5 I'd be happy to, Chairman. Those
6 comments were just disturbing to me too,
7 and I'm so sorry that that was her and
8 her family's experience. It should not
9 have been, and this is again just
10 obvious that we have to make more
11 efforts around how we train our staff
12 and what's acceptable in terms of our
13 service to all residents of the City of
14 Philadelphia and beyond.

15 And I will say that, you know,
16 again having the inclusion plan and the
17 training curriculum, the resources, but
18 most importantly that leadership
19 position that is going to work one-on-
20 one with staff and our managers to
21 ensure that we are consistent in our
22 service delivery to all individuals is
23 just critically important. So I think
24 for me it amplifies the need for that
25 larger commitment from our Department to

1 do better and to be better. I'm very
2 saddened to hear about her experience.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And just to
4 state for the record, it is the goal of
5 the Parks & Recreation Department for
6 all the facilities to be available for
7 people of all differences, both learning
8 and/or physical differences?

9 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Every
10 single human, every single human, yes.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Commissioner.

13 Any other questions from
14 members of Council?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Seeing none,
17 we will move on to the next witness, the
18 next panel. The next panel will begin
19 with -- well, I'm sorry. Mr. Iannuzzi,
20 please state the names for the next
21 panel and considering -- well, I'll
22 allow you state the witnesses for our
23 next panel.

24 THE CLERK: My apologies,
25 Mr. Chair.

1 The next panel will include
2 Tamar Riley and Mike Martin.

3 MS. RILEY: Good afternoon,
4 Chairman Green.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If you can
6 just state your name for the record and
7 then proceed with your testimony, and
8 then we'll have Mr. Martin do the same
9 after you finish with your testimony.

10 MS. RILEY: Okay. Thank you.
11 My name is Tamar Riley. I'm a parent as
12 well as the President of Carousel House
13 Advisory Council. Good afternoon,
14 Councilman. Good afternoon,
15 Councilmembers and others. I'm here to
16 present to Council the Carousel House's
17 position on the new plan the City has
18 for inclusion.

19 The Carousel House Advisory
20 Council does not agree with the plan
21 that the City has made, and we have
22 great concerns that the new plan of
23 inclusion will not be in the best
24 interest for the people with
25 disabilities community. We believe that

1 the people with disabilities community
2 should be able to be involved in
3 activities based on their personal
4 preference and desire and a center
5 dedicated exclusively for their needs.

6 It's important for all people
7 to be able to feel accepted, welcomed
8 and have a sense of belonging and not be
9 destigmatized. The Carousel House is
10 our place, a special place. It is also
11 important that people with disabilities
12 feel safe. In the 28 years that I have
13 been affiliated with the Carousel House,
14 there's never been an incident involving
15 gun violence or any other type of
16 violence including a weapon. At the
17 Carousel House, participants do fun, not
18 guns.

19 Also, it's not a safe idea to
20 place people with special needs
21 programming throughout the City in
22 various recreation centers, which we
23 have participants that ride public
24 transportation and it will be a burden
25 and hardship for them to travel all over

1 the City to access programming. Some of
2 our participants attend multiple
3 programs at the Carousel House on a
4 daily and weekly basis. The plan of
5 inclusion would be detrimental for them
6 and create unsafe conditions. This is
7 not safe, not safe, not safe. God
8 forbid an incident such as a fire or an
9 unforeseen incident occurs, who will be
10 responsible for the safety and well-
11 being of seeing that a special needs
12 participant is safe. A lot of our
13 consumers have sensory challenges and
14 may or may not be able to follow
15 directions in the case of an incident.
16 And for them to be surrounded by people
17 who are unknown to them is not a good
18 idea.

19 The Carousel House is centrally
20 located, has ample parking and was
21 designed to be fully accessible for the
22 people with disabilities community. Any
23 car or van can let a participant out
24 within 3 feet of the entrance. This is
25 truly a unique place. Inclusion is not

1 the answer for the people with
2 disabilities community when it comes to
3 social and recreation programs. In an
4 ideal world, it might be if we had a
5 bottomless bucket of money, but we know
6 in the real world we do not. The Parks
7 & Rec budget has been dwindling over the
8 past several years. Lastly, I am
9 appealing to you to please help us save
10 our place, a special place. Thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Ms. Riley.

13 Mr. Martin, please state your
14 name for the record and proceed with
15 your testimony.

16 MR. MARTIN: Yes, my name is
17 Michael Martin. And good afternoon,
18 Chairman Green and all. I'm the
19 Treasurer of Carousel House Advisory
20 Council and a wheelchair user for the
21 last 35 years. I've been involved with
22 Carousel House for over 20 years.

23 A little brief description, we
24 have over 19 programs that run
25 throughout the year. We host six

1 (inaudible) per year and those dances
2 routinely have 250 people at each dance.
3 We end up turning people away. We host
4 two national wheelchair basketball
5 tournaments, the Junior Wheelchair
6 Tournament and Adult Wheelchair
7 Tournament (inaudible) across the United
8 States that showcase the City's
9 commitment to the disability community.

10 We have over 700 names on our
11 participant list, these are names and
12 addresses, in some cases telephone
13 numbers. Our total volunteers number
14 over 50. And speaking of the workplace
15 development plan, Carousel House has had
16 a workplace development plan for over 15
17 years. We currently have two disabled
18 clients, Leroy and Eric, as part of our
19 maintenance staff.

20 Ms. Ott Lovell has stated that
21 16 percent of the population in
22 Philadelphia has some type of cognitive
23 or physical disability. We need as many
24 rec centers as possible in operation to
25 serve the disabled community. Carousel

1 House is one of and maybe the only truly
2 100 percent accessible center. This
3 means onsite parking for loading and
4 unloading and adequate parking for CCT
5 vehicles, accessible entrance,
6 accessible restroom, accessible indoor
7 pool, fitness center, computer lab and
8 meeting rooms. Every rec center in the
9 City is suffering from a lack of
10 maintenance and insufficient staffing.

11 Carousel work orders have been
12 denied month after month, year after
13 year. We've watched as normal
14 maintenance issues mushroom into capital
15 improvements. Many normal maintenance
16 issues left unattended necessitates a
17 capital improvement line item. With all
18 this said, how can a building that is
19 over 35 years old be damaged beyond
20 repair. But throughout all of this,
21 Carousel House has served and advanced
22 the mission of the disabled community.
23 We are not an idea or a goal or a
24 benchmark or a pilot program. We are a
25 recreation center that works day-in and

1 day-out for the last 35 years.

2 We have been in the trenches,
3 not just talking about ideas, but
4 implementing those ideas. Why would you
5 demolish our center? How would that
6 serve the inclusion model adopted by the
7 City? As mentioned by Councilperson
8 Bass, the Inclusive Parks and Playground
9 bill was signed into law in 2016, but we
10 still do not have a comprehensive plan
11 for inclusion and accessibility. The
12 goal of the Carousel House Advisory
13 Council is to repair and reopen Carousel
14 House and to save our special place.
15 Thank you very much all.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
17 Mr. Martin, for your testimony as well
18 as Ms. Riley. I do have to note once
19 again for the record that the chat
20 feature will only be used by members of
21 Council due to the Sunshine Act.

22 But, Ms. Draper and
23 Mr. Dougherty, I noticed that you are
24 interested in testifying. I don't see
25 you on our list of scheduled witnesses,

1 but we will have additional witnesses at
2 the end of this matter.

3 With that, are there any
4 questions from members of Council as we
5 prepare for the next group of
6 witnesses -- I do have a question for
7 the Commissioner in reference to the
8 inclusion plan.

9 One, this plan from my
10 understanding was initially going to
11 release at a later time, but that was
12 moved up. And also, two, what was the
13 engagement with the Advisory Council in
14 the inclusion plan as it pertains to the
15 Carousel House?

16 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:
17 Chairman, I missed your first question.
18 I apologize.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: One, my
20 understanding is that the city-wide
21 inclusion plan was scheduled to be
22 released, but has been moved up to an
23 earlier time period, that's one. And
24 two, what has been the involvement of
25 the members of the Advisory Council for

1 Carousel House, their involvement in
2 that inclusive plan specifically as it
3 pertains to Carousel House?

4 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes.

5 So the first question, we have had sort
6 of a fluid timeline when the inclusion
7 plan would be released. It's just about
8 finalized. To be honest, I was waiting
9 for the budget to be passed so I could
10 do it hopefully when we make a public
11 announcement around the new position
12 that we will be hiring for and really
13 needed to know where things stood with
14 the budget.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. So
16 just to clarify, when people have been
17 talking about an inclusion plan, which I
18 heard from Ms. Riley and Mr. Martin,
19 they're making reference to from my
20 understanding the inclusion plan in
21 reference to Carousel House, not the
22 plan that you're talking about that will
23 be released soon?

24 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I'm
25 not sure I understand what the other

1 plan is.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Well,
3 I'm just making sure I understand
4 because they talked about inclusion and
5 inclusion plan. And that's why I asked
6 both questions.

7 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yeah.
8 I thought they were talking about the
9 inclusion plan that we're doing, so
10 maybe I misunderstood.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, maybe
12 you can clarify. Have members of the
13 Advisory Council participated in the
14 city-wide inclusion plan that they're
15 finalizing and/or have they been engaged
16 in conversations in reference to
17 activities at the Carousel House and --

18 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Got
19 you.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: -- and other
21 locations?

22 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Got
23 you. I understand. There was a
24 community conversation that I think Amy
25 McCann mentioned that involved the

1 Carousel House Advisory Council. I'm
2 looking for the date of that -- that was
3 on March -- I'm sorry. There was an
4 introductory meeting between our
5 consultants for the inclusion plan and
6 the Advisory Council on March 9th, and
7 then on March 23rd we held a community
8 conversation around the inclusion plan
9 with the Advisory Council of Carousel
10 House.

11 And then once we realized -- we
12 went to reopen rec centers around the
13 first week of April post-COVID, all of
14 our recreation centers, and that's when
15 we really determined how badly the needs
16 were at Carousel House. Then I met with
17 the Advisory Council soon after we made
18 the determination that we would not be
19 able to reopen it until the new facility
20 was built. So I met with the Carousel
21 House Advisory Council on April 13th.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. So
23 basically, there was a conversation with
24 the Advisory Council about the status of
25 the Carousel House as well as there was

1 this engagement process that was used as
2 a way to have their input as well as
3 others input regarding the inclusion
4 plan that will be released shortly?

5 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: Yes.
6 There were dozens of community
7 conversations that happened around the
8 City with various stakeholders in
9 various communities, but there was a
10 specific one for the Carousel House
11 Advisory Council, and some other
12 stakeholders, the staff at the Carousel
13 House was included in that as well. And
14 then we had a separate meeting once
15 we -- the Carousel House Advisory
16 Council was really the first group we
17 met with when we realized what would
18 need to happen with Carousel House and
19 the facility itself.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So some of
21 the commentary made by Ms. Riley and
22 Mr. Martin talked about the staffing of
23 Carousel House and why that because the
24 staffing of that location made it such
25 an inclusive space. As you are

1 finalizing this inclusion plan for
2 facilities across the City, will that
3 same level of staffing be identified at
4 certain locations?

5 I know earlier in the hearing
6 Gustine Lake was mentioned as a location
7 where some services will be housed
8 possibly. And so, is the same type of
9 staff attention that was provided at
10 Carousel House be at Gustine Lake and
11 other locations?

12 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL:

13 That's our hope. To be honest, the
14 staff at Carousel House are recreation
15 leaders and they receive the same
16 training as recreation leaders at other
17 places in our system, and the Carousel
18 House director is a woman named Erica
19 Young who is now serving temporarily as
20 the District Manager for us, but their
21 backgrounds are in recreation, the same
22 as all of the other staff that come
23 through our system, so they like any of
24 our recreation centers have built
25 special relationships with their

1 constituents just like our recreation
2 centers in other facilities, but they
3 don't have specific backgrounds to work
4 with individuals at Carousel House.

5 With that said, once we -- our
6 goal is to once we hire this leadership
7 position of a Director of Inclusion
8 Services and that person helps us to
9 implement our inclusion plan, a goal
10 that I would have provided, we can have
11 the funding would be to hire more
12 individuals who have backgrounds in
13 working with people with various needs
14 and to have them as resources throughout
15 our system, right, in addition to
16 training our own staff as we are doing,
17 really have been doing since the
18 Inclusion Summit and beyond around the
19 resources and opportunities that we can
20 offer to them to better serve those
21 audiences.

22 But certainly, our goal in
23 addition to all of that is that the
24 existing staff who've worked at Carousel
25 House historically, some of them would

1 move with some of the programs, right,
2 that they led. So programs that they
3 led, they could continue to lead those
4 programs at new facilities, not new
5 facilities but different facilities
6 where those programs would now be
7 housed.

8 Likewise we would hope that in
9 these places what we've done through the
10 Inclusion Working Group is we've
11 actually had some pilot programs at
12 other facilities throughout our system
13 that are not dedicated to people with
14 special needs. They're just regular old
15 recreation centers, and what we have
16 found is when we have engaged staff at
17 those facilities and trained them to
18 work with individuals, whether it's
19 supervising them like J.J. and David or
20 other folks, they're incredibly
21 receptive as Amy was saying to the idea
22 of expanding their knowledge-base about
23 how best to serve these individuals.

24 That's our hope, is that we
25 can -- the same relationship that

1 individuals built with the staff at
2 Carousel House, we want those
3 relationships to be able to be formed
4 with all of our staff at all of our
5 recreation centers. That's our ultimate
6 goal. And we know it's baby steps. In
7 the meantime, any programs that our
8 staff were leading, those staff will
9 come with those programs.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And I know
11 you stated that the individuals of the
12 Carousel House who are recreation
13 department staff may not have had
14 specialized education or training, and I
15 can be wrong in this assumption, but
16 from years of working at the Carousel
17 House and also developing an affinity of
18 working there, they've developed an
19 expertise in that area and developed
20 relationships with individuals at the
21 Carousel House, not only the Advisory
22 Council but others that frequent that
23 recreation center. So learning is not
24 just from being in the classroom, it's
25 also by experience. And I would dare

1 say they have developed the expertise in
2 that regard even though they may not
3 have been training in that first
4 perspective. And then --

5 COMMISSIONER OTT LOVELL: I
6 totally agree with you, Chairman. If I
7 can just add that that is exactly what
8 we see happen at these other facilities
9 where we've introduced some of these new
10 programs. For example, at Tarken
11 Recreation Center we introduced a
12 sensory skating program. That staff are
13 learning through that experience and
14 through their relationships with those
15 individuals, and that's our hope at all
16 of our facilities that those -- just
17 like people make relationships with any
18 person who attends their programs, that
19 those relationships and expertise will
20 be developed through those relationships
21 and that experience.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
23 Commissioner. I want to thank all the
24 witnesses for this panel for your
25 advocacy and for your indulgence this

1 afternoon for what has already been a
2 long hearing, but it's an opportunity to
3 have all of these views expressed
4 regarding this important issue.

5 Mr. Iannuzzi, if you can call
6 the next panel of witnesses.

7 THE CLERK: Jaleel King,
8 Katherine Protenic, A.J. Nanayakkara,
9 Caitlin Chasar.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
11 And if you can please proceed with your
12 testimony by stating your name for the
13 record and then continue.

14 MR. KING: Am I up first? I'm
15 sorry.

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes, you are
17 first, Mr. King.

18 MR. KING: My name is Jaleel
19 King. I'm a resident of Philadelphia.
20 When I was 8 years old, I used to live
21 in South Philly at the time and I got
22 shot in the back with a sawed-off
23 shotgun consequently becoming paralyzed.
24 I guess part of my rehab was dealing
25 with and being a part of some aspects of

1 Carousel House, but I think that part of
2 the reason why I'm here is because in
3 the grand scheme of things I've kind of
4 become a cynic about some of the things
5 that happened when it comes to people
6 with disabilities or people who more or
7 less have a much more muted voice within
8 the communities.

9 Some of the things that people
10 have said would be nice in relation to a
11 bigger, better, badder Carousel House.
12 But the problem ultimately is time, and
13 everything seems to take so much longer
14 when it comes to anything that revolves
15 around inclusion. And I have a saying,
16 that what you do for the least of us you
17 do for the rest of us quite frankly.

18 And case in point would be
19 something like curb cuts. I remember
20 years ago right at the start of ADA
21 where we were protesting about having
22 accessible buses, and had one bus driver
23 who said something about the curb cuts
24 and how people didn't use them. Well,
25 nowadays if you go anywhere and there's

1 not a curb cut, you'll find a lot of
2 people complaining mostly because it's
3 useful for a lot more people than just
4 people living with disabilities. And I
5 deal with this. As much as I love my
6 City, I still find myself being
7 penalized for my disability even through
8 crazy parking terms for people with
9 disabilities and those types of policies
10 being put in place without understanding
11 the economic and social aspects of what
12 it takes for people with disabilities to
13 even get a car, have a car and get a car
14 made to be fully accessible as far as
15 the cost is concerned while still being
16 penalized without realizing a lot of us
17 are still living on subsidized incomes.

18 A lot of what I liked about the
19 Inglis House is that it was actually --
20 I'm sorry, not Inglis House. But with
21 the Carousel House was that it actually
22 was served by at least three public
23 transportation routes, which made
24 getting there by bus easier. Yes, it's
25 not the most convenient location for

1 people depending on where you're coming
2 from. But there's been times where I
3 currently live, and I guess they would
4 consider this North Center City at this
5 stage, where I could catch one bus to
6 get there. And there were times where I
7 lived in other places where I could
8 catch another bus, but I have options.

9 And if we're not talking about
10 building up something that brings back
11 these types of options that gives
12 people, I guess, the independence to be
13 able to get there themselves as well,
14 then we also have a problem. Also the
15 lack of information is also a problem as
16 well as far as trying to figure out what
17 places are accessible.

18 Something like I would think
19 having something like VisitPhilly.com
20 being a nice avenue as far as
21 VisitPhilly.com accessibility in having
22 a list of places that are accessible in
23 the ways in which some people have
24 talked about. We're talking about from
25 what I understand -- I've been on a call

1 for a long time so I apologize.

2 We're talking about having
3 hundreds of pools, but only seven of
4 them are accessible, how do you figure
5 out which pools are accessible and when.
6 So having the ease of access to
7 information also will benefit a lot of
8 people with disabilities, whether it be
9 intellectual or physical. It just seems
10 to be a lot of little things that can go
11 a long way, with at least taking some of
12 the hurt from what is being proposed as
13 far as Carousel House is concerned.

14 I used to play wheelchair
15 basketball there, and a lot of things
16 that are wrong there are not self-
17 inflicted but inflicted from other
18 things. So for instance, the roof was
19 damaged because of high CCT cars that
20 would hit the roof on occasion, and
21 guess what, that stuff was never
22 repaired. There's just a lot of little
23 things that equate. And honestly, the
24 City has done a bad job at taking care
25 of its people.

1 And considering the gun
2 violence that we have right now, we're
3 finding that we're having more and more
4 people who are now finding themselves in
5 a very similar situation that I face on
6 a daily basis even through no fault of
7 their own or through whatever access.
8 Either way they still have to live and
9 figure out what's best.

10 We at one point in time were
11 running a support group for people who
12 became disabled through gun violence.
13 And pre-COVID, our meeting ground was in
14 fact Carousel House because it was a
15 very central location. As others have
16 pointed out, there was ample parking.
17 And again, plenty of public
18 transportation so it was very easy to
19 get to. And I can understand why people
20 would want something that is a little
21 bit more convenient, but I guess my
22 question then would be if the City has
23 not been proactive about making
24 inclusion a thing going forward post-
25 Carousel House, how long do people with

1 disabilities who are in need of these
2 services have to wait once Carousel
3 House is no longer there and how far do
4 we have to travel. Because if you're
5 thinking about it, we're talking about
6 facilities that are in various different
7 places that have different programs that
8 may not suit each person or people who
9 need to utilize multiple programs, but
10 have issues with getting to these
11 programs because one may be in the
12 Northeast, one may be in South Philly
13 one week, one may be in Northwest
14 another week. So find ways to kind of,
15 again, get this information out.

16 Like I said, I'm a bit more of
17 a cynic in the situation because I've
18 lived with this situation and struggled.
19 And I feel as though in my City I've
20 done everything right only to feel like
21 I'm still struggling at every juncture
22 with everything when it comes to my
23 disability, either through education,
24 again parking situations where I'm
25 getting tickets for parking in

1 handicapped zones, where I will admit
2 that my van is not accessible mostly
3 because of the cost that's associated
4 with getting a van to be accessible.
5 But a lot of the vans that are made
6 accessible are made accessible for
7 people who are caretakers, not
8 necessarily people who are drivers. And
9 I say that because again these are
10 things that are overlooked in the grand
11 scheme of things. And even programs
12 that are supposed to help you have
13 various tight reasons for why they won't
14 help you.

15 If your car basically is not
16 brand new, they will not assist you with
17 a lot of the accessible things that it
18 necessitates, what you would need. But
19 I just personally would just like to see
20 more information that is pushed out in a
21 better way of communicating on a regular
22 basis, even if it's a mailing list that
23 people could sign up for that is
24 regularly updated on a weekly basis or
25 something like that. I think that

1 there's some little things that people
2 can do to take this thing out of what is
3 possibly going to be happening with
4 Carousel.

5 I agree with other people it's
6 a little of a new building considering
7 that it's kind of scheduled for
8 crushing, but at the same time it's so
9 much amplification going on, I'm just
10 wondering how long before we get
11 anything that's remotely like Carousel
12 House. Thank you guys for your time.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
14 I'd like to hear from the next witness.

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Ms. --

17 MS. PROTENIC: Yeah, I'm sorry.
18 I'm trying to figure out how to get my
19 picture here. I've never used this
20 platform before. Can you hear me?

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes, we can.

22 MS. PROTENIC: But you can't
23 see me. Okay. Wait a minute.

24 MR. KING: Your picture is up.
25 Your picture is up.

1 MS. PROTENIC: Oh, it is up.
2 Okay. I'm sorry. Okay. Thank you.
3 Good afternoon. My name is Katherine
4 Protenic. I'm the Founder and
5 facilitator of a group called the
6 Rolling Rebels. We're a group of alumni
7 from Widener Memorial School where I
8 taught for 39 years. Our members range
9 in age from 25 to 69 and have multiple
10 physical, intellectual and sensory
11 disabilities. The group also includes
12 their attendance, their families and
13 some wonderful volunteers. We function
14 as a community and everything that
15 happens is facilitated by volunteers.

16 Starting in 2013, we have met
17 at Carousel House once a month and in
18 the community once a month until the
19 pandemic. We use Carousel House in many
20 ways, their large auditorium for our
21 meetings where we do crafts, game days,
22 talent shows, swap meets, support group
23 meetings, holiday and birthday parties.
24 We use their kitchen to cook and heat up
25 food. We also use the smaller room when

1 we want to split into two groups. We
2 attend their fundraiser, The Carousel
3 Ball and attended the Rec Fest when it
4 was held there.

5 Carousel House has always
6 welcomed us. I trust as do my members
7 that if I am late getting there, someone
8 will be there to greet them. This is
9 important to my members, many of whom
10 have memory difficulties, trouble
11 driving their power chairs, difficulty
12 with problem-solving, seizures and
13 vision and hearing loss. They are able
14 to use Carousel House independently on
15 CCT because it is a place that knows and
16 understands their challenges.

17 The staff has waited for late-
18 hour transit vans and helped people
19 contact paratransit when necessary.
20 Many of my members have also
21 participated in the dances, art classes,
22 movie nights and day camp at Carousel.
23 I do not understand why we as users of
24 Carousel House were not consulted when
25 plans were being discussed for the

1 facility. Not one user of Carousel
2 House within our community was asked for
3 their opinion during the years when
4 these discussions were being held.

5 Why are other people who may
6 never have used the facility allowed to
7 speak for us. Maybe their needs are
8 different, and more importantly, maybe
9 their goals and wishes are different.

10 Why can't everyone have a choice of the
11 type of facility they attend. Who are
12 we hurting if we provide accessibility
13 city-wide, which I fully support, as
14 well as a center for those who need and
15 prefer it. Why can the users not decide
16 what they need and prefer, because it's
17 politically incorrect.

18 Finally, you are narrowing
19 rather than expanding the opportunities
20 for people with disabilities. For one
21 thing, the projected goal of full
22 accessibility is not for another seven
23 or eight years. People who only feel
24 safe in a center setting will now stay
25 home if the way Carousel is handled is

1 changed.

2 The members of my group go to
3 many places in the community with the
4 help they need provided by their
5 attendance, family members, volunteers
6 for the group and me. Those who come
7 independently on paratransit only do so
8 because I or concerned staff members are
9 there waiting for them and making sure
10 they are picked up to get home safely.

11 I will give you a few examples
12 of what essential services such as
13 paratransit and Carousel House provide.
14 One of my members came to Carousel House
15 by paratransit on a day we were not
16 meeting. The staff knew her and
17 immediately called her mother who came
18 to get her. She could not have done
19 this on her own. One of my other
20 members who lives and needs to go places
21 with her guardian or sister will only
22 travel on paratransit.

23 She and her sister have both
24 been upset by the attitude of SEPTA
25 drivers and passengers delayed by the

1 need to use the bus lift when they have
2 ridden SEPTA. Why should they be
3 subjected to that. If others feel they
4 want to fight for that SEPTA bus, that
5 is their right. But there is not one
6 right answer. My members feel safe at
7 Carousel House and have made a choice to
8 attend a center. They have not been
9 forced to do so. Please consider
10 Carousel House as a bridge to greater
11 independence within a caring community
12 at whatever level that means for each
13 individual. Everyone deserves a voice
14 and a continuum of service. For those
15 who cannot as effectively advocate for
16 themselves as others can, they deserve
17 people who will fight for them. Please
18 do not deprive them of what they need to
19 be out in the world. I thank you for
20 your time and your attention.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
22 for your testimony.

23 We will hear from the next
24 witness.

25 MR. NANAYAKKARA: Chairman

1 Green, honorable members of City Council
2 and guests, thank you for this
3 opportunity to speak today. My name is
4 A.J. Nanayakkara. I'm the former member
5 of the Mayor's Commission on People with
6 Disabilities where I chaired the
7 Recreation Committee. I have been using
8 a wheelchair for 27 years when I
9 sustained a spinal cord injury.

10 And the scariest day of my life
11 was not when I broke my neck in 1994.
12 The scariest day was the day right
13 before I left the hospital. Because in
14 those four months of rehab, everybody I
15 knew either had a disability, was a
16 caregiver or was generally educated
17 about other people with disabilities.
18 But when I was going home, I was going
19 to be the only person in the wheelchair
20 I knew. It was scary. And I went
21 through the motions, and I lived out in
22 the community but it was just really
23 difficult.

24 And then in 2002, I started
25 playing wheelchair sports at Carousel

1 House. This was the first time since I
2 left the hospital that I was around
3 other people with disabilities on a
4 regular basis. And all of a sudden, I
5 was around people like me. I learned
6 from them. And, yes, I gained a lot of
7 physical fitness from participating in
8 sports, but I also gained self-
9 confidence developing locus of control,
10 and developed all of these little
11 building blocks that helped me to become
12 a productive, vibrant member of the
13 community.

14 I gained the confidence to go
15 back to school, where I went back to
16 Temple and graduated. I got a job. I
17 eventually went to graduate school and
18 built a career and a life that I'm proud
19 of. And for me, Carousel House is a
20 gateway and a bridge to living the life
21 that I am living now.

22 We know that recreation is an
23 essential component of our physical and
24 psychological well-being. But for
25 people with disabilities, recreation is

1 also rehabilitation. It helps with
2 physical, social and psychological
3 adjustment to living with a disability,
4 especially transitioning to living with
5 a disability in the community as an
6 adult.

7 Now, there's a lot of value in
8 making all of our spaces inclusive and
9 accessible, but as we have heard already
10 today for marginalized groups, there is
11 a lot of value for having a place that
12 we can call our own, to be able to share
13 our experiences, to learn from each
14 other, to support each other. For
15 people with disabilities in
16 Philadelphia, that place is the Carousel
17 House. And I hope the City invests in
18 Carousel to help future Philadelphians
19 with disabilities gain the benefits of
20 recreation. Thank you for this time and
21 this opportunity to connect with you
22 today.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
24 for your testimony.

25 We'll hear from the next

1 witness.

2 MS. CHASAR: Good afternoon,
3 Chairman Green and everyone. My name is
4 Caitlin Chasar, and I appreciate the
5 opportunity to share my testimony today.
6 I'm a young adult with a disability and
7 a wheelchair basketball athlete. I
8 started playing wheelchair basketball at
9 the Carousel House when I was 10 years
10 old.

11 Growing up, my mom would take
12 me to the Carousel House every week and
13 I would practice with my team, the
14 Katie's Komets. She also told me that I
15 used to go as a toddler also and I would
16 use the pool for therapy. Growing up
17 when I would go to the Carousel House
18 and play basketball, it was the
19 highlight of my week. I have so many
20 fond memories of my time at the Carousel
21 House and have met so many friends
22 throughout the years.

23 There's truly no place like
24 Carousel House for Philadelphians with
25 disabilities. To me and many others,

1 the Carousel House has always been a
2 safe judgment-free zone for
3 Philadelphians with disabilities and
4 their families to come together. I have
5 attended countless sports tournaments at
6 the Carousel House.

7 Currently, I am a member of the
8 Magee Rehab Sixers Wheelchair Basketball
9 Team. Up until the COVID-19 pandemic,
10 my team and I practiced at the Carousel
11 House on a weekly basis. We have not
12 had a regular season since the pandemic
13 started, but we are beginning to resume
14 this season, and it was very
15 disappointing to hear that the Carousel
16 House will not be there when we return.
17 It's hard to imagine what it would be
18 like to not have the Carousel House in
19 our community. Athletes with
20 disabilities throughout the Eastern
21 Seaboard know Carousel House and what it
22 represents.

23 While it is very sad and
24 unfortunate that the Carousel House is
25 closing, it is now time to ensure that

1 Philadelphians with disabilities have a
2 place to comfortably and safely
3 participate in recreational activities.
4 Inclusion is the goal, but my concern is
5 that other recreation centers in
6 Philadelphia do not have the
7 accommodations and the equipment to
8 ensure that people with disabilities can
9 participate.

10 It is so important for people
11 with disabilities to engage in physical
12 activities, socialization and have
13 recreational fun in order to have a
14 positive outlook on life and a quality
15 of life. This is why it's so important
16 that a disability-friendly recreation
17 center exists in Philadelphia. Because
18 of the -- because of the Carousel House
19 being demolished, our wheelchair
20 basketball team will have to practice in
21 New Jersey which is going to be
22 difficult for many of my teammates.

23 I encourage you to research
24 Ability360, which is a nonprofit
25 organization -- excuse me, which is a

1 nonprofit organization that provides
2 disability-related programming and
3 includes accessible equipment for people
4 with disabilities in the Phoenix,
5 Arizona area.

6 According to the CDC, 23.9
7 percent of Pennsylvanians have some sort
8 of disability. With such a large
9 population of people with disabilities
10 in Pennsylvania, I think it's imperative
11 that Philadelphia provides accessible
12 and disability-related programming for
13 its constituents. I appreciate your
14 time and attention to this matter, and I
15 look forward to learning more about the
16 next steps that the City Parks & Rec
17 will take on this issue. Many people
18 are counting on it. Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
20 for your testimony.

21 Before Mr. Iannuzzi reads the
22 names from the next panel, I see
23 Councilmember Brooks has a comment.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
25 you, Chairman Green.

1 First, I want to thank Mr. King
2 for sharing his concerns on how the City
3 prioritizes those who are most impacted
4 by gun violence and the City's
5 disinvestment. And I want to let him
6 know that I share his sentiments around
7 the urgency and push for inclusion, and
8 to center those most marginalized as we
9 pursue inclusion, whether it's impacted
10 by gun violence, people with
11 disabilities and people like yourself
12 who are at the intersection of those
13 margins.

14 So one question for you I have
15 is, if those of us on this call put all
16 of our energy in the pursuit of
17 inclusion, do you believe a fully
18 inclusive facility would benefit
19 yourself and members of your support
20 group?

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Are you
23 still on?

24 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Mr. King,
25 are you still here?

1 (No response.)

2 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: He may
3 not still be on.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yeah, I see
5 him, but I'm not sure if he's still
6 connected. But I would say that's an
7 excellent question and perspective. I'm
8 interested when Mr. King made a slip and
9 said Inglis House, I wasn't sure he was
10 making a connection to Charles Horton
11 who is currently at Inglis House, but is
12 also an advocate not only for the issue
13 that Mr. King talked about, but also
14 building a community from his previous
15 work with the City of Philadelphia and
16 now at Inglis House.

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, if
19 Mr. King is able to come back, we'll
20 have him answer that question.

21 Mr. Iannuzzi, if you can read
22 the names of the next list of witnesses
23 scheduled to testify.

24 THE CLERK: Samantha Petty,
25 Tracey Hearse Purvey, Bridget Powell,

1 Shanda Dilworth.

2 MS. S. PETTY: Good morning.

3 Thank you for allowing us to talk to you
4 today. I brought my daughter Willa to
5 the table since no one's invited her to
6 the table so far, and I think she should
7 get a chance to speak for herself on the
8 issue. So I'm going to let her speak.

9 She's a wheelchair user with complex
10 needs that uses the Carousel House
11 weekly for swimming, and she had
12 prepared some remarks on her
13 communication device.

14 MS. W. PETTY: Swimming is fun.
15 Swimming is fun. Float. Float.

16 MS. S. PETTY: Thank you for
17 letting her have a chance to talk, and I
18 think I share a lot of sentiments with
19 some people who've gone before and I
20 will try not to take too long. But I'm
21 going to read a little bit about our
22 experience using the Carousel House.
23 Willa's 7. We've been going to the
24 Carousel House to swim every Saturday
25 since she was 3. It's probably the best

1 part of her week. It takes us about an
2 hour to leave our house. We live in
3 West Philly. And to go anywhere, we
4 have to pull her seizure meds and kind
5 of rainbow her tube feeding backpack and
6 gather all her swimming things like any
7 family, and then we bring her
8 communication device because we like her
9 to be able to talk wherever she is. And
10 when we are doing that, get out the
11 door, we just find that the world is not
12 built for people like my daughter
13 because her body is a combination of her
14 sort of own incredible will power and
15 also the power of modern medicine in the
16 face of her random genetic mutation.

17 And it takes us multiple
18 challenging physical lifts and transfers
19 to get out the door and arrive at
20 Carousel House, which we use sometimes
21 on the bus and sometimes in our vehicle
22 and sometimes on a CCT. But from our
23 arrival, we're in this kind of magical
24 barrier free world where my daughter can
25 fully participate in. That starts when

1 we enter through these automated
2 doublewide front doors and all our junk
3 and everything we bring with us to keep
4 her healthy and safe just fits through
5 without any trouble.

6 And I think Gayle's been called
7 out a couple of times in this hearing,
8 that we just have this wonderful
9 greeting by someone who's in a
10 wheelchair who speaks directly to my
11 daughter instead of speaking to me,
12 which is so rare and so valuable. And
13 when we go to the locker room, we often
14 pass a basketball game and there's
15 coaches that have visible disabilities
16 and kids that look like my daughter.

17 And by the time we get to our
18 locker room, my kid has seen so many
19 people who look like her and adult role
20 models that are really hard to find
21 elsewhere in her life. So I think to
22 the point that people have been making
23 throughout this discussion as a parent,
24 I constantly walk the fine line between
25 advocating for my daughters' inclusion

1 and advocating for disability pride and
2 opportunities like this week when we
3 have disability pride for her to be
4 proud of who she is exactly, how she is
5 and know there's nothing that we need to
6 fix about her. And both of those
7 opportunities can be pretty hard to come
8 by, but the Carousel House has certainly
9 fostered a sense of pride for her.

10 The other thing that is pretty
11 unique to the Carousel House is that we
12 include my daughter at synagogue, we
13 include her at summer camps in my
14 neighborhood. And so, there's kids in
15 our neighborhood who know her and greet
16 her and I think are really doing their
17 best in including her, but she's not
18 invited to any birthday parties and
19 people don't really know how to be a
20 good friend to her as she is, but at the
21 Carousel House she has real friends.
22 And she meets real people that
23 understand her and understand how to
24 talk to her and understand how to play
25 with her, so there's an elder -- because

1 there's a lot of elders who swim at the
2 Carousel House to maintain their health.
3 And she knows that there's a little girl
4 who's coming every Thursday and a little
5 girl who's coming every Saturday and she
6 wants to know from both the parents so
7 that we can coordinate and bring our
8 kids together. And we've been friends
9 with that little girl Zoe ever sense and
10 have gone swimming with her every week,
11 and during the pandemic we've gone on a
12 walk with her every week, the whole
13 pandemic.

14 So I just want to list the
15 things that make it possible for us to
16 have this experience at the Carousel
17 House: The first thing is my daughter
18 doesn't move very much in the water. So
19 when we talk about just having a pool
20 with the lift outside, she really can't
21 do that because she gets cold very
22 quickly because her body isn't as mobile
23 as other people's bodies and she's not
24 exercising in the same way to keep
25 herself warm. So the warmer water

1 allows her to stay in the pool for an
2 actual 45 minutes to an hour like a
3 typical kid would and play.

4 Other things that we're using
5 is the automated doors. I just can't
6 alone get her and all her stuff in the
7 door if I have to hold the doors. And
8 then I have to make hard decisions about
9 what to leave behind. And what often
10 gets left behind is a shared
11 communication device and that is
12 horrible. I hate leaving behind her
13 words. I love the wide hallways of the
14 Carousel House because she can roll in
15 her wheelchair side-by-side with her
16 friend. And I like that we have secured
17 lockers so I can store her communication
18 device, which unfortunately costs
19 \$25,000 and I don't feel bad about
20 bringing it with me because I know it's
21 safe.

22 The other thing that I haven't
23 heard talked about today is that she
24 wears a swim diaper and we need a place
25 to change her into that swim diaper when

1 we get to the pool, and I don't like
2 talking about her toileting needs, it's
3 not fair to her, they're private, but we
4 need a therapy bench to change her into
5 her swimsuit and her swim diaper. We
6 can't do that at home and then arrive at
7 the pool. We need to do it there right
8 before we go in to help keep the pool
9 safe for everybody.

10 And when people say, well, we
11 just need a pool lift, well, I still
12 need somewhere to change her and make
13 sure that she can safely be changed and
14 that those transfers are safe and then
15 afterwards, I can shower her and there's
16 an ADA shower chair that's available to
17 me. The floor that raises up means my
18 daughter can practice walking in the
19 pool. She can walk independently in the
20 water. She can't walk on land at all,
21 so it's pretty magical to raise the pool
22 to her height and allow her to walk, and
23 you have the state of the art pool there
24 that is allowing people with
25 disabilities to do that. It also allows

1 her to get in the pool as the pool comes
2 up to the surface level, and she can
3 just transfer from the wheelchair right
4 to the pool floor and then they can
5 lower it.

6 So we got really excited when
7 we heard the Carousel House had been
8 chosen as a Rebuild site, and we
9 understand that like many recreation
10 centers in a limited budget is long
11 overdue in repairs and we have
12 experienced the roof leaks and
13 understand that the locker room
14 equipment is pretty worn out, needs a
15 (inaudible), but it's also the only
16 place we can go to swim with my
17 daughter. It's literally the only pool
18 we have for her.

19 So I think I have all the
20 concerns of many here, and I think the
21 Commissioner herself is concerned about
22 this. It's the timing and the phasing
23 here that we're most concerned about.
24 If you're closing this, we haven't heard
25 anything about replacing the pool and we

1 haven't heard anything about the timing
2 in the phasing of where my daughter can
3 swim in the meantime.

4 And we were referred to
5 Carousel House by CHOP, Children's
6 Hospital of Philadelphia, on a
7 suggestion that it would reduce my
8 children -- my daughter's hospital stay
9 and help her build up muscle mass and
10 endurance, and it's done all that and
11 it's also provided for a really,
12 wonderful supportive community.

13 COVID-19 kind of, I think,
14 uniquely harmed the users of the
15 Carousel House. Without her weekly
16 swims, my daughter has grown weaker and
17 she's lost her muscle mass, and we had
18 really hoped our rec center would be
19 open as soon as it was safe, and instead
20 we learned from a news article that it
21 wasn't planning to be reopened in that
22 capacity again. I feel suspicious when
23 disabled constituents are treated
24 differently than other constituents.

25 And my experience at other

1 Rebuild sites like my neighborhood rec
2 center Kingessing, the community
3 engagement process began before big
4 decisions like this were made. At
5 Kingessing Rec, our community has been
6 engaged early and often to make us aware
7 that our recreation center was a Rebuild
8 site and help us identify and prioritize
9 our repair needs. But for Carousel
10 House, I've learned about the proposed
11 demolition and dramatic programming
12 changes from the news media. And there
13 wasn't a public meeting that included
14 people like my daughter before the Billy
15 Penn article came out, and that was very
16 upsetting to learn from this resource
17 that we depended on was being demolished
18 from this news article.

19 My biggest question right now
20 is I just want peer advocacy for my
21 daughter. Is there a plan to quickly
22 re-establish a way for users like my
23 daughter to swim in a Parks & Rec pool?
24 And if not, it feels like the City of
25 Philadelphia is harming her by taking

1 away a service that they provide to
2 nondisabled Philadelphians. She needs a
3 way to enter the pool as a wheelchair
4 user and a locker room that offers her a
5 safe and dignified way to prepare for a
6 swim.

7 She and many others need warmer
8 water temperatures that can take into
9 account bodies that move differently and
10 less vigorously than a typical lap
11 swimmer. If you demolish this existing
12 pool, how will she swim, when will she
13 be able to swim. I haven't heard things
14 about phasing and construction timelines
15 or even a guarantee that a pool like
16 this will be replaced or preserved that
17 will reassure me.

18 I need clear answers to these
19 questions, and I believe without them
20 that you're discriminating against
21 wheelchair users and those with complex
22 disabilities like my daughter. She has
23 legal rights under ADA and it's not just
24 a budgeting. It's a legal guarantee
25 that she gets to access City services on

1 par with her nondisabled peers.

2 And finally, my other question
3 is I am very concerned that I'm not
4 seeing disabled patrons of the Carousel
5 House holding decision-making roles. I
6 love the Carousel House because it's led
7 and guided by users with disabilities
8 and staff with disabilities. When I
9 thought I was joining a Rebuild process,
10 I thought I was going to take a backseat
11 to those users. And instead I'm
12 testifying to City Council on behalf of
13 my daughter. I want to be being led by
14 the people who use the Carousel House
15 who know what's best for themselves, and
16 I think it's a dangerous assumption to
17 think that I or anyone else knows better
18 than them what they need.

19 I really hope that we get
20 neighborhood-level inclusion. I want to
21 state that we want that more than
22 anything and we work very hard to
23 include my daughter. And I just want to
24 call out while we have the Commissioner
25 here some really wonderful people within

1 the Parks service that have treated us
2 with the inclusion mindset that I
3 appreciate your commitment to try and
4 extend training to all your staff.

5 We really appreciate Ranger
6 Tony at Cobbs Creek Environmental
7 Center, all the rangers through our
8 nature talks at John Heinz. We love the
9 Philly Go Project and we love the
10 programming offered by Let's Go
11 Outdoors. We're really excited
12 Bartram's Garden has a new successful
13 dock, and we're really invested in the
14 Parks system. We use it every week.

15 We're pretty much shut out of
16 the rec centers, but we believe if you
17 meet my daughter's needs, you'll make
18 the rec center system stronger and
19 better for all users. At this time,
20 we're very concerned that her needs are
21 not being met. Thank you.

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
23 for your testimony. We'll hear from the
24 next witness.

25 MS. HEARSE PURVEY: I think

1 that's me. Can everyone hear me?

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes, we can
3 hear you.

4 MS. HEARSE PURVEY: Okay.

5 Thank you. My name's Tracey Hearse
6 Purvey, Chairman. Let me just get my
7 notes out. Okay. Good afternoon,
8 Chairman Green and community members.
9 My name is Tracey Hearse Purvey, and I'm
10 the mother of the very loving and
11 adventurous 9-year-old son with a dual
12 diagnosis of Down syndrome and autism
13 spectrum disorder. Our family is not in
14 support of the current model to make the
15 Carousel House inclusive.

16 Although our family believes in
17 inclusion whenever possible, there are
18 some instances when we have not received
19 the best benefit from some inclusive
20 practices. A place like the Carousel
21 House means a great deal to us because
22 we know that others like my son will be
23 treated with respect and dignity and not
24 feel that as if he's an object in a cage
25 that no one has ever seen before. That

1 has been our experience when going into
2 our community.

3 In a perfect world, people with
4 disabilities should not be segregated.
5 We're not in a perfect world. We still
6 have great strides to make when it comes
7 to building those relationships. And
8 although I am ready, willing and able to
9 put in the work to make that happen, I
10 can't ignore the voices and
11 conversations with other parents that
12 have spent more years than I have
13 fighting for their children, adults
14 alike to just be in a place of feeling
15 free from discrimination.

16 How do we come to a happy
17 medium? I don't know and I don't have
18 all of the answers, but I think we
19 should listen to each other with an ear
20 of not being judgmental or I'm right and
21 you're wrong, but with a shared vision
22 that we need to move all of our Parks &
23 Recreation facilities into the 21st
24 century for all users.

25 In closing, I would like to see

1 the Carousel House remain a place for
2 people with disabilities like that for
3 whatever the myriad of reasons. I don't
4 want to -- I'm sorry. I lost my train
5 of thought. In closing, I would like to
6 see the Carousel House remain a place
7 for people with all disabilities that
8 for whatever the myriad of reasons don't
9 want to venture out into the inclusive
10 community. I would also like to see our
11 Parks & Recreation centers beefed up
12 with inclusion programming for people
13 with all abilities to include playground
14 equipment and layout that is accessible,
15 and let's not forget our swimming pools
16 that also need a little TLC and have no
17 accessible features as well. Thank you
18 for your time.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
20 for your testimony.

21 We'll hear from the next
22 witness.

23 MS. POWELL: Good afternoon.
24 My name is Bridget Powell and I first
25 want to thank you for allowing me to

1 testify regarding the Carousel House.
2 As a Board member of the Eastside
3 Parkside Association, a school nurse at
4 School to Future which is walking
5 distance from the Carousel House for 12
6 years, which serves 12 full-time special
7 contained classes and a resident of West
8 Philadelphia for 40 years, in addition
9 to being a parent of a 34-year-old with
10 Asperger's syndrome, I was not informed
11 of any of these changes. I recently
12 talked to our President of the Eastside
13 Parkside Association and she was
14 clueless about the Carousel House, and
15 Ms. Quasar has been a resident of the
16 East Parkside for over 70 years.

17 Although the American
18 Disabilities Act was formed 25 years ago
19 in supports being inclusive, inclusive
20 doesn't always mean equal access to
21 services and a sense of belonging. Just
22 last week, I was disappointed to see a
23 cheerleader with Down syndrome excluded
24 from a group photo. We often have
25 Annual Night to Shine Proms for children

1 with special needs, which is a
2 successful celebration.

3 So I ask, is inclusive actually
4 welcoming all people? We as adults
5 should feel obligated that people with
6 special needs feel included, but also
7 accept that all things are not created
8 equal and, therefore, allow sites like
9 the Carousel House remain open status
10 quo where there is no judgment. Can you
11 imagine how this cheerleader who
12 practiced and competed was excluded from
13 a photo, how she was felt? She was
14 being denied enjoyment in an inclusive
15 environment.

16 Have we actually asked the
17 people who attend the Carousel House how
18 they felt and what they really want?
19 There are plenty of local recreation
20 centers near the Carousel House, which
21 residents can enjoy like Parkside Evans
22 and Miles Mack Recreation Center to name
23 a few. In Philadelphia, we're already
24 accustomed to traveling across the City
25 as our student with special needs get on

1 buses almost every day and travel to
2 schools that are not in the
3 neighborhoods.

4 Also, and I've heard this
5 mentioned quite often, a CCT is
6 available to transport kids with special
7 needs for transportation. The Carousel
8 House is for people with special needs
9 and being a historic landmark, which is
10 one of the only ones in the United
11 States I think we should keep it there.

12 Our six full-time special ed.
13 classes have the privilege and enjoy
14 going to the Carousel House annually and
15 you should see the smile and fun that
16 they have at the Carousel House. As a
17 school nurse, I have seen the positive
18 experiences and the separate but equal
19 programs. Last week I had the pleasure
20 of talking to one of our former students
21 age 29 with osteogenesis, which is
22 brittle bone disease so he's wheelchair-
23 bound. He has attended the Carousel
24 House since the age of 6.

25 He was able to thrive and gain

1 confidence at the Carousel House and has
2 gone on to create numerous wheelchair
3 basketball tournaments across the
4 country. His fear is that people with
5 disabilities will fall victim to gun
6 violence without the Carousel House
7 remaining for people with disabilities.
8 Many know that I advocate and support
9 children and families, and the Carousel
10 House is one that's worth advocating
11 for.

12 I have gone around the City as
13 a school nurse and I see the one
14 handicapped swing in the playground, but
15 what I don't see are the handicapped
16 accessible pools. Are there funds to
17 convert all the City pools to be
18 handicapped? And I just listened to the
19 panelist before here and she made a
20 great point. As a school nurse, some of
21 these children can't tolerate being
22 outside in these pools, so let's build a
23 state-of-the-art indoor accessible pool
24 for these children.

25 I ask the City Council not

1 approve the changes and keep the
2 Carousel House for people with
3 disabilities. Our population with
4 special needs deserve this place, so
5 let's fund it for whatever it costs.
6 Thank you for allowing me to testify.

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
8 for your testimony, Ms. Powell.

9 Ms. Dilworth.

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Looking for
12 Shanda Dilworth.

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: As we're
15 waiting for Ms. Dilworth, Mr. King, if
16 you are still on the call, if you can
17 come back on, Councilmember Brooks had a
18 question for you.

19 MR. KING: I am.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So we'll
21 have Councilmember Brooks ask the
22 question, and then if Ms. Dilworth is
23 able to come on, we'll hear from her.

24 MR. KING: I'm here.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Thank

1 you.

2 Councilmember Brooks.

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN:

5 Councilmember Brooks.

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILMAN GREEN:

8 Councilmember Brooks.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Hello.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I'm
12 sorry. Yes, I see that Mr. King is on.
13 I just want to re-ask that question and
14 I have two others. I'm not sure if he
15 heard already, but I wanted to thank him
16 for sharing his concerns around the
17 impact by gun violence and the City's
18 disinvestment. And my question for him
19 was if those of us on the call put our
20 energy into pursuing the inclusion, does
21 he believe that a fully inclusive
22 facility would benefit him and the
23 members of his support group?

24 MR. KING: You know, like I
25 said before, what you do for the least

1 of us, you do for the most of us. And
2 ultimately as someone who was injured at
3 a very young age, for me personally
4 finding purpose and not having this
5 mental stigma that I know that people
6 who do have disabilities deal with as
7 far as this idea of being a burden can
8 go away because you know as other
9 parents have expressed, when you're
10 around people who make you see what's
11 possible, then anything and everything
12 is possible.

13 So I will agree, yeah, I think
14 when you do have something that makes
15 you not think about the barriers that
16 you face on a regular basis, it's always
17 going to be a good thing. I'm a
18 photographer living in a city. And for
19 me personally, I never knew what my
20 purpose was. And I started doing
21 speaking engagements and things like
22 that. And part of that is getting out
23 and having that encouragement to know
24 that, one, my life doesn't feel like
25 it's a burden on others. But more

1 importantly, I can still live a
2 fulfilling life.

3 I can't tell you how many times
4 I have had parents who have children
5 with disabilities who have reached out
6 and emailed me because they see the
7 struggles that I deal with on a regular
8 basis being a photographer who now have
9 new hope for what's possible for their
10 children. So having a facility that
11 encourages and brings about those
12 changes for people who quite honestly
13 don't think or know what's possible for
14 them, it's always going to be a benefit.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
16 so much, Mr. King.

17 My next question is for
18 Ms. Protenic. I thought your comments
19 about SEPTA use provided an important
20 comparison, especially learning that the
21 stigma against people with disabilities
22 has deterred many within the disability
23 community from using SEPTA to travel
24 around the City. From your experience,
25 can you share more about how safe

1 spaces, and particularly the Carousel
2 House promotes greater independence for
3 your group members?

4 MS. PROTENIC: Yes. There's
5 been a number of my group members who
6 have really experienced growth because
7 they are coming to a place like Carousel
8 House. I'll give you an example. One
9 of my members never took CCT alone. She
10 would only travel with an attendant or a
11 family member, but because she knew that
12 she was going to a place where they knew
13 her, she knew them, they would be
14 willing to wait for her if the van
15 didn't come back, they would be willing
16 to help her with the phone to call. I
17 have several members who can't access
18 their own phones physically, and they
19 have been reassured by the fact that
20 they can now travel independently
21 because they are at a spot where the
22 people on the other end are there for
23 them and know their needs and deal with
24 their needs.

25 And as Jaleel was saying, they

1 can see other people doing those things,
2 oh, this person has a disability that's
3 similar to mine and yet look at them,
4 they're traveling independently and
5 they're living independently, some of
6 them. They've been able to see people
7 who are role models to them and increase
8 independence, which is why I said it
9 needs to be on a level whatever the
10 person is. Everybody is not the same
11 level.

12 And for people for example who
13 have seizures, to know that somebody's
14 there, whether it's me or the person in
15 charge who knows them very well and
16 knows, okay, this is a person who has
17 this type of seizure, they're going to
18 come out of it, no, you don't need to
19 call 911 or the person with sickle cell
20 pain where somebody can say the staff
21 there knows that this is not the
22 necessary time to call her mother but
23 this might be, these are things that you
24 can't rely on out in the wider world.

25 And as someone mentioned, it's

1 not the -- the real world is not what we
2 wish it would be. We wish it would be
3 welcoming to everybody, but our
4 experience is that it isn't always. And
5 as somebody else said also, you're
6 taking away a thing like a swimming pool
7 without anything to replace it.

8 So to get back to what you said
9 and what you've asked, we have had
10 numerous experiences where people have
11 been willing to be independent. Another
12 example I can give you is several of my
13 members who come to the evening program
14 at Carousel House. Their family members
15 are not comfortable traveling in the
16 dark, traveling in the evening, going
17 home in the evening say at 9:00 at night
18 after an art class unless they're at a
19 place where they know someone knows them
20 and someone is there for them. Thank
21 you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
23 so much.

24 And my final question is for
25 Ms. Chasar. I was disheartened to hear

1 you testified that the Rolling Rebels
2 will have to practice in New Jersey.
3 That is a huge loss to the City as a
4 whole. Has anyone from the City reached
5 out to invite the Rolling Rebels to use
6 Gustine facility to practice wheelchair
7 basketball?

8 MS. CHASAR: So I'm actually
9 not affiliated with the Rolling Rebels.
10 I'm with the wheelchair basketball team,
11 the Sixers.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Oh, I'm
13 sorry.

14 MS. CHASAR: That's okay. I
15 don't know the answer to that question.
16 We do have team managers who are
17 involved and I'm actually not one of
18 them, so I can't answer that question
19 for you. But I do not believe so. If
20 they did, I have not heard anything, but
21 I can definitely find out and I can let
22 you know.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay.
24 Because I would like to continue this
25 conversation, because Philadelphia is a

1 regional leader in wheelchair basketball
2 because of the Carousel House facility,
3 and it would be a huge loss to the
4 public and young people to have the team
5 move somewhere permanently or just being
6 displaced, especially as you approach
7 the season. And I want to thank you for
8 your willingness to share a little about
9 the benefits of safe spaces, especially
10 for people and young people with
11 disabilities. Thank you so much for
12 that.

13 MS. CHASAR: Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And I
15 want to thank also the parents and the
16 residents that have spoken about that as
17 well.

18 MS. CHASAR: Thank you very
19 much.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:
21 Councilman Green --

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: -- that
24 concludes my questioning. Thank you so
25 much.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

2 All right. We have the next panel.

3 Mr. Iannuzzi, if you can state the names
4 of the next panel.

5 THE CLERK: Wilhelmina Herbert,
6 Dominique Howell, David Evans, Heidi
7 Allen.

8 MS. HERBERT: Hello.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes. Please
10 state your name for the record.

11 MS. HERBERT: Okay. My name is
12 Wilhelmina Herbert and I'm a concerned
13 parent of a son with disabilities that
14 he had developed from birth. He lost
15 oxygen to his brain. He's been
16 attending Carousel during the mid-1970s
17 when Carousel was a small wooden
18 octagon-shaped building on the west side
19 of Belmont across from the new Carousel,
20 where that one is. It didn't have a lot
21 of amenities. It was basically an open
22 area where attendees played and engaged
23 in games and other activities.

24 Unfortunately, some
25 neighborhood kids broke into that

1 Carousel and caused a fire, which burned
2 it down. At that time, the Carousel
3 participants were transferred to some
4 place called Ridgeland House, I believe.
5 And they stayed there until the new
6 Carousel was built, which was 1987.

7 The new Carousel House, which
8 we know, had wheelchair basketball,
9 indoor pool with a platform and various
10 other things, a music room with a piano,
11 a lunchroom and kitchen, and it was
12 air-conditioned. It was a much larger
13 building. Now, according to an article
14 in the Inquirer dated June 10, 2021,
15 which is when I found out that the
16 Carousel was being closed down, it
17 stated that the Carousel House was the
18 nation's only city-funded rec center
19 with persons with disabilities.

20 And I'd like to add to that the
21 Carousel House serves persons from every
22 area in the City. Also, according to
23 the article, officials want to tear the
24 building down and replace it with a rec
25 center that will serve the entire east

1 and west part of our community. There's
2 always been rec centers for persons who
3 are not disabled located throughout the
4 City, but only one Carousel House.

5 Revamping these rec centers in order to
6 make them more inclusive will, in my
7 opinion, remove the safety net from
8 disabled persons who currently feel safe
9 and respected at whatever level they
10 function.

11 There are different levels of
12 disability and some persons are higher
13 functioning than others. But those
14 persons who want to be less segregated,
15 they should be able to join regular rec
16 centers. But to take away Carousel
17 House from those who desperately need it
18 would be a travesty. My son has been
19 attending Carousel House for
20 approximately 45 years, and I'm grateful
21 that he has some type of outlet.

22 Many disabled persons never
23 leave their home. But for those who are
24 able to attend Carousel House, it's like
25 a beacon in a storm. I believe it would

1 be more cost-effective to repair
2 Carousel House and keep it for disabled
3 persons than to simply tear it down in
4 order to lump them in with persons who
5 are not disabled, those persons who can
6 be mean-spirited, who laugh at them and
7 make fun of disabled persons. Disabled
8 persons are not void of feelings. They
9 are also human beings who cry, suffer,
10 get angry when they are treated badly.

11 In closing, I'm hopeful that
12 City officials will reconsider tearing
13 down the Carousel House and consider the
14 harm closing it will cause very
15 vulnerable persons who have so little in
16 terms of activities as it is. Thank
17 you.

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
19 for your testimony.

20 We'll now hear from the next
21 witness Dominique Howell.

22 MS. HOWELL: Yes, I am here.
23 Sorry. As many of you may know, my name
24 is Dominique Howell, a disabilities
25 advocate and most importantly, a mom.

1 As a child and a young adult, Carousel
2 House was an intricate part of my life.
3 I'm the advocate I am today because of
4 places like Carousel House. As a
5 disability advocate, inclusivity is one
6 of the most utmost importance to me, but
7 specifically, done in the correct way.

8 Carousel House is a safe space
9 that gives us a place to be ourselves
10 and grow. I believe that if we continue
11 to put inclusivity -- if we continue to
12 be inclusive, we need to think about
13 making sure that safe space remains just
14 as Carousel House gave us. Also, I
15 would like to say because this is public
16 comment and I just want to go off of
17 what other folks were saying, that even
18 still we need to be able to make sure
19 that we know where those other places
20 are that we can access. Because I am 35
21 years old and I have (inaudible) --

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Ms. Howell.

23 (No Response.)

24 MS. HOWELL: Okay. I'm sorry.

25 It went out for whatever reason. So I

1 was saying that I have never been privy
2 to the fact that there were other safe
3 spaces that we could use pools. And so,
4 I think that that is very important
5 moving forward to make sure that the
6 community at large knows where there are
7 spaces that we can use because we are
8 unaware, and to make sure that when we
9 go forward into this inclusive plan as
10 you all say, that the people at the
11 forefront are the people, the disability
12 advocates like myself and Kate Chasar,
13 for lack of a better word, a person
14 because she was a basketball player.
15 Make sure that we're at the forefront
16 because we know what we need, as the
17 parents that are on this thing. Don't
18 allow it to just be the City saying,
19 this is what needs to be done, and be
20 sure that you follow the ADA. Don't
21 just say, oh, I'm putting in one ramp or
22 I'm putting in one stall. Be sure that
23 it's clear.

24 And the other point I would
25 like to make is in eight years, what

1 would we have, what would we have in
2 eight years. That's a long span of
3 time. So we're going to miss a lot.
4 Kids are going to grow and miss what
5 Carousel House brings. They're not
6 going to have that safe space, and it's
7 very important because a lot of other
8 communities that are underserved and
9 that are discriminated against have
10 those safe spaces. So I feel as though
11 even though I am 100 percent behind
12 inclusivity, we all need safe spaces as
13 what was talked about prior to me
14 speaking.

15 So I think that if we just
16 continue to realize that safe spaces and
17 inclusivity, if we can work together and
18 understand how to bridge that gap, we'll
19 be better off for it as in the
20 disability community, as in the City of
21 Philadelphia, and we're losing a jewel.
22 We are losing a jewel. And also, I have
23 seen so many different types of
24 disability organizations come into
25 Carousel, so many types of people who've

1 had different disabilities. So when I
2 hear the word segregated, it's very
3 disheartening for me as a disability
4 advocate, but also as a child that grew
5 up there and participated in so many
6 activities with other children, some
7 like myself and some not. I want to
8 make sure that when we talk about safe
9 space and when we talk about
10 segregation, that moving forward this
11 does not continue to happen and that we
12 make disability a 100 percent priority.
13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
15 for your testimony.

16 We'll hear from the next
17 witness, Mr. Evans. David Evans.

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. If
20 Mr. Evans comes on, we will add him to
21 the next panel.

22 Mr. Iannuzzi, if you can read
23 the names of the witnesses for the next
24 panel.

25 THE CLERK: Victor Krauss,

1 James Murphy, Lea Hill and Keith

2 Newer -- I'm sorry, Newerla.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And then,
4 Mr. Iannuzzi, after this group we will
5 also hear from Deborah Draper and Liam
6 Dougherty.

7 THE CLERK: Mr. Chair, I'm
8 sorry, Liam is not going to be speaking,
9 but Deborah is on the line.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. Thank
11 you. Mr. Krauss, please begin with your
12 testimony.

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. I'm
15 not sure if Mr. Krauss is still with us.
16 Mr. Murphy.

17 (No response.)

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Also not
19 sure if Mr. Murphy is still with us.

20 Ms. Hill, Lea Hill.

21 (No response.)

22 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I thought I
23 did see her here.

24 MS. HILL: I'm here.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay.

1 Please state your name for the record
2 and proceed with your testimony.

3 MS. HILL: Give me one second.
4 Let me turn my camera -- is my camera
5 on?

6 COUNCILMAN GREEN: The camera
7 is not on.

8 MS. HILL: Is it on now?

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: It is not
10 on. We can hear you, but the camera is
11 not on.

12 MS. HILL: Okay. Well, you can
13 hear me so let's proceed being as though
14 you can hear me. Hello, everybody. My
15 name is Lea Hill. Thank you so much for
16 allowing me to speak today.

17 Unfortunately, I was not allowed or
18 included in the planning of the future
19 of the Carousel House, which is in my
20 District which is the 4th District. I
21 was born and raised in West
22 Philadelphia, and I've been a resident
23 in the 4th District for a very long time
24 and I'm very active in my community.

25 When I first heard about the

1 decision to make the Carousel House just
2 a general recreation center, I heard it
3 on WURD Radio. Unfortunately, I didn't
4 get an invitation from my
5 Councilmember's office. Unfortunately,
6 I didn't see anything posted on the
7 Carousel House website stating that,
8 hey, we're having a meeting about the
9 future. I didn't see any of that, and
10 I'm a person that's usually on top of
11 everything in my community, so I'm very
12 sad to hear that this decision was made
13 without people that actually live in the
14 District and people that live in the
15 actual community.

16 I'm also a parent of a child
17 who attended many park and recreation
18 activities throughout the City,
19 particularly West Philly recreation
20 centers. I'm also a Parks & Recreation
21 Center Advisory Councilmember. My
22 experience with my child at Parks &
23 Recreation sites in West Philadelphia,
24 in particular was we got the flyers, you
25 know, the flyers. The flyers looked

1 good. They had a bunch of nice programs
2 and stuff. And when we actually
3 enrolled in these programs, nothing was
4 delivered that was on these flyers.

5 So all these talks about
6 inclusiveness and this and that, I hate
7 to say it, but I don't believe it. I
8 don't believe it because the general
9 recreation centers right now for the
10 general public is not even structured.
11 It's not even organized, which is a
12 reason why I'm an Advisory Councilmember
13 in District 4 at a District 4 Parks &
14 Recreation site. So I'm asking -- I'm
15 very disturbed that the general
16 population, again their programs are not
17 even in order. So I'm asking for the
18 decision to be reversed, to keep the
19 Carousel House strictly for people with
20 disabilities. That is their main hub.

21 I heard my Councilmember and
22 the Commissioner say Parks & Recreation
23 has over 300 sites. Let's keep this one
24 for the special population that it was
25 designed for. Thank you for allowing me

1 to speak.

2 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
3 Ms. Hill, for your testimony.

4 I stated also -- I asked for
5 Mr. Newerla, but also Heidi Allen is
6 also scheduled to testify as well as
7 Ms. Draper. So let's go in that order.

8 MR. NEWERLA: Thank you,
9 Mr. Green. My name is Keith Newerla and
10 I run the wheelchair sports program from
11 the Magee Rehabilitation Hospital. I
12 also help coach and lead the Katie's
13 Komets Youth Wheelchair Basketball Team
14 that was started by the Katy Kirlin Fund
15 in the Philadelphia Department of
16 Recreation.

17 I have a permanent disability
18 that has made me a wheelchair user my
19 entire life. And growing up, I
20 participated in programs similar to the
21 ones I run today. My goal in the next
22 few minutes is to provide perspective of
23 how the closure of Carousel House
24 protects those with physical
25 disabilities who are living in our

1 community.

2 First, let me say that I am all
3 for integration and inclusion, but
4 that's not always feasible or
5 appropriate. For example, all of the
6 teams I oversee are part of nationwide
7 leagues that are made for people with
8 physical impairments where they compete
9 in their sport against other people with
10 disabilities from other cities around
11 the country. If we were to attempt to
12 make our sport inclusive at the local
13 level, we would not be able to hold
14 formal training sessions or practices.

15 You see, we play competitive
16 sports. Many of our athletes over the
17 years have received college scholarships
18 and played wheelchair bas -- sorry,
19 received scholarships to play wheelchair
20 basketball and were able to get their
21 education like Catie Chasar, who you
22 heard from earlier today. Most
23 recently, Ryan Neiswender, one of the
24 Katie's Komets alum, was one of the 12
25 people named to the Wheelchair

1 Basketball Men's National Team that will
2 be competing at the Tokyo Olympics this
3 year.

4 In the process of making things
5 more inclusive, please don't lose sight
6 of the value of people with physical
7 disabilities having their own space.
8 People with disabilities are constantly
9 fighting for acceptance during their
10 day-to-day life. Whether it be for
11 transportation, housing, employment or
12 education, we fight every day.

13 The kids in my youth program
14 who often are the only kid with a
15 disability in their own school they
16 attend fight for acceptance and access
17 with their able-bodied classmates.
18 Carousel House was a place we could go
19 where we didn't need to worry about
20 access or acceptance, where it didn't
21 matter if you were using a wheelchair,
22 crutches or a prosthetic. Once you came
23 through the door, you were the norm.
24 And for once, those without disabilities
25 were not. It was a place that was

1 focused on what could be accomplished
2 and not what was wrong or why you were
3 different. And there's tremendous
4 comfort in that.

5 It's a place that in Saturday
6 mornings you're in youth wheelchair
7 basketball. The wheelchairs practically
8 disappear and kids are just being kids.
9 It was a safe place where we didn't have
10 to worry about gun violence or being
11 taken advantage of. So safe that
12 parents felt comfortable dropping off
13 their kids and picking them up hours
14 later.

15 You see people with
16 disabilities can't go to their local rec
17 center to participate. Even if every
18 rec center was accessible, who would the
19 athlete play wheelchair basketball,
20 wheelchair tennis against? Where would
21 they store the sports-specific
22 wheelchair that they need to play the
23 sport they love? People with
24 disabilities of all ages use sports to
25 escape the challenges of their day-to-

1 day lives. And now we don't have our
2 safe space anymore. It was taken away
3 from us. And we have to go other places
4 where we might be judged and struggle to
5 fit in.

6 Just imagine for a second that
7 something traumatic recently happened to
8 you that caused you to be permanently
9 disabled. You're figuring out what your
10 new normal is, and you're not
11 comfortable being seen or living in a
12 wheelchair. If you heard about a sports
13 program, wheelchair basketball going on
14 in Philadelphia and you were going to go
15 out for the first time to check it out,
16 where would you feel more comfortable?
17 A place where you were with your peers
18 in similar situations or a more
19 inclusive place where you can't be
20 judged --

21 (Background interruption.)

22 MR. NEWERLA: -- or a place
23 where you might be judged or --

24 (Background interruption.)

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Excuse me.

1 If everyone could put themselves on mute
2 so this witness can complete his
3 testimony uninterrupted.

4 (Background interruption.)

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If Council
6 Support could put that person on mute.

7 (Background interruption.)

8 COUNCILMAN GREEN: If Council
9 Support could put that person on mute so
10 the witness can complete his testimony.

11 MR. NEWERLA: Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. I
13 apologize for the interruption.

14 MR. NEWERLA: That's okay.
15 Imagine for a second something traumatic
16 recently happened that caused you to be
17 permanently disabled, you are still
18 trying to figure out what your new
19 normal is and you're not comfortable
20 being seen or living in a wheelchair.
21 If you heard about a wheelchair sports
22 program and you wanted to go check it
23 out for the first time, where would you
24 be more comfortable? Would you be more
25 comfortable in a place with your peers

1 in similar situations or an inclusive
2 place where you might be judged and look
3 at strangely by others? With the
4 closure of Carousel House, we have many
5 concerns.

6 As I said before, the majority
7 of the rec centers in the City aren't
8 wheelchair-accessible. Rec centers that
9 we will potentially be moved to already
10 have existing programming, and we will
11 have to fight with them to find
12 consistent gym time, and parking spaces
13 to accommodate vehicles those with
14 disabilities are also a concern. We
15 feel like we were never included in the
16 decision process to close Carousel
17 House, not given much notice and never
18 consulted on in future plans.

19 Generally speaking, past
20 experiences indicate future results.
21 For decades, we voice the needs to fix
22 various things at Carousel House and
23 nothing was done. Quite frankly, I
24 think we all know that that's why we're
25 in the situation we're in right now. It

1 was built, never looked after and never
2 prioritized.

3 Why should people with
4 disabilities feel confident that the
5 Department of Recreations will
6 prioritize people with disabilities now
7 when they haven't in years. Finally,
8 even if the City builds a brand new
9 recreation center in place of the
10 existing Carousel House, many of us are
11 concerned that if it's not exclusively
12 for people with disabilities, we will
13 once again be on the outside looking in,
14 because everybody will want to use the
15 new state-of-art facility and we will
16 once again not be prioritized. I know
17 it's been a long day for everybody.
18 Thank you very much for your time.

19 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
20 for your testimony. Thank you for your
21 indulgence for that time was taken, and
22 once again I apologize for the
23 interruption.

24 At this point we'll have Heidi
25 Allen, and then Ms. Draper will be after

1 Ms. Allen.

2 MS. ALLEN: Dear, City Council.

3 Thanks so much for allowing me to
4 testify. I come here as the mom of a
5 very determined 7-year-old named
6 Michael, and really why it's so
7 important to promote inclusion through a
8 commitment to really make every
9 community rec center and playground more
10 responsive to individuals with
11 disabilities.

12 Michael has multiple
13 disabilities, including cerebral palsy.
14 He uses braces, a walker and a
15 wheelchair. He also has autism, an
16 intellectual disability and a speech
17 disorder and uses assistive technology
18 to communicate. But most importantly,
19 he loves playgrounds. We live in
20 Roxborough, and we can walk to both
21 Kelly and Gorgas Parks. Michael has
22 grown up knowing these local parks, like
23 in addition Pretzel Park in Manayunk and
24 is really a big fan of what these parks
25 offer him.

1 We really have loved since the
2 birth of Michael that both of these
3 parks have been renovated to be more
4 inclusive not only of kids with physical
5 disabilities, but also sensory issues
6 like adaptive swings and all kinds of
7 swirly things. We actually had parks
8 listed on Michael's IEP as a community
9 setting where his therapist could
10 provide services to facilitate inclusion
11 and peer interactions, and he met all of
12 these goals, and most importantly is
13 known to kids in the area.

14 We are involved in our
15 community, as Josh Cohen and Pam
16 DeLissio can attest to, Pam is my
17 neighbor, as they both watched Michael
18 grow up and be involved in his
19 community. But our other neighbors also
20 know Michael from school to the Y, to
21 local kids' play areas, Special Olympics
22 and has really given him opportunities
23 to develop friendships, which is
24 something that is very hard for Michael
25 to do.

1 And I just felt it was
2 important to testify, because I think
3 the greatest thing about living in the
4 City, as I didn't grow up in the City
5 and I kind of sought that out, is to
6 kind of be able to hang out with your
7 friends, go down the block, go down to
8 the playground, your local rec center
9 and you just play until dark. And I
10 really look forward to Michael being
11 able to do that. He does do that with
12 us, but hopefully some day by himself.

13 And I think to facilitate this
14 for all kids in the City is that
15 programming really needs to be
16 intentional in affording accommodations
17 and modifications, because access really
18 isn't enough. It's not just about for
19 my kid who has not only physical
20 disabilities but developmental
21 disabilities, but he also needs the
22 programming that takes into account his
23 sensory needs, ongoing training programs
24 and partnerships to address the needs of
25 kids that have multiple disabilities and

1 differences.

2 And I just really want Council
3 to know how meaningful it has been for
4 Michael to have accessible inclusive
5 playgrounds in his own community as a
6 child that has difficulty engaging with
7 other children. Playgrounds really have
8 been a gateway to interactions and
9 really paved the way for Michael to
10 develop friendships that so many of our
11 children need. Thank you so much for
12 allowing me to testify.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.
14 Our next witness is Ms. Draper.

15 MS. DRAPER: Thank you so much,
16 Councilman Green and to all the
17 panelists and all City Councilmembers.
18 The Resolution 210128 is a resolution
19 authorizing the Committee on People with
20 Disabilities and Special Needs to hold
21 hearings regarding services for people
22 with disabilities and general compliance
23 with an enforcement of the Americans
24 With Disabilities Act.

25 I was not aware with this

1 public hearing notice that the
2 conversation would be about the Carousel
3 House. I am unfamiliar with the
4 Carousel House, but I do have another
5 issue that I am so concerned with that
6 City Council will be voting on in the
7 fall with regard to a situation that
8 will affect people with disabilities and
9 special needs on my street.

10 I live in the 5300 block of
11 Walnut Street and was born here. I'm an
12 older female. I'm a senior citizen.
13 I've been here a long time. I am very
14 familiar with Walnut Street. In Center
15 City, Walnut Street is congested. The
16 traffic is slowed up and noisy, lots of
17 horns blowing. But as you get into the
18 residential areas, the traffic is much
19 more speedier.

20 Walnut Street used to have
21 three lanes, and it has been reduced to
22 two lanes and one lane has been
23 converted to a bicycle lane with about a
24 2- to 3-foot barrier, line painted
25 barrier, to separate the biker from the

1 cars coming down Walnut Street, two
2 lanes of traffic down Walnut Street in a
3 residential area which is very fast.

4 What the Office of
5 Transportation, Infrastructure and
6 Sustainability wants to do and wants
7 City Council to vote on in the fall is
8 an Option 2 for Walnut Street, which
9 moves -- now, mind you, a bike lane also
10 serves as a safe space for people with
11 disabilities and special needs to exit
12 and enter the vehicle as passengers on
13 Walnut Street. They have that extra
14 space for entering and exiting vehicles
15 on Walnut Street, and separated from
16 those fast-moving cars.

17 What the Office of
18 Transportation, Infrastructure and
19 Sustainability wants City Council to
20 vote on in the fall is to move the bike
21 space to the curb with barriers
22 separating the bike space from the
23 vehicles, pushing the vehicles into the
24 street, leaving no space for passengers
25 on the side of the vehicle, no safe

1 space for anyone with disabilities who
2 usually are the passengers. And for
3 special needs like people with autism to
4 exit in and out of the vehicle, they
5 will exit out of the vehicle into the
6 fast-moving two lanes of traffic, which
7 I feel is discrimination against them
8 with just the biker being protected with
9 a safe space, and putting people with
10 disabilities and special needs as well
11 as seniors and children in harm's way.

12 And so, I have a lot of people
13 with disabilities on my street and I've
14 gotten them to attend these meetings and
15 things and we've got them aware, because
16 I was the only person aware of the
17 situation. And so, finally I reached
18 out to the OTIS office and they've been
19 mailing out things. But you're going to
20 be presented with this in the fall. And
21 my hope is that you will read it,
22 investigate and take a really good look
23 at it instead of them just pushing it
24 through and not considering people with
25 disabilities and special needs as well

1 as seniors and children, putting them
2 into harm's way right into the traffic
3 as they exit and enter vehicles in the
4 residential areas.

5 I thank you so much for
6 allowing me -- and the money that could
7 be saved on those barriers could be used
8 to help sustain the Carousel House,
9 which from what I've been hearing in the
10 testimony is a very essential place that
11 needs to be sustained. Thank you so
12 much, Councilman Green, for hearing me
13 today.

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
15 for your testimony.

16 Mr. Iannuzzi, are there any
17 other members of the public that are
18 here to testify on these resolutions?

19 MR. CRUZ: Councilman Green,
20 can you hear me?

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes.

22 MR. CRUZ: Yes. My name is
23 Victor Cruz. I was supposed to get
24 called a little bit ago, but I'm not
25 very technologically sound.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: No problem.
2 You were called earlier, but please
3 proceed.

4 MR. CRUZ: Okay. My name is
5 Victor Cruz from the Roxborough area,
6 and I'm calling in not as a parent or a
7 person who has a special needs person,
8 child, adult, but as somebody who
9 volunteers to work with the children and
10 adults.

11 And through the help of the Rec
12 Department, initially through Bill
13 Salvatore and then with Shane Martin
14 down at Kendrick Recreation, we've been
15 able to take a program -- there wasn't
16 anything in Roxborough. And we've been
17 able to get the program from 2 people up
18 to about 17 or 18 people. And it's a
19 local Roxborough area that's involved
20 with the neighborhood. The neighborhood
21 has become very much involved with it.
22 We're in the local papers all the time.

23 It's important, I think, for
24 inclusion to start in the neighborhoods.
25 And I will give you an example, and then

1 I'll let you go because it's been a long
2 day for you I'm sure. We have practices
3 for football, and there's a small group
4 called the Roxborough Eagles, and they
5 practice against us. Now, these are, I
6 don't like to use the word normal, but
7 we'll say normal kids who don't have any
8 handicapped problems, and we practice
9 against them.

10 And the difference between the
11 beginning of the practice and the end of
12 the practice how these so-called normal
13 children react to the special needs
14 children is light and day, and I'm
15 telling you it only takes a half an
16 hour. So to me inclusion, this
17 neighborhood, it starts at the
18 neighborhood. Because those children
19 that were so-called normal were now
20 exposed directly to the special needs
21 children and what a difference it makes.
22 They walk off the field, they're
23 talking. Now, that's inclusion. So my
24 feeling is neighborhoods are important.
25 The local recreation departments are

1 normal. So with that, I'd like to thank
2 you for your time. And hopefully, I
3 didn't butt in on anybody when I was
4 speaking.

5 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
6 for your testimony. I would just like
7 to make a comment that I think will be
8 probably better going forward not to use
9 the phrase normal.

10 MR. CRUZ: Right. I didn't
11 know what word to use.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: I
13 understand. That's why I made the
14 statement the way I did based on your
15 commentary, and I understand that. I --

16 MR. CRUZ: Yup. Not a problem.

17 COUNCILMAN GREEN: --
18 appreciate your perspective in this
19 regard on how we deal with people who
20 have physical learning differences,
21 which come in all kinds of different
22 perspectives and aspects --

23 MR. CRUZ: It was amazing how
24 the differences in that half hour.

25 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you so

1 much.

2 MR. CRUZ: Okay. Have a great
3 day.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
5 for your testimony.

6 Is there anyone else here to
7 testify on any of these two resolutions?

8 MS. SAMPSON: I would like to
9 testify please.

10 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Okay. And
11 please state your name for the record.

12 MS. SAMPSON: Thank you,
13 Councilmember Green. My name is Katie
14 Sampson.

15 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Yes. Okay.

16 MS. SAMPSON: Thank you all for
17 taking this comment. I know it's been a
18 long day. Let me just -- I am a
19 quadriplegic and wheelchair user, and I
20 work as the Director of Education at
21 Art-Reach in Philadelphia, an art
22 service organization. I am an
23 accessibility advocate, and training is
24 my life's work. I've worked with PPR
25 during the Inclusion Summit in 2019, but

1 my testimony today comes from a
2 perspective of a wheelchair athlete and
3 a former facilitator of Rec Fest with
4 Global Abilities for many years.

5 But I live in Montgomery
6 County. Over the 21 years I've been
7 involved in adaptive sports in
8 Philadelphia, I've benefited from
9 Carousel House. But I have a car, I
10 have full-time employment, access to a
11 personal care attendant and the support
12 network at Magee Rehabilitation at
13 Jefferson University.

14 I question how many
15 participants who utilize accessibility
16 and inclusion programs at the Carousel
17 House and other Parks & Rec sites are
18 non-Philly residents like myself. Many
19 places of public accommodation today ask
20 people every day for their zip codes in
21 order to participate. Programs that
22 privilege suburban adults' children
23 rather than Philadelphians with
24 disabilities is unjust.

25 If we are really addressing a

1 reckoning of social justice in
2 Philadelphia, I feel it's important we
3 don't ignore the policies and practices
4 that got us to this point. We are
5 hearing today from so many people I have
6 worked with, played sports with and
7 advocated for, but who are we missing.
8 Likely, thousands and thousands of
9 people with disabilities.

10 Lastly, I want to address the
11 issue of accessibility that go far
12 beyond wheelchairs, wheelchair
13 accessibility, such as accessibility to
14 virtual programs, website accessibility,
15 redesigning the program finder on the
16 website to highlight accessibility
17 programs that address also at-risk
18 seniors, people with intellectual
19 disabilities, neurodiversity and many
20 others, and just public access in
21 general. Thank you so much for your
22 time.

23 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you
24 for your testimony.

25 I know that John Orr is also

1 here to testify as well.

2 MR. ORR: Hi. My name is John
3 Orr. I'm the Executive Director of
4 Art-Reach and a member of the Mayor's
5 Commission for People with Disabilities.
6 I want to thank the Council Committee
7 for a pretty lengthy day today, but for
8 hosting the hearing. I will keep my
9 stuff short. Over the last six years,
10 my organization has worked with over 220
11 arts organizations to provide training
12 in adaption in audience building in
13 partnership with the disability
14 community in Philadelphia. Because of
15 that work, we've increased our impact
16 and accessible arts engagement by over
17 1500 percent since 2015.

18 We're one of the partners who
19 took part in the Parks & Rec training
20 with Anna and Chase and Amy and a few
21 others who we all heard from earlier.
22 All that just to say making the Parks &
23 Rec center accessible can be done, and
24 I've heard a lot of testimony about
25 supporters of Carousel House and

1 supporters of changing the system.

2 This doesn't have to be an
3 either-or debate. It should be a
4 yes-and conversation. Our entire rec
5 system needs to be accessible, and it
6 will take a lot of training. It will
7 take some time and it will take a lot of
8 money, but it's absolutely abhorrent to
9 think that nearly 250,000 Philadelphians
10 with disabilities should have one
11 dedicated rec center at a time when the
12 City hasn't provided the accessible
13 infrastructure to get everyone who needs
14 that center from their house to
15 Fairmount Park.

16 If you want to make the
17 investment to make every rec center
18 possible, this City has the people and
19 organizations who can lift the entire
20 Parks & Rec system. And it can't be
21 wishful thinking. We can no longer rely
22 on good intentions. All right. The
23 City has had 47 years -- forget the ADA.
24 You've had 47 years since the 1973
25 Rehabilitation Act and Section 504 to

1 make yourself accessible, and I don't
2 understand why the disability community
3 has had to wait this long for its human
4 rights to be recognized by the City.
5 There's a network of partners ready to
6 go. And honestly, we're just waiting
7 for you to say when, so thanks for your
8 time.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
10 Mr. Orr.

11 Are there any other witnesses
12 here to testify?

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCILMAN GREEN: All right.
15 And I don't see any additional questions
16 or comments from members of Council. So
17 I will say that there being no further
18 questions from members of the Committee
19 and no other witnesses to testify, I
20 will ask for those -- and we just asked
21 that question, if anyone else wanted to
22 offer testimony on either of these two
23 resolutions.

24 I want to thank all of the
25 participants that were here for this

1 hearing. We will continue this
2 conversation that started this
3 conversation. This is an issue that I
4 see both sides of the concern. One, as
5 a location for those that have physical
6 differences and learning differences a
7 safe space where they can be among
8 themselves and their peers to grow and
9 develop levels of self-advocacy and
10 confidence and also be able to have an
11 opportunity to enjoy and participate in
12 Parks & Recreation facilities.

13 But at the same point, we need
14 to make sure that all facilities provide
15 a level of inclusion no matter what type
16 of physical or learning difference or
17 what you're able to do, so we'll
18 continue this conversation. It's an
19 important conversation. I'm looking
20 forward to seeing the finalized report
21 from the Commissioner regarding
22 inclusion, but also want to see what
23 steps we're taking to make sure that
24 we're providing all the services, one,
25 both in a space that allows people the

1 same perspective to be engaged together
2 as well as the same opportunity to then
3 be in other locations regardless of the
4 type of space that they provided.

5 I want to thank everyone and
6 all the panels and the witnesses for
7 their participation today. We value
8 your opinions. And this will conclude
9 the public hearing of this Committee,
10 and we will recess this hearing to the
11 call of the Chair. Thank you all very
12 much for your participation and
13 attendance.

14 (Committee on People with
15 Disabilities and Special Needs concluded
16 at 5:55 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

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

TANEHA C. CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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

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