

Committee of the Whole
February 10, 2021

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Wednesday, February 10, 2021
10:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT DARRELL L. CLARKE, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CHERELLE L. PARKER, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN ALLAN DOMB
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

RESOLUTIONS: 200715, 200716, 210031, 210032,
210033

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2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
3 morning. I'm going to get started. And
4 I would like to welcome everyone to the
5 public hearing and public meeting of the
6 City Council Committee of the Whole.
7 State law currently requires that the
8 following announcement be made at the
9 beginning of every remote public hearing
10 as follows: Due to the current public
11 health emergency, City Council
12 Committees are currently meeting
13 remotely. We are using Microsoft Teams
14 to make these remote hearings possible.

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

23 Mr. Christmas, will you please
24 call the roll to take attendance. And
25 Members that are present, please

1 indicate by saying present or aye or
2 whatever it is you so chose.

3 Mr. Christmas, call the roll.

4 THE CLERK: Yes, sir. Council
5 Lady Bass.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
7 morning. I am present. Thank you very
8 much.

9 THE CLERK: Council Lady
10 Brooks.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good
12 morning. I am present.

13 THE CLERK: Councilman Domb.

14 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Good morning,
15 Council President and colleagues.

16 THE CLERK: Council Lady
17 Gauthier.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Good
19 morning, Council President. Good
20 morning, colleagues. Present.

21 THE CLERK: Council Lady
22 Gilmore Richardson.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
24 RICHARDSON: Good morning, Council
25 President and colleagues. I'm here.

1 THE CLERK: Councilmember
2 Green.

3 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Good
4 morning, Council President. Good
5 morning, colleagues. I am present.

6 THE CLERK: Council Lady Gym.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Good
8 morning, everyone. I'm present.

9 THE CLERK: Council --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I'm
11 going to ask everyone to mute their mic.

12 THE CLERK: Councilman Jones.

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'm present
14 and fully masked. I'm around my staff.
15 Good morning.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
17 morning.

18 THE CLERK: Okay. I --
19 Councilman Jones is present.

20 Councilman Johnson, please.

21 (No response.)

22 THE CLERK: Councilman O'Neill,
23 please.

24 (No response.)

25 THE CLERK: Councilman Oh,

1 please.

2 COUNCILMAN OH: Present. Good
3 morning.

4 THE CLERK: Council Lady Parker.

5 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Good
6 morning, Mr. President, colleagues and
7 Philadelphia.

8 THE CLERK: Council Lady
9 Quinones-Sanchez.

10 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
11 Good morning, Mr. President and
12 colleagues.

13 THE CLERK: Councilman Squilla.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I think
15 that's me. I'm having a hard time
16 hearing. But good morning, Council
17 President and colleagues.

18 THE CLERK: Councilman Thomas.

19 (No response.)

20 THE CLERK: Council President
21 Clarke.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I am
23 here, and let's get started.

24 COUNCILMAN HENON: Excuse me,
25 Council President. This is Councilman

1 Bobby Henon. Good morning, colleagues.

2 I apologize. I am present.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good
4 morning, Councilman.

5 Okay. This the public hearing
6 of the Committee of the Whole regarding
7 Resolution Nos. 200715, 200716, 210031
8 210032 and 210033.

9 Mr. Christmas, can you please
10 read the title of the resolutions.

11 THE CLERK: Resolution
12 appointing James Aros, Jr. to the
13 position of Chief Assessment Officer of
14 the Office of Property Assessment.
15 That's Resolution 200715.

16 Resolution 200716, confirming
17 the appointment of Diana Cortes as the
18 City Solicitor.

19 Resolution 210031, confirming
20 the appointment of Cecelia Thompson to
21 the Board of Education of the School
22 District of Philadelphia.

23 Resolution 210032, confirming
24 the appointment of Lisa Salley to the
25 Board of Education of the School

1 District of Philadelphia.

2 And Resolution 210033,
3 confirming the appointment of Reginald
4 L. Streater, Esquire, to the Board of
5 Education of the School District of
6 Philadelphia.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

8 Thank you, Mr. Christmas.

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

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

1 feature must only be used for this
2 particular purpose.

3 Mr. Christmas, will you please
4 call the first witness we have to
5 testify this morning on Resolution Nos.
6 200715, 200716, 210031, 210032 and
7 210033.

8 THE CLERK: Our first
9 witnesses, Council President, are James
10 Aros, Jr., nominee for Chief Assessment
11 Officer of the Office of Property
12 Assessment and Rob Dubow, City Finance
13 Director.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
15 Thank you. Good morning.

16 MR. AROS: Good morning.

17 MR. DUBOW: Good morning.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
19 Please state your name for the record
20 and you can proceed with your testimony.

21 MR. AROS: Thank you. Good
22 morning, Council President Clarke and
23 members of City Council. My name is
24 James Aros, Jr. I'm the Interim Chief
25 Assessment Officer at the Office of

1 Property Assessment. I thank you for
2 the opportunity to testify on Resolution
3 200715, which would appoint me to the
4 Chief Assessment Officer position
5 permanently to complete the term ending
6 June 30, 2022.

7 I'm a lifelong resident of the
8 City of Philadelphia and have been
9 working for the City in the property
10 assessment field for the past 17 years.
11 This has given me the opportunity to
12 learn about the value and duty of the
13 Department at every level over the
14 course of nearly two decades. I have
15 served in my current role as the Interim
16 Chief Assessment Officer since January
17 2020.

18 I believe in the importance of
19 fair, equitable, ongoing reassessments
20 that the OPA strives to provide as well
21 as its commitment to continuously
22 approve the assessment process. The OPA
23 has recently implemented a number of key
24 process and procedure changes that were
25 suggested by industry expert Robert

1 Gloudemans as well as recommendations
2 made by an external audit commission by
3 City Council.

4 These changes include creating
5 a dedicated market data team, hiring
6 additional modelers, making valuation
7 and assessment reports available on
8 OPA's website and documenting and
9 explaining the assessment and valuation
10 process to the public. The OPA is also
11 in the process of reviewing and
12 implementing several additional
13 recommendations, including a review of
14 all classifications and condition codes
15 for residential and nonresidential
16 properties.

17 Taken together, these
18 improvements will help ensure the
19 sustained success of the Department and
20 will assist the OPA in achieving the
21 long-term goal of receiving the
22 Certificate of Assessment and Assessment
23 Administration from the International
24 Association of Assessing Officers. It
25 has been a privilege to serve the

1 citizens of Philadelphia and I am
2 honored to be nominated to continue to
3 serve in this capacity on a permanent
4 basis. This concludes my testimony and
5 I'm available to answer any questions
6 you may have.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

8 Thank you very much.

9 Mr. Dubow, are you just here to
10 provide support or did you have any
11 testimony?

12 MR. DUBOW: Just here for
13 support.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

15 Okay. All right. Thank you and good
16 morning.

17 Mr. Aros, I had one question
18 that I know that is usually on
19 everybody's mind. CAMA system, is it
20 ready and is it functional and we can
21 count on it to give us accurate
22 assessments and all of the other good
23 things that was promised over the many,
24 many years that we've been hearing this
25 year after year in the testimony?

1 MR. AROS: Sure. We went live
2 with our CAMA system about a year ago
3 and Phase 1 of the functionality is a
4 roll-out of all of our previous
5 processes for our day-to-day business
6 operations here, and that started a year
7 ago and has been ongoing, the roll-out
8 since then. And we are preparing to
9 start the second and third phases of the
10 CAMA implementation, which is new
11 functionality and technology, to assist
12 us with data collection in the field and
13 a new customer service interface for
14 citizens to interact with us on our
15 website and some other new functionality
16 that we currently don't have. And we
17 will be using that system for the next
18 reassessment that we do and we
19 anticipate no issues with that, and
20 we'll be using that fully as we complete
21 the next round of assessments.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
23 Okay. Well, that's good to hear. We've
24 been talking about it for a long, long
25 time.

1 One other question, in earlier
2 years before the pandemic hit, there was
3 this suggestion that we would experience
4 natural growth and values. I think we
5 estimated around 3 percent. Are we
6 still there or has it been a dramatic
7 change in terms of what we project as it
8 relates to the natural growth
9 assessment?

10 MR. AROS: So in the last year
11 alone, so if we look at Calendar Year
12 2020, the growth in market -- the growth
13 and the value of sales of properties
14 throughout the City was much higher than
15 that. I've seen estimates for
16 residential property in excess of 10
17 percent just for 2020 sales in and of
18 themselves. I would say that any
19 predictions that we may have had or may
20 have estimated the year previously may
21 not have been -- well, certainly have
22 been exceeded in the last year and then
23 we'll see if that continues to happen
24 before the next round of assessments.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All

1 right. My last question, and then I'll
2 pass it over to my colleagues, can you
3 tell me what's going on with that
4 significantly increased level of market
5 value and sales? I think some people
6 thought that somehow it would be
7 negatively impacted by the pandemic.
8 But when you look at our budget
9 projection, that's the one category
10 that's actually increased or kept pace
11 at a minimum and probably exceeded what
12 we did last year.

13 Can you give me a sense of
14 what's going on and why the values are
15 driving up?

16 MR. AROS: So at a very high
17 level, there were fewer transactions
18 that took place in 2020 compared to
19 previous years, although it was a single
20 digit decrease so it wasn't a
21 tremendously large number. I think the
22 historically low interest rates are
23 certainly a driver for folks to try and
24 get in and purchase a property at lower
25 rates.

1 And we've seen demand for
2 properties really go through the roof
3 and bidding wars for certain properties
4 take off at the moment a property hits
5 the market, record number of days on the
6 market in terms of actually being
7 shorter than normal and the supply for
8 the last year or so has not met the
9 demand that is out there in the market,
10 so those are really some of the main
11 factors as to why there's been such a
12 growth over the last year.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

14 Okay. I know I said that was my last
15 question, but this is my last question:
16 I know that there was also some concerns
17 raised about people leaving the City of
18 Philadelphia because of the pandemic,
19 the density issue and everybody had
20 projected everybody was going to move to
21 the suburbs where the COVID numbers were
22 much lower. And I don't know if you can
23 determine that. I know you can look at
24 sales, and our transfer tax is up by the
25 way also. Do you have a perspective on

1 that? Are we seeing that? We were
2 really concerned about that based on
3 what --

4 MR. AROS: Yeah, so -- I mean,
5 on our end we haven't done any analysis
6 as far as our people leaving the City.
7 But when you see the number of
8 transactions that are out there, it
9 means that, yes, somebody is selling a
10 property but it means that somebody is
11 buying it too and folks are not buying
12 property to have it sit there vacant.
13 So as people are selling and perhaps
14 leaving the City, there's somebody
15 coming right behind them that's
16 purchasing that property because they
17 want to live in the City, and there are
18 a couple of large-scale apartment
19 projects that are still under way or
20 have been put under contract during the
21 pandemic, so there are still folks that
22 want to be in the City and they're
23 trying to meet the need by having that
24 supply out there of those apartment
25 units.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

2 Okay. Chair recognizes Councilwoman
3 Gauthier.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
5 you, Council President.

6 Good morning, Mr. Aros.

7 MR. AROS: Good morning.

8 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: During
9 your testimony, you mentioned that the
10 OPA has implemented or is in the process
11 of implementing recommendations from
12 reports issued in December 2018 and
13 January 2019. On January 2019, OPA
14 posted an action plan on its website
15 that outlines the implementation plan
16 and schedule for these reforms.

17 It doesn't appear that the
18 action plan has been updated since then
19 to reflect the progress that OPA has
20 made since the release of the plan over
21 two years ago. Can you describe the
22 specific progress made under
23 construction quality and data
24 enhancement category? Improving the
25 collection of this type of data in

1 particular is vital to ensuring accurate
2 and fair assessments.

3 MR. AROS: Sure. So we are
4 currently in the midst of that project
5 of capturing and collecting
6 construction-quality grade conditional
7 properties as I mentioned and some
8 property-style information.

9 We have an RFP that was issued
10 and we contracted with an outside vendor
11 to assist us with that. That data
12 collection project is ongoing at the
13 moment. And once that's completed, we
14 will be importing all of that data into
15 our systems and using it to see if it
16 makes a difference in our values and
17 incorporating it in our modeling process
18 as we move forward. So that project is
19 ongoing as we speak.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: What do
21 you see as the timeline for that?

22 MR. AROS: So we are
23 anticipating to have all that
24 information in our system and ready to
25 be used for the assessments that will be

1 completed next year for Tax Year 2023.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
3 you. So you also mentioned in your
4 testimony that you plan to explain the
5 assessment and valuation process to the
6 public. How do you plan to go about
7 doing that and what is your action plan
8 for community engagement around the new
9 assessments, especially given the
10 historic inequities, inaccuracies and
11 lack of transparency around these
12 assessments in our City?

13 MR. AROS: Sure. So as I
14 mentioned, we published a number of
15 documents on our website as required by
16 the City Code, City Charter to explain
17 what our methodologies are, how we come
18 about, what our ratio statistics are.
19 And as far as community interaction, we
20 try to be as available as possible to
21 the public.

22 I know we have a dedicated
23 community outreach coordinator who
24 interfaces with just about every Council
25 office I believe, and prepandemic we

1 were at many meetings across the City at
2 various times and we will fully be
3 prepared to make ourselves available and
4 to respond to any requests that come
5 from other Council offices, the
6 community organizations, the RCOs that
7 would like to have us come out and talk
8 to their respective groups when the next
9 round of assessments come out.

10 We usually get most of those
11 requests when there is a round of
12 assessments that come out, but we're
13 available year-round for anybody who
14 would like to have us come out and talk
15 to their group.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Do you
17 think that we should have a more
18 proactive plan just given traditionally
19 how this has played out in the City?

20 MR. AROS: Sure. We can
21 certainly look at being proactive and
22 reaching out to those organizations
23 ahead of time and say, hey, would you
24 like us to come out and speak as opposed
25 to waiting for the request. There are

1 some groups that it's really a yearly
2 standing request that we're always
3 coming out there at a certain time, and
4 others it's sort of ad hoc, if they hear
5 from their residents and they want some
6 more information, we come out. So it's
7 certainly something worth considering.
8 And obviously, we're here -- well,
9 prepandemic we were here in the office
10 all the time, but we have a number of
11 ways to contact us to ask questions
12 about the assessments through our
13 citizen service portal.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Okay.
15 Last question: What specific steps will
16 you take to ensure that the 2023 CAMA
17 property tax assessments do not unfairly
18 and inequitably impact the property
19 assessments of long-time homeowners in
20 gentrifying neighborhoods?

21 MR. AROS: So one of the things
22 that we're going to do that is going to
23 help with the quality of the assessments
24 for the whole City is that we're going
25 to be bringing in an outside consultant

1 to do an audit of our process and
2 procedures and the results of the 2023
3 reassessment project, so we'll be able
4 to get some realtime feedback as far as
5 what's working, what we might need to
6 improve ahead of the certification of
7 the assessments. And then at the end of
8 that, have them review what the numbers
9 look like and do some ratio statistics,
10 ratio studies to see how we were
11 successful in that. That's really the
12 biggest thing that I could say that's
13 going to be able for us to come back and
14 say, we were successful with this and we
15 were able to alter this methodology in
16 the process. If there was some sort of
17 tweaking we need to do, we like to do
18 that ahead of time before we finished
19 the project.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Will
21 that help have any specific focus on
22 equity?

23 MR. AROS: Yeah. There are
24 ratio measures that focus on equity of
25 the level of assessment and the market

1 value of properties, so that will be
2 part of that.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
4 you.

5 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON:
6 Mr. President, can I have a point of
7 information if you don't mind? This is
8 Councilman Johnson.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
10 Chair recognizes Councilman Johnson for
11 a point of information.

12 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Will the
13 gentleman commit to holding off
14 assessments until the outside
15 independent party comes in and clarifies
16 the outcome of the actual evaluation
17 that they're going to do?

18 MR. AROS: I cannot commit to
19 that at this time, but it's something we
20 will consider.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
22 Mr. Dubow, I expected you to speak up.

23 MR. DUBOW: So the outside
24 auditor will be providing information to
25 OPA as the process goes along. So

1 whatever input they have will help
2 during the process, so that assessment
3 will be done kind of in coordination
4 with the assessment that OPA is doing.
5 So by definition, the way it's working,
6 their work will be finished before the
7 assessment is done.

8 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

10 You're good, Councilman. Thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
12 Mr. President.

13 Thank you, Councilwoman
14 Gauthier.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

16 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Gym.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you
18 very much, Council President.

19 And good morning, Mr. Aros.

20 Good morning, Mr. Dubow.

21 MR. AROS: Good morning.

22 MR. DUBOW: Good morning.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So to follow
24 up a little bit on Councilmember
25 Gauthier is the question of reupping the

1 assessments and the understanding that
2 we have not conducted or made our
3 residents aware of assessments that have
4 been ongoing for now two years; is that
5 correct?

6 MR. AROS: So for Tax Year 2021
7 and for Tax Year 2022, which we'll be
8 certifying next month, there was not a
9 city-wide comprehensive reassessment on
10 all properties. So for those two years
11 the changes that folks are seeing are
12 pretty much restricted to properties
13 that had a change, such as a tear-down,
14 a fire, new construction added or
15 exemptions or abatements that are
16 rolling off so their market values
17 becoming fully taxable, they're getting
18 notices that say their assessment
19 breakdowns are changing, but those are
20 pretty much the limit on folks that are
21 getting reassessments for the tax year
22 that is currently being certified and
23 for the one previous.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And in your
25 opinion, is it healthy for the City to

1 be doing regular assessments annually?

2 MR. AROS: Yeah, absolutely.

3 And that's our goal, to able to be doing
4 that on a yearly basis reacting to the
5 market, if necessary. If we come to a
6 point in time where the market is really
7 flat, then there's really not much for
8 us to do if the assessments are
9 up-to-date. But one of the benefits of
10 doing yearly assessments is that if you
11 see sustained growth in the market as
12 we've had in Philadelphia and certain
13 sectors for a long period of time,
14 you're getting that year by year as
15 opposed to one large change a couple of
16 years at a time.

17 And when you see a year of
18 growth like we had last year, the number
19 in and of itself is double digits. So
20 we would certainly be -- we would want
21 to be doing this on a yearly basis so
22 that way folks can be expecting their
23 notices the same time every year and we
24 can keep up with the markets one way or
25 another, whichever way it's going.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I appreciate
2 you outlining the advantages and
3 importance of the annual assessments. I
4 think it's clear that Council can have a
5 responsibility about what to do with
6 regard to property taxes, but it's
7 important for us to be able to track the
8 assessments and understand growth that's
9 happening within the City, particularly
10 if there are market areas that feel
11 outside of the norms, that we could
12 maybe track all of them.

13 So it is your expectation from
14 your Department that OPA will move
15 forward with a full city-wide
16 reassessment in 2023, correct?

17 MR. AROS: Yes, that's correct.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Okay. And
19 in anticipation of that, I think my
20 colleague asked about the importance of
21 public communications, and I think you
22 talked about how you have availability
23 that's made to you or you are available
24 should people request there's
25 information on the website. But given

1 the fact that there has not been a city-
2 wide reassessment in three years between
3 2020 and 2023, many residents could be
4 confused, blindsided or surprised by
5 changes that might exist in their
6 property assessments regardless of
7 what's happened in the market.

8 What we've learned from our
9 experiences around COVID, from our
10 experiences around school reopening is
11 that if you expect the public to come to
12 you, you will be blindsided by your
13 ability to meet public demand when your
14 roll-out is clear. So I think I would
15 say to you that I would be very
16 dissatisfied with the communications
17 plan that you have laid out. I think
18 it's something that we have seen with
19 the health care, with our School
20 District and it has largely backfired.

21 I'm interested in hearing from
22 you about whether you have -- and the
23 importance of learning lessons including
24 things like a hotline, including things
25 like an affirmative communications plan,

1 including things like making sure your
2 community outreach person doesn't just
3 serve Council offices, but actually
4 serves community neighborhoods. So has
5 that been discussed?

6 Mr. Aros, if you're not the
7 person to do it, maybe, Mr. Dubow, you
8 can step in.

9 MR. AROS: So we haven't had
10 any specific discussions as far as a
11 communications plan or a roll-out around
12 the 2023 reassessment as of yet. But
13 listening to your comments and some of
14 the concerns raised previously in this
15 meeting, it's certainly something that
16 we're mindful of and we will try to be
17 proactive as possible.

18 As I mentioned, we're not only
19 just talking with Council offices all
20 the time, but our community outreach
21 coordinator has contact with I don't
22 want to say every RCO out there, but
23 we've been all over the City at various
24 times meeting requests for community
25 involvement and coming to community

1 meetings, so we will continue that. And
2 as we get closer to finishing the
3 assessments, we will have a better sense
4 of what kind of changes folks should
5 expect and how we might need to
6 coordinate and be available to the
7 communities in advance of those
8 assessments being issued.

9 MR. DUBOW: And just to confirm
10 what Mr. Aros said, we will make sure
11 that there is a communications plan so
12 that your people know what's coming and
13 understand why and how, what kind of
14 impacts it might have.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I just think
16 we cannot take a compliance-based
17 approach towards communications. It's
18 really got to be much more affirmative.

19 Thank you very much,
20 Mr. President.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
22 (Muted).

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Council
24 President, you're on mute.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

1 Thank you. Sorry.

2 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
3 Gilmore Richardson.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Thank you, Mr. President.

6 Thank you, Mr. Aros. First, I
7 wanted to start with your
8 industry-specific credentials. Can you
9 speak to your industry-specific
10 credentials that make you qualify for
11 this role?

12 MR. AROS: Sure. As I
13 mentioned, I've been working in this
14 industry for over 17 years now. I am a
15 certified Pennsylvania evaluator, which
16 is a designation issued by the
17 Pennsylvania State Board of Appraisers
18 and I'm a member of the International
19 Association of Assessing Officers, the
20 IAAO, which is the global organization
21 that sort of governs and put out the
22 standards on the work that we do and I
23 am currently a candidate for their CAE
24 designation, which is their highest
25 designation for someone who is working

1 in the assessment industry.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

3 RICHARDSON: Okay. Excellent. Thank
4 you so much. And I wanted to move
5 forward to a question I had and you
6 noted your years of experience in OPA,
7 so I wanted to go more so to your
8 contracting opportunities within OPA.

9 What is the overall goal for
10 your minority, women and disabled
11 business enterprises for OPA?

12 MR. AROS: Sure. So off the
13 top of my head, I believe that's
14 currently at 10 to 20 percent. We have
15 a new -- we have several new contracts
16 that will be going out over the course
17 of the next year and we've already been
18 in touch to make sure that we have those
19 available and there's offerings and
20 opportunities for folks that meet that
21 qualification in order to be able to be
22 contracted with us. So we have a number
23 of contracts that will be going out in
24 the next year and that will be a heavy
25 focus on what we do with those.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

2 RICHARDSON: Okay. So I wanted to
3 repeat that, are you talking about the
4 actual amount of contracts that you all
5 have engaged in or are you referring to
6 your goal? My question was around what
7 is your goal.

8 MR. AROS: Yeah. So the goal,
9 as I said, I believe is 10 to 20
10 percent. And in order to reach that
11 goal, we have a number of contracts that
12 are expiring right now that we will
13 reissue and will be working towards
14 making sure we meet that goal, if not
15 exceed it in the coming year.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

17 RICHARDSON: Okay. And then can you
18 just discuss the total dollar amount
19 that was spent over the last two fiscal
20 years with your minority contracts and
21 vendors?

22 MR. AROS: I don't have that
23 number handy, but we can certainly get
24 back to you on that.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: Okay. May you provide that
2 to the Council President for the benefit
3 of the body.

4 I wanted to also circle back to
5 some questions specifically around the
6 report that was commissioned. Relative
7 to OPA's adherence to the Code, the
8 report found 11 out of the 18 required
9 processes in the Philadelphia Code,
10 including failure to publish assessment
11 standards and others were not adhered
12 to. So can you just talk about the
13 steps that you all have taken there.
14 And also, will your Department be
15 providing City Council with the
16 assessment studies that will help shape
17 how you move forward with the 2023
18 assessments?

19 MR. AROS: Yes. So as I
20 mentioned earlier, we've gone ahead and
21 published a number of documents on our
22 website around our most recent
23 reassessment projects and racial
24 statistics and methodology explanations
25 as required by the Code that was

1 referenced in the report as not being
2 done. We work towards that and
3 published those about a year and a half,
4 two years now, that would be. And we
5 were working with Council with how those
6 reports will be issued and what they'll
7 look like as we move forward with Tax
8 Year 2023. We'll be having some
9 meetings with Council representatives
10 about that. I'm sorry. Was that one
11 last part of the question that I did not
12 address?

13 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

14 RICHARDSON: Sure. And when will your
15 Department be providing City Council
16 with the assessment studies that will
17 help shape the 2023 assessments?

18 MR. AROS: Sure. So as we have
19 the discussions about what the reports
20 will look like upon the completion of
21 reassessment with Council, we can also
22 discuss what kind of information we can
23 provide along the way. Obviously, most
24 of the information is going to be
25 provided at the end once everything is

1 completed, but we can certainly work on
2 a timeline to provide whatever
3 information might be requested as needed
4 along the way.

5 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

6 RICHARDSON: Okay. That will be very
7 helpful, because I think that
8 information helps Councilmembers to
9 communicate with our constituents. And
10 the last thing I wanted to ask, you
11 talked about the citizen service portal.
12 But in the vain of transparency and
13 accountability, I frequently use the OPA
14 website as I travel throughout the City.

15 Can you speak to the feature on
16 the website that has been disabled where
17 you cannot search by name? So
18 typically, you can search by address or
19 you can search by block, but you're
20 unable to search by name. Can you speak
21 to why that change was made if we're
22 seeking to increase transparency and
23 accountability in government?

24 MR. AROS: Yes. So the
25 property data website that you're

1 referring to it's really governed by a
2 number of City agencies, including the
3 OPA with the information that we
4 provide, it pulls in data from L&I and
5 some other organizations, so it's not
6 strictly the OPA's website. And there
7 had been some discussions at the broad
8 level about privacy concerns and whether
9 a search by owner would be appropriate,
10 and the collective decision across the
11 organizations was made to remove the
12 property search, but the property owner
13 information is still available. It's
14 just you can't search by a property
15 owner's name.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

17 RICHARDSON: Council President, I did
18 hear the bell, but I wanted to drill
19 down on this specific question. Can you
20 please go into detail relative to who
21 made this decision and details on why
22 this decision was made, because I know
23 that no one communicated this change
24 specifically with my office?

25 I understand privacy concerns.

1 But often times there are many issues
2 around trying to figure out exactly
3 who's the owner of a property or how
4 many properties they may own in the
5 City, and we just need to have further
6 clarity around who collectively made
7 that decision and exactly why that
8 happened.

9 Thank you, Council President.

10 MR. DUBOW: I was part of that
11 decision-making process. If it's okay
12 with the Councilmember, I would like to
13 have an offline conversation with you
14 about that, if that works for you.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

16 Okay. But immediately somebody watching
17 this will say, well, what are they going
18 to talk about offline that they can't
19 talk about on screen.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

21 RICHARDSON: Exactly.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: So
23 we'll have the offline conversation, and
24 I'm sure it will be subsequently
25 followed by an online conversation.

1 MR. DUBOW: Okay.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All
3 right.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
5 RICHARDSON: Thank you, Council
6 President.

7 And thank you, Mr. Dubow and
8 Mr. Aros.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
10 Thank you. Chair recognizes
11 Councilwoman Quinones-Sanchez.

12 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
13 Good morning, folks. Good morning.
14 Thank you so much for your clarity
15 around how we are going to drive some of
16 the best practices in challenges around
17 the CAMA system. Back in 2017, '18 we
18 had many conversations about the
19 assessment and the historical practice
20 by the City of Philadelphia to increase
21 people's taxes when we did
22 infrastructure improvements, and
23 therefore, I don't fix this because my
24 taxes are going to go up, I don't fix
25 this because (inaudible) long-term

1 residents is, most of the new things
2 that are coming in, shopping malls or
3 whatever, have an abatement value, what
4 I call artificial value because until
5 you're paying taxes on it, it is not
6 real.

7 It is valued for your balance
8 sheet for purposes of finances, but it
9 is not real. But the City's practice to
10 spread that value to long-term residents
11 has created this tension between
12 improvements mean that I'm going to get
13 a real estate increase.

14 We passed Bill 170467 that said
15 part of the new formula transparency
16 requirement is that we have to follow
17 state law and ensure that unrealized
18 abatement value is not factored in. Can
19 you speak to me in layman's terms how
20 you are ensuring that, that
21 underrealized value is not spread out to
22 others?

23 MR. AROS: Sure. So when we do
24 our market value estimates, when we say
25 market value, we're doing an estimate as

1 of a certain date as to what a property
2 in a hypothetical situation between a
3 willing buyer and a willing seller, what
4 that transaction amount would be if it
5 were on the open market with no undue
6 duress and a couple of other qualifiers.
7 So when we do our valuations, we're
8 trying our best to compare apples to
9 apples and oranges to oranges.

10 So if a property is brand new,
11 three stories, 3,000 square feet with a
12 number of amenities, only properties
13 that are like that property are being a
14 value to --

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

16 So let me stop you there. Let me stop
17 you there. That is part of our
18 challenge. The new abatement property
19 with three stories should not impact a
20 long-term resident's value. So you have
21 a property at 500,000 with abatement and
22 then you have a property next door
23 that's only really worth 100 and meets
24 150, but the end result of our
25 assessment process is that \$100,000

1 property now becomes valued at 250,000
2 and the abatement property has an
3 artificial value. That is illegal
4 according to state law.

5 So how are we going to fix that
6 because that's the tension we're
7 feeling? Because once you do the
8 market, the general market, you
9 encompass all property. And that is
10 where we have the rub around the City
11 needing to capture unrealized value and
12 spreading it out to other folks. Are we
13 going to get people to trust it when we
14 see a GMA, it reflects that?

15 MR. AROS: Sure. So in your
16 example, the two-story property that's
17 next to the new construction, when we
18 value --

19 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
20 I'm saying two stories to three stories.
21 You guys use this formula, yes.

22 MR. AROS: Okay. So anything
23 that's not new construction when we
24 value those properties, we are not using
25 the sales of new construction to value

1 that property. We are looking at
2 properties that are similar or exactly
3 the same as that in that area, same
4 size, same condition and what those
5 properties are transacting for on the
6 open market, and then those are the
7 sales we're using to estimate the value
8 of the older property in your example.

9 So when we go to do that, we're
10 seeing, okay, this is this type of
11 property, how many sales have we had,
12 what are they going for. So as we're
13 required by law to estimate what the
14 property would sell for on the open
15 market, we have to use that market data
16 for those specific types of properties.
17 And whatever that market is bearing out
18 at that time, those are the numbers that
19 we're going to use to help formulate
20 what our estimate of market value is on
21 that older, smaller, not as nice of a
22 condition or not as modern as the newer
23 properties that are getting the
24 abatements.

25 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

1 So when you create the general market
2 areas that help you get averages, how
3 are you going to make sure that that is
4 factored out, because again that becomes
5 a part of your formula base to say
6 there's a bigger value here, how are
7 going to ensure that?

8 MR. AROS: So we review our
9 market areas before each assessment is
10 completed. So we try to pick up what
11 trends are happening, which
12 neighborhoods are now maybe more similar
13 to other ones where the values and the
14 types of properties, there's a similar
15 type of demand for certain properties.
16 But if you're talking about properties
17 on the same block, for example, right
18 next to each other, those are going to
19 be in the same geographic market area,
20 but they're not in the same pool of
21 sales or part of the same exact
22 valuation process. So we go a couple
23 steps further than the GMA for the
24 market area when we group properties
25 together.

1 So the geographic market area
2 is the first step, but then there's the
3 size of the property, the position, how
4 old it is and what's its style. So you
5 get much more refined than the
6 geographic market area when we're
7 looking at the values of the properties
8 and what the sale prices are.

9 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
10 Okay. Well, we'll look forward to
11 working with you as those come up. That
12 has not been our experience in the past,
13 and that's a key component of us in this
14 debate.

15 And, Council President, I just
16 have one last question that I think is
17 important.

18 It goes to, what is your
19 philosophical view on land value tax in
20 the City when you look at Philadelphia
21 in comparison to Boston, New York and
22 other places in light of our limited
23 tool box and our uniformity challenge?

24 MR. AROS: So tax policy
25 questions specifically is not under our

1 purview, so I will defer to Mr. Dubow on
2 that if he has any comments. But I'm
3 looking forward to your webinar coming
4 up soon to hear what your thoughts are
5 on that.

6 MR. DUBOW: AJ gave a great
7 answer. I don't know if I can top that.

8 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
9 Rob and I have had too many debates
10 about this already. I want to debate
11 someone new.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: He's
13 learning from you, Rob.

14 MR. DUBOW: Yes.

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
16 Well, I think it's a conversation --
17 again, as we talk about fairness and
18 GMAs and value again around long-term
19 residents, we really need to take that
20 into consideration. We have penalized,
21 again these are bad practices of the
22 past, you fix your house, you got a new
23 assessment, your taxes went up. We
24 really have disincentivized housing
25 preservation and for an old city, and

1 then when you look at Boston and others,
2 this is a challenge. So I look forward
3 to this debate. It's one that we should
4 be having as we go and build that
5 capacity to have annual assessments. So
6 thank you very much.

7 Thank you, Council President.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

9 Thank you, Councilwoman.

10 Next up Councilman Green.

11 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
12 Council President.

13 And great minds think alike
14 because I was going to ask about land
15 value tax and that was a very good
16 adjustment, Mr. Aros. I see you've
17 learned very quickly from Sensei Dubow
18 on how to definitely answer questions in
19 a creative way. But it does seem prior
20 to the pandemic, especially with
21 properties that had a tax abatement,
22 there was an increase in assessment on
23 land for those properties, which some
24 have called that a backdoor land value
25 tax.

1 So could you provide some
2 perspective on prior to the pandemic
3 from your experience that increase on
4 the land value assessment, especially
5 for properties that have a tax
6 abatement?

7 MR. AROS: Sure. So for all
8 properties throughout the City several
9 years ago, we revised the methodology of
10 how we value underlying land or residual
11 land, however you would like to refer to
12 it as. So the land portion of the
13 assessment as part of the whole when the
14 property has a building on it, so we
15 switched to a methodology of an
16 allocation percentage based on the
17 location of the property and the
18 condition of the property.

19 So we start with overall market
20 value of the property and then based on
21 condition, location, a specific
22 percentage of that overall market value
23 is allocated to the land as we have to
24 break out assessments for land and
25 building. And that was -- from a

1 methodology perspective, we thought that
2 gave us a better way to value the land.

3 And obviously, that did affect
4 some of the properties with the
5 abatements, but it was not a specific
6 project to value properties that had
7 abatements or did not. It was city-
8 wide. And just about every property,
9 residential property in the City, was
10 affected when we did that change in
11 methodology.

12 COUNCILMAN GREEN: So based on
13 that change in methodology and using the
14 allocation, you were allocating more the
15 value on the land of part of the entire
16 valuation of the parcel, including the
17 structure on it?

18 MR. AROS: So there were
19 changes both ways. In some cases the
20 land allocation caused an increase in
21 the land value attributed as part of the
22 market value. In other cases, it went
23 down. So if you think of some of the
24 neighborhoods in the City, Northeast
25 Northwest where you have very large

1 parcels of land or larger than your
2 average City parcel, trying to do a rate
3 per square foot method becomes
4 problematic because then you're putting
5 almost 80, 90, 100 percent value of the
6 land even at a very low rate per square
7 foot.

8 And trying to be consistent
9 across the City on how we value the
10 land, the allocation methodology which
11 is used in a number of other
12 jurisdictions is the one we chose to
13 adopt for the most recent couple of
14 assessments we have done. And the
15 changes went both ways where people saw
16 their land value decrease as part of the
17 overall percentage and other cases where
18 the land value increased as part of the
19 overall percentage.

20 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Two other
21 quick questions before my time is up. I
22 know you're very familiar with the
23 actual value initiative that we've had
24 in years past. Can you give a
25 perspective in your role now on

1 assessments how we'll get away from
2 having to have this long span of time
3 before we do regular assessments and try
4 to do it on a time period that makes the
5 most sense for the citizens in the City
6 of Philadelphia, but at the same point
7 making sure we're capturing appreciation
8 and value of homes and what would be
9 that correct time period to do that
10 city-wide assessment and how often.

11 MR. AROS: Sure. So moving
12 forward beginning with at this point Tax
13 Year 2023, we want to be looking at that
14 on a yearly basis. So it doesn't mean
15 that everybody's property value would
16 change necessarily every year, but we
17 want to be in a position, we expect to
18 be in a position where on a yearly basis
19 we're reviewing to see where our values
20 are now compared to where we've seen
21 changes in the market since the last
22 reassessment.

23 And as I mentioned earlier, if
24 a market is relatively flat, then there
25 may not be any changes or very few

1 changes that will be a part of any
2 reassessment. If the market goes down,
3 we will react accordingly as well. It's
4 not one way here. Every reassessment we
5 have done has had tens of thousands of
6 decreases in market value going out to
7 taxpayers if that's what we determine
8 was the market at the time. But to
9 anticipate and it's certainly our goal
10 to be reviewing and, if necessary,
11 issuing new assessments on a yearly
12 basis beginning with Tax Year '23.

13 COUNCILMAN GREEN: And one last
14 question. I think you may have touched
15 on this earlier in your presentation in
16 reference to the current status of CAMA
17 and the implementation and how that will
18 also help going forward with more
19 regular assessments both on residential
20 and commercial.

21 MR. AROS: Yeah. So one of the
22 great things about the CAMA system is
23 that it's taking information that we
24 have in a number of different data
25 silos, if you will, and bringing it all

1 under one umbrella and really
2 streamlining our processes, modernizing
3 a number of the processes and all of
4 that will improve our efficiency and
5 lead to the ability to be doing these
6 assessments year over year in a much
7 quicker and a much more hopefully
8 effective fashion.

9 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
10 Council President.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
12 Thank you, Councilman.

13 Chair recognizes Councilman Oh.

14 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
15 much, Council President.

16 Good morning. Nothing personal
17 to you, but I hate the entire thing.
18 I've opposed it. I'm against it. I'm
19 for, like, defund OPA. And I'm joking,
20 but I'm serious. I can remember first
21 coming on the City Council. I think it
22 was my second year I was hearing about
23 CAMA. And every year after that, we've
24 asked about CAMA. It's up. It's
25 running. It needs some tweaks. It's

1 fixed.

2 I'm entering my 10th year and
3 it's beyond perverse that we're
4 continuing to talk about this system
5 that doesn't exist, which means all
6 these years there's been an eyeball and
7 even that assessment process that City
8 Council through an independent audit
9 determined was below industry standards.
10 I introduced a bill to reject those
11 assessments. Give people back their
12 money. They're overtaxed, and I believe
13 that is the basis of gentrification at
14 its core because it really kicks out
15 people who cannot afford to pay for that
16 difference.

17 Now, it sounds like you're
18 getting ready to talk about record
19 property assessments. It is nothing
20 that I am familiar with. I see COVID.
21 I see joblessness. I see businesses,
22 small businesses that won't reopen. I
23 see people moving out to the rural areas
24 of Pennsylvania, if not. I know we got
25 people coming from New York, but people

1 are not planning to be in this City.

2 Violence, joblessness, tourism is down.

3 You want to check about tourism

4 and tourism dollars, no concerts, no

5 restaurants. None of these things are

6 going on. How are you coming up with

7 these record high assessments? I

8 understand there are some big expensive

9 condos and apartments being built, but

10 people are not living well. How can

11 their properties be assessed even more

12 higher? I would expect the assessments

13 go down. And quite frankly, what you

14 are asked is absolutely the case.

15 When someone does a 10-year

16 abatement improvement, it is not

17 supposed to impact the surrounding

18 properties and yet it does. We see that

19 it does. And then when we look at near

20 my neighborhood, yeah, the houses look

21 the same. The incomes inside the houses

22 are dramatically different and it's not

23 because of the property. It's because

24 University of Penn provides financial

25 incentives and insistence depending on

1 what side of the street you live in.
2 You cannot assess surrounding properties
3 based on that. The methodology is
4 wrong.

5 I don't know what to do,
6 introduce a Charter change to require
7 certain things be done. This is a huge
8 problem. It's not okay. It has -- this
9 OPA office has never been able to even
10 remotely come close to proper
11 assessments year by year.

12 Councilman Squilla suggested
13 you do a quarter of the City each year.
14 I agree with that. Give people a
15 respite. Let them get their feet
16 settled in and finances straight. But
17 right now in this financial crisis,
18 you're talking about jacking up property
19 taxes. That's the people in our City.
20 And we're looking at a potential
21 statewide property tax increase. I
22 think this is a serious problem. I'm
23 just complaining, but I'm going to do
24 something, whatever little me can do.
25 This is a tragic problem.

1 Thank you, Council President.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

3 Thank you, Councilman. Appreciate you.

4 MR. AROS: Council President,
5 if I can just say one thing for the
6 record. I am not predicting anything
7 specifically for what assessments may be
8 a year from now. There's a lot of time
9 and a lot of market data. I was simply
10 responding to the Council President's
11 specific question as to what we've seen
12 and what is publicly available,
13 published data and analysis as far as
14 where the markets have been. But we're
15 a year away and I make no predictions or
16 assumptions of what markets will look
17 like a year from now as we finalize
18 assessments.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: Listen, thank
20 you very much. It's not against you
21 personally. I have been kind of like
22 annoyed beyond containment for years
23 now, Council President knows, and you
24 happen to be sitting there. But I
25 certainly thank you for your service. I

1 look forward to the good work that you
2 do, but this is a fight for sure. Thank
3 you.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

5 Thank you both. Appreciate you.

6 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
7 Bass.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, good
9 morning, Mr. Aros.

10 MR. AROS: Good morning.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I just want
12 to start off and I want to ditto my
13 colleague David Oh because I feel the
14 frustration as well. And I just think
15 that these assessments and I know that
16 you're saying you're not predicting,
17 you're just basically making a statement
18 based on what you see right now, but I
19 think that these assessments when they
20 come forward in the future from the City
21 of Philadelphia have the capacity to
22 either make or break this City. And I
23 think that that should not be lost on
24 any of us, that what happens here is
25 really going to be -- it's going to be

1 monumental, one way in a positive way or
2 another way in a negative way. It's
3 going to have a significant impact. And
4 I just don't want that to be lost in the
5 conversation.

6 Most of my questions from
7 earlier have actually already been
8 answered. But I did want to say as
9 you're moving around and the
10 conversation is about assessments, that
11 I just really want to encourage you to
12 do something a little more proactive in
13 terms of reaching out to communities and
14 especially communities that are in the
15 throes of gentrification.

16 In my District, there are
17 significant parts of Germantown that I
18 would say fit the bill, that people have
19 lived there generation after generation
20 and it's changing. And so, where do the
21 people who are leaving, where do they
22 go. And so, that has to be a question
23 that we have to really thoroughly
24 answer, and we have to make sure that
25 people are not displaced out of a

1 neighborhood that they've been living in
2 for generations and now they are taxed
3 out of that neighborhood.

4 So I really want to just make
5 sure that as you move forward that the
6 work that you do around outreach and
7 communications is paramount, because you
8 really need to make sure people
9 understand what's happening. And also,
10 with the property assessments, I should
11 be able to calculate my own property
12 assessment based on the formulas that
13 you have laid out. So we want to make
14 sure that information is provided and
15 that it's very easy to understand and to
16 calculate and to absorb.

17 So with that being said,
18 Mr. President, most of my questions
19 otherwise have been answered already.
20 So thank you very much.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

22 Thank you, Councilwoman.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

25 Chair recognizes Councilman Squilla.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
2 Mr. President. I think I have an echo
3 there. Hopefully, that's okay.

4 My question is, is there a way
5 to send out when we send out a notice,
6 we could also send out what the probable
7 tax bill would be? Because most people
8 get a notice in the mail and they see
9 the assessment is going up and it might
10 have been 180,000 and now it's 200,000
11 and they say, okay, and they put it to
12 the side. They don't realize their tax
13 bill is going up however much it is.

14 When you send that assessment
15 out, is it possible to send out a
16 possible bill amount if the rate stays
17 the same or whatever, this would be your
18 new tax bill?

19 MR. AROS: So from the
20 assessment side, obviously the
21 assessment plays one large and part role
22 of the tax process. We do our best to
23 keep those conversations as separate as
24 possible because we're not going to
25 speak specifically to the taxes about a

1 property. But I will let Mr. Dubow jump
2 in and talk about the tax side of it.

3 MR. DUBOW: Yeah, and we have
4 talked about that in the past. I think
5 that the one thing that concerns us is
6 the assessments go out well before the
7 budget process, so that if there's a
8 change in the rate and we put a rate and
9 a tax on the assessment bill, we'll be
10 giving people bad information.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We
12 mentioned this every year. But
13 understanding that, if the tax rate
14 doesn't change this is what your bill
15 will be, if Council raises the tax rate,
16 your bill will go up; is that something
17 that we can say?

18 I mean, the challenge is when
19 the people get it, they still don't
20 associate an assessment with an increase
21 in the tax. At least most of the people
22 in my District will say, oh, I got this
23 assessment thing but I didn't realize it
24 was going to raise my tax this much
25 money. And therefore, by the time the

1 tax comes, it's too late to appeal or
2 the challenge is that for those people
3 to be able to pay them or go on a
4 payment plan become more of a problem.
5 There's got to be a way that we can
6 offer that.

7 And I understand what you're
8 saying, that that tax rate may not --
9 say your tax may be this if the rate
10 stays the same, but if the City changes
11 that rate, you will pay a greater amount
12 or something like that so they know.

13 MR. DUBOW: No, I understand
14 you. I think the two things that we
15 have to figure out, and we're definitely
16 open to discussions to figure out
17 whether there are ways around it, is to
18 avoid that confusion and to make sure
19 that people understand there's an
20 assessment process and a tax process,
21 and maybe it's two separate documents in
22 the same envelope, but it's definitely
23 something we should talk about and
24 figure out ways to do.

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Well,

1 we've been talking about it for a long
2 time. And so, now I think we ought to
3 try to do something about it.

4 MR. DUBOW: Yup, agree.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right.
6 The other thing is now that all of these
7 changes of CAMA has come there and, AJ,
8 first I want to thank you for your
9 responsiveness because I know we are
10 always contacting OPA for information
11 for our constituents and you've been
12 very responsive. We appreciate that.

13 The coordination with revenue,
14 now we always had a hard time, whether
15 it was an appeal process or whether it
16 was just assessments that OPA has one
17 number and Revenue has something else,
18 is that system now in place where as
19 soon as CAMA system has the assessment
20 process or an appeal has been filed,
21 once that's inputted, that Revenue gets
22 that information immediately?

23 MR. AROS: Yeah. So the
24 process of transmitting to Revenue is
25 not changing in the sense that once the

1 value is input, finalized and approved
2 on the OPA side, it's transferred to
3 Revenue. That time frame is pretty much
4 the same because that's usually on a
5 very quick basis. But for the whole
6 process from start to finish, we're
7 seeing much more quicker turnaround time
8 on the OPA side. As changes are made,
9 they're input directly into the computer
10 system. There's no more printing out a
11 paper document that you have to sign,
12 walk over to somebody else, walk over to
13 sign, give it to somebody else to put
14 back into a system to get more people to
15 sign and then send to Revenue.

16 With the CAMA system, you input
17 the number and there's a couple clicks
18 of approval and then it gets sent over
19 to Revenue to be updated very quickly.
20 So that whole process from start to
21 finish is much faster than it was prior
22 to CAMA. But the actual transmission of
23 OPA to Revenue does not necessarily get
24 any faster, but it's the OPA side that's
25 going to be a quicker turnaround.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: With
2 technology today, is that something we
3 can't do? Is there a way that CAMA can
4 send this data directly over to Revenue
5 so that they have it, whereby the time
6 we see it on the screen, it's one thing,
7 and then you call Revenue, it's another
8 thing and they're still not coordinated.
9 There's no way for us to coordinate both
10 systems to do this?

11 MR. AROS: So we do. We upload
12 our changes on a nightly basis and then
13 Revenue pulls those changes on a daily
14 basis as well. So there's really not
15 more than -- once a value is finalized
16 in our system, there's not more than a
17 day or two that Revenue does not pick up
18 that value change.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Oh, all
20 right. So if somebody appeals a case
21 and OPA puts that appeal number in, that
22 appeal number is now -- within a day
23 Revenue has that and people are paying
24 taxes on that amount?

25 MR. AROS: Yes. So if the OPA

1 inputs a BRT decision, for instance,
2 that says the property value is now this
3 and we put in our system, it gets the
4 approvals that are necessary, it's
5 finalized, that goes right over to
6 Revenue. So if we close that change out
7 in our system at 2 o'clock in the
8 afternoon, it doesn't go to Revenue
9 2:01, but it goes over either the next
10 day or the day after as they pull our
11 information. So it's not instant by the
12 second, but it's within a day or two.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.
14 Well, that's great to hear because
15 that's been a challenge for our office
16 all along. You mentioned the assessment
17 process and we know the last couple of
18 years assessments were sort of on hold.
19 They have done some assessments,
20 periodic assessments on new sales and
21 stuff like that. So this year
22 supposedly it is a city-wide assessment;
23 is that correct?

24 MR. AROS: For 2023, it will
25 be. For 2022, which are the assessments

1 we'll certify in the coming weeks, there
2 is not a city-wide reassessment.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right.

4 But the next one going out using the
5 CAMA system will be a city-wide
6 assessment?

7 MR. AROS: Yes.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right.

9 And that information gets to the
10 residents when?

11 MR. AROS: So we're required to
12 certify our assessments the end of March
13 and the notices are typically mailed out
14 within a few weeks of that. How quickly
15 they go out and when folks start to
16 receive them, it depends on the volume
17 of assessments and the number of changes
18 that are going out. But within a few
19 weeks of the certification is when the
20 owners typically get the notice of
21 assessment change.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So is that
23 in May, March?

24 MR. AROS: So in the past
25 typically -- and I won't use last year

1 as a reference because that was a
2 pandemic and I certainly hope that next
3 year we're not having any pandemic
4 considerations as far as the timing of
5 what we do, but usually the notices are
6 sent out and received in the month of
7 April.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: April,
9 okay. So they'll get it in April. Next
10 year in April we'll start to get our
11 assessments go out to our residents.
12 I'll come back for more questions. But
13 at that point, we'll see how many
14 people's assessments have changed and
15 I'm sure we'll have a lot of questions
16 at that time.

17 So thank you, Council
18 President.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
20 Thank you, Councilman.

21 Next, Chair recognizes
22 Councilwoman Parker.

23 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank
24 you, Mr. President.

25 Good to see you, Mr. Aros and

1 Rob. I want to go back to your earlier
2 comments that I know are of great
3 importance, particularly to our District
4 Councilmembers when you talked in
5 response to Council President Clarke's
6 question about the significant level of
7 the increase in sales in the midst of a
8 pandemic, and you noted that selling and
9 buying has been frequent.

10 Is it possible for you all to
11 map for us by Council District so that
12 District Councilmembers sort of get an
13 opportunity to see where trends are
14 developing in specific regions in their
15 district, if it's a high turnover. I
16 expect, for example, in my District it
17 is not simply because people are moving
18 to the suburbs, but for me because of
19 the aging constituency, right, and a lot
20 of the silver foxes we call them in the
21 District who have passed away, we are
22 seeing families who are not holding onto
23 the properties, right, because they've
24 had a tangled title or a lot of debt has
25 been consumed or for me, another thing

1 we're seeing is reverse mortgages.

2 So can you heat-map that for us
3 so that we can see that as a City, but
4 specifically by Council District so that
5 we can identify if we can see any trends
6 taking place there?

7 MR. AROS: Sure. Yeah, there's
8 a number of standard mapping that we do
9 as part of any reassessment that we
10 provide to the Councilmembers as
11 requested. But we can certainly take a
12 look at that as it pertains to sales
13 information specifically, if that's what
14 you're looking for.

15 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Yes,
16 sales and purchase. Because when the
17 properties change hands, we get new
18 residents, right. And sometimes when
19 you get new residents in the community,
20 sort of quality of life, the people who
21 are long-term owner occupants who have
22 been there, they live a certain way, new
23 people coming in. So it tells us
24 sometimes that we need to go into a
25 specific area and maybe do a canvass, so

1 that information would be extremely
2 helpful. Thank you very much.

3 I now want to follow up on
4 Councilwoman Gym's comment about sort of
5 lessons learned and making sure we're
6 paying attention to those, and I want to
7 thank her for putting that on the record
8 as it relates to affirming that the City
9 shouldn't employ sort of a
10 noncompliance-based approach when moving
11 forward when we get to 2023 and we're
12 conducting those full city-wide
13 assessments. So I want to embrace her
14 notion that we should be much more
15 proactive and we should learn some
16 lessons, so to speak, from the past.

17 With that in mind, I also want
18 to thank Councilwoman Katherine Gilmore
19 Richardson because I know she just paid
20 attention to a lesson we all learned.
21 She specifically asked you to note for
22 the record what were your credentials
23 that prepared you and ensured that you
24 were qualified for the position that you
25 are in front of us for today. And I

1 want to thank you, Mr. Aros, for just
2 affirming your 17 years, for affirming
3 your academic credentials in all of the
4 ways that you are involved in the
5 industry, so that's extremely important
6 for the public to note that we do have
7 that on the public record.

8 Now, I want to give you a bit
9 of advice that normally doesn't come to
10 Council until the endgame. And by the
11 time it gets to us, we're usually able
12 to say it was done all wrong. And this
13 goes back to Councilwoman Gauthier, when
14 she said when it comes time to
15 communicate with the public, we need to
16 be proactive in contacting
17 community-based organizations. So I'm
18 thinking these are the basics, and this
19 is for your communications team if
20 they're paying attention. Housing
21 counseling agencies or CLSSs, the
22 SeniorLaw, VIPs, RCOs, senior centers,
23 Philadelphia Association of CDCs,
24 churches, this is extremely important,
25 because when you come back before us

1 when these assessments are going out,
2 everybody and their mother is going to
3 call our office and say I had no idea,
4 right, that there was the potential for
5 increase or this was happening. So I
6 also want to request that you very
7 formally, aside from what I just off the
8 top of my head threw out there, I would
9 like for your staff to send an email out
10 to all members of Council formally
11 asking us for a list of community-based
12 organizations in our respective
13 Districts that we know interact, and
14 this is very important, who are
15 credible.

16 I know I'm biased. I just
17 don't believe that there is anybody in
18 this City who knows a Council District
19 better than the District Councilperson
20 and/or our At-large people, because they
21 travel from one end of the City to the
22 other. So ask them formally for a list.
23 And if this is done accurately, and I'm
24 not a technical person, you would have
25 by Council District in an Excel

1 spreadsheet every community-based
2 organization that we are recommending
3 that you communicate with here in this
4 City.

5 And then as you move forward,
6 if someone is saying that they don't
7 know, it won't be because the City
8 didn't have a strategic plan well in
9 advance to reach out to those respective
10 constituencies. Tell me how does that
11 sound to you. Is that something you
12 think you can do?

13 MR. AROS: Absolutely. I think
14 it makes perfect sense that if we're
15 trying to reach the broadest swath of
16 people as possible as far as
17 organizations go, (inaudible) that or at
18 least reaching out to the Districts and
19 even to the At-large members would be
20 beneficial as far as pointing us to
21 anybody that if we want to be proactive
22 and reach out or at least know what
23 organizations are out there that may
24 want to talk to us. Yeah, it makes
25 perfect sense.

1 And to be honest when I was
2 talking earlier about Districts that we
3 have standing meetings with, your
4 District is the one that comes to mind
5 because we've been doing meetings for
6 you from back when you were at the state
7 level, so your Budget town halls, we're
8 regulars there on a yearly basis in a
9 nonpandemic environment. So like I
10 said, we're available and happy to help
11 coordinate a potential outreach with the
12 Districts to make sure we can reach as
13 many people as possible.

14 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank you
15 so much.

16 And thank you, Mr. President.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
18 Thank you, Councilwoman.

19 Chair recognizes Councilman
20 Johnson.

21 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
22 Council President.

23 Thank you, James, for being
24 here today. Just by background, James,
25 can you just clarify again your years of

1 working with OPA?

2 MR. AROS: Yeah. So I've been
3 with the City in the assessment field
4 here for over 17 years now, so that
5 would have started when everything was
6 under the BRT and then as we
7 transitioned to OPA.

8 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: And you
9 know that the reason that you are here
10 is because members of Council didn't
11 have faith in your former predecessor
12 and his leadership of leading OPA. Do
13 you understand that that's the reason
14 why you have been nominated for this
15 particular position?

16 MR. AROS: I've been nominating
17 I believe because Mr. Dubow and the
18 Finance team and the Mayor consider me
19 qualified. And whatever Council's
20 predisposition of my predecessor, not
21 really my point to speak to that.

22 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I just
23 want to go on the record, right, I
24 believe you are qualified. But the
25 purpose of why the Administration

1 decided to nominate a new person who is
2 yourself is based upon the failure of
3 leadership of your predecessor. And
4 I'll say that for the record. That's
5 why we commissioned our own study
6 separate from the Administration to look
7 at how properties are being assessed
8 here in the City of Philadelphia.

9 And so, I really want to get an
10 understanding and idea because you have
11 been there for 17 years, right, really
12 more about your vision around a couple
13 of different areas. So one, a lot of
14 people after AVI have lost a lot of
15 faith in this process, particularly
16 because as we not only talk about the
17 issue of gentrification, I have a very
18 diverse District, so after the last two
19 property assessments, this has impacted
20 individuals who live in Point Breeze the
21 same way as they have impacted senior
22 citizens who live in Packer Park, who do
23 not qualify for any type of tax relief
24 measures that would allow them to help
25 stay inside their homes if they're on

1 fixed incomes.

2 And so, give me an idea of how
3 you would restore that faith in this
4 particular office when it comes to
5 property assessments and the disparities
6 of how properties are assessed on a
7 block. We have had reports where one
8 side of the street properties are
9 assessed at a certain value and across
10 the street on that same block, the house
11 is assessed at a totally different
12 value. One might be higher. One may be
13 lower, right, which has eroded the trust
14 in some of my constituents.

15 Also, prior to 2019 when I
16 hosted a hearing around AVI and property
17 assessments, we weren't publishing the
18 assessment methodology on our website.
19 After 2019, we actually started to. But
20 nevertheless, from my understanding what
21 we published didn't meet the industry
22 requirement based upon Washington, D.C.
23 municipal government, which was also
24 listed as what's required in our City
25 Code. How are we going to meet those

1 standards?

2 And then the last part of my
3 question is prior to the pandemic we've
4 had a significant backlog in property
5 assessment appeals and you have also had
6 staff cut out of the Office of OPA. How
7 are we going to address that? So those
8 three things I would like you to
9 address.

10 MR. AROS: Okay. Let me go
11 back to the first question. So really
12 three things that I think we can focus
13 on as far as giving people confidence
14 that the assessments are fair and
15 equitable. The first part is obviously
16 making sure our data is up-to-date. So
17 as I mentioned earlier, we have the
18 project going on right now to collect
19 and verify elements of data that we
20 already have, but to make sure we're
21 up-to-date as possible, things change
22 daily throughout the City in some cases.
23 But we want to be as recent as we can be
24 for the data that we're analyzing as far
25 as the values. And also, as part of the

1 recommendations determining if we need
2 to change how we classify or certain
3 descriptions of the properties that
4 would make it easier and better to do
5 some of the mass appraisal work. The
6 second part of that would be bringing in
7 the outside auditor to go through
8 everything and issue recommendations or
9 a report or whatever. That's not us
10 evaluating ourselves. That's somebody
11 from the outside doing that, so an
12 impartial third party and being able to
13 have those results speak to the work
14 we're doing.

15 And then the third thing I'll
16 mention with that as I mentioned in my
17 testimony, the International Association
18 of Assessing Officers or the IAAO for
19 short, which is the governing body of
20 the work we do throughout the world,
21 they issue something called the
22 Certificate of Excellence in Assessment
23 Administration, so there's a process to
24 go through to earn that. But if you
25 earn that, you are considered

1 essentially an award-winning
2 jurisdiction, and that's an
3 accreditation that's issued worldwide
4 for the best of the best in the
5 assessment field for a jurisdiction. So
6 my long-term vision is I don't see any
7 reason why we will not be able in the
8 future to qualify for that. And I think
9 being able to achieve that would be a
10 great credit to the staff here and it
11 will be something that the citizens of
12 Philadelphia could hopefully be proud
13 of.

14 So with the D.C. report you
15 mentioned specifically, that goes back
16 to what I talked about earlier as far as
17 communicating with Council and
18 representatives from Council as to what
19 that report will look like. Those are
20 discussions we'll be having probably
21 fairly soon actually to start that
22 conversation, but we'll be going through
23 all of that and what to expect and what
24 we can produce for the 2023 reassessment
25 and how that's going to look using the

1 D.C. model as you mentioned.

2 And then as far as the appeals
3 backlog, I know the BRT is working
4 diligently to get through the appeals as
5 quickly as they can. Like most folks,
6 they had to make a transition and their
7 hearings right now are fully virtual,
8 but they're scheduling as quickly as
9 they can and we're working with them to
10 make sure that we can answer and testify
11 as needed with that.

12 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Is part of
13 your strategy the request to increase
14 the budget since staff was cut to
15 address the backlog in assessment
16 appeals? You're the leadership, young
17 man.

18 MR. AROS: Well, yeah. I don't
19 want to get too far ahead with the
20 budget, and save that for the next
21 discussion. But separate from the
22 appeal issue, we have vacant positions
23 that we certainly wish to fill. There
24 was nobody that was laid off in the OPA
25 as part of the budget process so far,

1 but we are looking to fill vacancies to
2 help get through any backlog of any type
3 of work appeals or whatnot.

4 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: And I'm
5 just going to wrap up with this one last
6 aspect. I like that you have a focus on
7 achieving the IAAO standards of
8 excellence for OPA for the City of
9 Philadelphia. So thank you for having
10 that goal. I do want to state for the
11 record that the City Controller's
12 report, her analysis, said that OPA did
13 not meet the IAAO's standards. But this
14 is a new day and I support strong young
15 leadership. But this is a very serious
16 and critical issue because at the end of
17 the day, it's between somebody living in
18 their home and being homeless, so this
19 is how really serious it is,
20 particularly as it relates to not only
21 my District, but also my colleague's
22 Districts across the City of
23 Philadelphia. So thank you for taking
24 time out of your schedule and being here
25 today and thank you for your testimony.

1 Thank you, Council President
2 Darrell Clarke.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
4 Thank you. Thank you, Councilman. City
5 Controller's report. Okay.

6 Chair recognizes Councilman
7 Domb.

8 COUNCILMAN DOMB: Thank you,
9 Council President.

10 And good morning, Mr. Aros. I
11 just have a quick question and comment.
12 In the past, we've used outside
13 appraisers to help the OPA with
14 knowledge of the market in getting
15 accurate appraisals. It might be a good
16 idea for us to continue that practice.
17 I think we used maybe Hughes Appraisal
18 Services in the past.

19 You might want to expand that
20 practice to even the residential
21 neighborhoods and have third-party
22 people assist you, if possible, when you
23 have questions. And it can be very
24 helpful to you in making sure these
25 assessments are accurate. It's nothing

1 like getting another opinion and having
2 the data. I just wanted to mention
3 that. Unfortunately, I have to leave.
4 I wish you well.

5 Council President, I can be
6 noted as voting aye on all the
7 appointments for today. Thank you very
8 much.

9 MR. AROS: Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

11 Thank you, Councilman.

12 Any additional questions by
13 Members?

14 (No response.)

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

16 Seeing there being none --

17 COUNCILMAN OH: I have a
18 question, Council President. I put it
19 in the chat box.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: You
21 just popped up, sir. Councilman Oh.

22 COUNCILMAN OH: Real briefly,
23 just in response to Councilmember
24 Squilla's question, it appears to me
25 it's pretty simple to put a statement

1 that any increase or decrease in your
2 assessment may have a corresponding
3 increase or decrease in your property
4 taxes. That's a very neutral statement.
5 And I hope that it doesn't take us like
6 nine years to come up with simple
7 solutions like that because it's very
8 disturbing. So I hope we can do that.

9 And I too have a meeting to go
10 to so I'd like to be recorded as voting
11 aye on all the matters before this body.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

13 Thank you, Councilman.

14 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you,
15 Council President.

16 MR. AROS: To the Councilman's
17 point there, I don't have the current
18 language in front of me, but currently
19 we send out information with the notice
20 that says, this is not a tax bill, but
21 it plays an important part on what your
22 tax bill may be.

23 And the level of description, I
24 don't know off the top of head but we
25 have communicated that to some level.

1 But as Mr. Dubow spoke to earlier, we
2 will certainly take that under
3 consideration for expanding or changing
4 the language moving forward.

5 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
6 much. Big red box, big red letters so
7 you can get people's attention. Thank
8 you.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
10 Thank you, Councilman.

11 Thank you, Mr. Aros. There
12 appears to be no additional questions.
13 I want to thank you very much for your
14 testimony. It appears we will be
15 looking forward to working you. Thank
16 you.

17 MR. AROS: Thank you very much.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
19 Please disconnect.

20 Mr. Christmas, please call our
21 next witness up.

22 THE CLERK: Next witness is
23 Diana Cortes, nominee to be City
24 Solicitor.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

1 Thank you.

2 MS. CORTES: And -- oh, go
3 ahead, Council President. I'm sorry.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: How
5 are you doing? No problem.

6 MS. CORTES: How are you today,
7 Council President?

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
9 Good. No problem. Just state your name
10 for the record and proceed with your
11 testimony.

12 MS. CORTES: Of course. Diana
13 Cortes, C-o-r-t-e-s, and I will proceed
14 with my statement. Good morning, buenos
15 dias, Council President Clarke and
16 esteemed Councilmembers of the Committee
17 of the Whole. I am Diana Cortes, the
18 Acting City Solicitor for the City of
19 Philadelphia. I have held this position
20 since December 11, 2020 and I am humbled
21 and honored by the opportunity to serve
22 as City Solicitor. I'm grateful for
23 Mayor Kenney for proposing my
24 appointment. I appreciate your
25 consideration of me for this appointment

1 and I am grateful for the opportunity to
2 testify before City Council seeking your
3 confirmation.

4 I grew up in Dover, New Jersey,
5 which is a small town that is about 90
6 percent Latinx in a predominantly White
7 affluent North Jersey County. My
8 parents, both Costa Rican immigrants,
9 left their families and country to seek
10 the American dream for themselves and
11 ultimately my brothers and me. They
12 raised us in a bilingual home where we
13 were proud of our heritage, especially
14 in the face of any discrimination we
15 experienced. We were also raised to
16 embrace any and all opportunities and
17 challenges and continue to demonstrate
18 to ourselves and the world what we could
19 accomplish.

20 Empowered by my parents' love,
21 work ethic and pride, I graduated third
22 in my class at Dover High School and
23 went on to obtain a Bachelor's of
24 Science in Industrial Labor Relations
25 from Cornell University. I'm convinced

1 this upbringing also prepared me for
2 finding my adult home here in the City
3 of Philadelphia. I have lived and
4 practiced law here since graduating
5 Villanova Law School in 2006.

6 I began my legal career
7 clerking for now Chief Judge of the
8 Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Juan
9 Sanchez. I then worked for five years
10 at the international law firm of Morgan,
11 Lewis & Bockius, representing Fortune
12 500 pharmaceutical and manufacturing
13 companies and white-collar crime
14 investigation and commercial litigation
15 matters.

16 I also carried a pro bono
17 practice ranging from assisting asylum
18 applicants on their path to safety, to
19 also helping veterans fight for
20 disability benefits. I then worked at
21 Philadelphia District Attorney's Office
22 for two years where I tried hundreds of
23 preliminary hearings and trials in both
24 adult and juvenile courtrooms.
25 Afterwards, I worked at Marshall

1 Dennehey Warner Coleman & Goggin
2 focusing on civil rights, employment
3 discrimination and tort claims.

4 In the spring of 2018, my
5 predecessor former City Solicitor
6 Marcel Pratt asked me to assume his
7 prior role as the Law Department's Chair
8 of the Litigation Group, which comprises
9 of six units and approximately 70
10 attorneys. In that role as its first
11 Latina, I oversaw the City's litigation
12 matters and directly supervised some of
13 the City's significant court cases.

14 Some of which that include
15 *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, where a
16 team of child welfare affirmative
17 litigation and appeals attorneys
18 prevailed before Judge Tucker at the
19 District Court level and then later at
20 the Third Circuit, convincing both
21 courts to affirm the City's decision to
22 not enter into a contract with Catholic
23 Social Services because of its refusal
24 to consider same sex couples as foster
25 parents. This case has received

1 national attention and is currently
2 under review by the Supreme Court of the
3 United States.

4 I've also worked with the
5 matter regarding VisionQuest at 5201 Old
6 York Road, where we successfully fought
7 VisionQuest when it tried to move
8 unaccompanied minors into that facility,
9 even though it was a violation of its
10 existing use permit. And finally, we
11 also worked on lost and stolen firearms,
12 where I filed the City's first lost and
13 stolen firearm civil prosecution and
14 succeeded in having the permit
15 injunction denied.

16 These examples demonstrate my
17 commitment and ability to provide high
18 quality legal representation to both
19 City Council and the Administration.
20 And through these cases and so many
21 others, I have had the pleasure and
22 opportunity to see firsthand the talent,
23 legal prowess and undying dedication of
24 the public servants who serve the City
25 of Philadelphia in the Law Department

1 and also in other City agencies.

2 Like my esteemed predecessors
3 Sozi Tulante and Marcel Pratt, I remain
4 committed to providing high quality
5 representation, upholding the
6 attorney-client privilege and ensuring
7 confidentiality over all communications
8 with me and each of my clients. These
9 are all hallmarks of the attorney-client
10 relationship which are sacred to me.

11 I would like to also address a
12 few of my plans for the Law Department
13 before opening it up to questions.
14 First, I will build upon the great work
15 of my predecessors to continue to
16 improve diversity, equity and inclusion
17 within the Law Department. Under my
18 leadership, the Law Department will
19 maintain its Mansfield Certification.
20 This certification requires interviewing
21 50 percent or more women or diverse
22 applicants for each supervisory
23 position. At the Law Department, we
24 will expand that for every single
25 vacancy we have.

1 We will also ensure that each
2 interview panel have at least one
3 diverse person and that the interview
4 includes questions focusing on
5 diversity, equity and inclusion. We
6 will also add a diversity, equity,
7 inclusion assessment to the annual
8 performance evaluation for each
9 individual at the Law Department.

10 Second, the Law Department will
11 continue to work with the
12 Administration, City Council and
13 Philadelphia Police Department on police
14 reform. This past year the Law
15 Department was a working partner in the
16 City's efforts. We worked to defend and
17 affirm the Police Department's first
18 termination of an officer in the face of
19 Plain View Project.

20 We will continue to negotiate
21 specific injunctive relief in
22 litigations arising out of police
23 responses to protest activity. We'll
24 also continue to support and advise the
25 Police Department as they look to

1 implement reformative efforts,
2 addressing excessive force and
3 disproportionate staffs of people of
4 color and as they work to improve the
5 culture of the Department for their
6 diverse officers.

7 We will also look to continue
8 to work with you all at City Council and
9 state legislatures to revise Act 111,
10 and we will also work with the Mayor's
11 Office of Labor Relations and the Police
12 Department to fight for significant
13 changes to the upcoming Collective
14 Bargaining Agreement.

15 Lastly, I will continue to work
16 with the Administration and with you all
17 at City Council in identifying
18 affirmative litigations that address the
19 concerns and goals of the City, such as
20 in public safety where we have to come
21 up with creative ways to combat the
22 pervasive and devastating gun violence
23 in our City, which begins with increase
24 in illegal access to firearms. We're
25 also looking into litigations involving

1 public health, where we'll continue to
2 fight against targeted marketing of
3 tobacco, opioids and other fatal vices
4 to our neighborhoods of color. And
5 also, we're looking to expand any --
6 explore and expand any type of
7 affirmative litigation on environmental
8 efforts.

9 City Council has been a true
10 partner in all of these foregoing
11 efforts and I look forward to your
12 continued ideas and collaboration.
13 Thank you for the privilege of
14 testifying before you today. It will be
15 the honor of a lifetime to serve as the
16 City Solicitor of Philadelphia. I'm
17 happy to answer any of the questions you
18 may have.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

20 Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Cortes. How
21 are you.

22 MS. CORTES: I'm good. How are
23 you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

25 Thank you for coming in. I just had a

1 couple of questions and I think you had
2 an opportunity to talk to all, if not
3 most, members for discussion here so
4 I'll just ask you a couple of brief
5 questions.

6 So you referenced the gun
7 lawsuits. Can you give me specifics?
8 Was it recently something, a filing that
9 we just did? Can you just update us on
10 both of those cases?

11 MS. CORTES: Of course. So the
12 first matter is Crawford, et al. vs. the
13 Commonwealth, and that's the lawsuit we
14 filed back in October. We filed that
15 lawsuit. The defendants have filed
16 motions to dismiss or preliminary
17 objections in the Commonwealth Court and
18 their briefs are due in March and our
19 responses are due in April. So right
20 now nothing has been decided yet. And I
21 think we're all amicus briefs. So if
22 you or any others have organizations
23 that would be interested in filing some
24 type of amicus brief, that would be due
25 in April as well, so that's the first

1 lawsuit.

2 And the lost and stolen
3 firearms lawsuit, we had that great
4 ruling of the permanent injunction being
5 denied. The defendant has appealed it,
6 so we're awaiting Judge Wright's
7 decision outlining the reasons why he
8 denied it, and that will give the
9 defendant the basis for his appeal.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

11 That's the lost and stolen?

12 MS. CORTES: Correct.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All
14 right. So we'll look forward to that.
15 Just keep us abreast as we move along so
16 we can help in every way, shape or form
17 possible.

18 MS. CORTES: Of course.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: So I
20 had this conversation with you. I had
21 it with Marcel. I had it with Sozi. I
22 don't think that -- and this is
23 obviously not reflecting upon yourself.
24 I don't think that the City Solicitor
25 can represent the City Council of

1 Philadelphia and the Mayor's Office
2 equally. It's just inconsistent with
3 the realities of having two clients on a
4 co-equal basis, that at some point in
5 time we'll have a conflict in terms of
6 one interpretation of the law, the
7 interpretation of jurisdiction, the
8 interpretation of a particular fiscal
9 matter, whatever. At some point, we're
10 not going to agree.

11 So I started with Sozi when I
12 asked him how he was going to deal with
13 that. As time went on, I want to say
14 that he did not attempt to change the
15 Charter although I did and still have in
16 my desk, and I hope not to influence any
17 members of Council, that I was going to
18 introduce a Charter change to have the
19 City lawyer that was an elected lawyer.
20 And a lot of people said, we've got a
21 lot of politicians so they didn't want
22 to do that, so I backed off of it.

23 But I need to hear from you how
24 you will represent us equally because in
25 our minds we are co-branches of

1 government, checks and balances. We're
2 the legislative. They're the executive.
3 Tell me how you're going to handle that,
4 how you will anticipate handling that if
5 there is conflict.

6 MS. CORTES: Council President,
7 I think you said the key words when you
8 spoke earlier, you said at some point.
9 So right now I think the potential for
10 conflict is inherent as you pointed out.
11 But I think the difference is when is
12 there an actual legal conflict. And I
13 think as you've seen through Sozi and
14 then through Marcel, those instances are
15 actually far and few between. And if
16 and when those do occur, the Charter
17 does provide for that safety valve
18 provision where we would provide you
19 conflict counsel.

20 Otherwise, I sort of view City
21 Council and the Administration and all
22 the other 30 or so City agencies that we
23 represent as sort of a family, where
24 there is going to be disagreements on
25 certain issues. But at the end of the

1 day, my role as the City Solicitor is to
2 identify and call the legal balls and
3 strikes. And as to these other issues,
4 that's not my lane, so I'm going to stay
5 in the legal lane as to whether
6 something is legally enforceable or
7 legally valid. And then I will give
8 that opinion. And so, I think as
9 demonstrated through the different
10 lawsuits, at least we were able to work
11 together, it shows that there is that
12 great opportunity to provide that
13 high-quality legal representation, which
14 we have done both under Sozi and Marcel
15 and I plan to continue that.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

17 Okay. So in a family, there's always
18 going to be a squabble and usually it's
19 the mom of the family that kind of calls
20 the balls and strikes. And I don't know
21 if you consider yourself in the future
22 to play that role, but --

23 MS. CORTES: I would say the
24 aunt. I don't think I want to be the
25 parent. I would say the aunt.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I
2 have that role to some degree sometimes
3 in this legislative body. I'm like the
4 old uncle. I hope I'm not the old crazy
5 uncle, but sometimes I have to play the
6 role as the old uncle.

7 So in the past what has
8 happened is the legislative branch was
9 always offered an alternative counsel,
10 meaning that there was a dispute between
11 the two and then Council was offered to
12 get their own lawyer to handle their
13 perspective on a particular issue.

14 Is there ever or would there
15 ever be a chance when the executive
16 branch would be offered an alternative
17 counsel? Why does it always have to be
18 City Council that has to have the
19 alternative representative and not the
20 executive branch have the alternative
21 representative?

22 So right there when that's
23 happened in the past -- Sozi and
24 Marcel, they did a great job -- why do
25 we have to be offered the alternative?

1 Maybe we would prefer to have the City
2 Solicitor represent us and then the
3 Mayor can hire outside counsel. And I
4 did warn you I was going to ask you
5 these questions, so I'm not throwing you
6 curve balls.

7 MS. CORTES: No, you definitely
8 did. I think it would depend on what
9 was the legal question. I think the
10 legal question presented to me as to
11 these different ordinances, I think that
12 is the official legal position of the
13 City Solicitor's Office. So it's more
14 so when there's a difference, I think,
15 of legal opinion, I think given that it
16 is the City Solicitor's position, then I
17 think it would naturally have to be --
18 if you or the City Councilmembers would
19 have a difference of opinion or would
20 want, I think just the way the Charter
21 is written it's set up that way, that it
22 would have to be conflict counsel for
23 City Council.

24 However, again like I stated, I
25 think those instances are actually very

1 few and far between in the past. As
2 Litigation Chair, there hasn't been that
3 many instances in which we've had to
4 obtain conflict counsel. Because at the
5 end of the day, all the legal interests
6 were aligned. We're not talking policy
7 or some of these other side
8 disagreements. As to the legal
9 conflict, they've been few and far
10 between.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All
12 right. I'm not going to belabor that
13 point. But as I said earlier, it will
14 come up. I guarantee you. But you
15 sound like you're prepared to deal with
16 it.

17 MS. CORTES: Yes, sir.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
19 Thank you. Chair recognizes Councilman
20 Green.

21 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
22 Council President.

23 Ms. Cortes, thank you and
24 congratulations on your legal career.
25 We had a chance to talk earlier in

1 reference to some of the issues I have
2 raised. I noticed in your testimony you
3 talked about Act 111. I want to just
4 follow up with you in that regard.

5 Through my work with Pennsylvania
6 Municipal League, that's one of the
7 issues we've been working on. Actually,
8 two weeks ago we had a call with
9 Governor Wolf about Act 111 and you will
10 be surprised the number of cities around
11 the Commonwealth that also had concerns
12 with Act 111.

13 Various cities do not have
14 their own city solicitor like you, but
15 they do have outside counsel. So to the
16 extent that there are opportunities to
17 work collaboratively with other
18 jurisdictions and their counsel, and I
19 can provide you with those cities, that
20 can be an opportunity to continue to
21 work regarding Act 111 and continue the
22 work that's been done in this Council
23 and also with members of the General
24 Assembly.

25 In that regard what areas, and

1 you gave quite a bit of background
2 regarding affirmative litigation that
3 you've been involved in as a member of
4 the Law Department, are there areas on
5 the horizon that you see regarding
6 affirmative litigation and do you
7 continue to have that type of
8 perspective regarding affirmative
9 litigation on behalf of the constituents
10 and citizens of the City of
11 Philadelphia?

12 MS. CORTES: Thank you for your
13 questions and also that insight,
14 Councilman Green. I would definitely
15 want to follow up with you and your
16 office to identify those other
17 municipalities because I think
18 definitely there is more power in trying
19 to attain and make those significant
20 changes in those numbers.

21 Regarding your question as to
22 my vision for affirmative litigation, I
23 am definitely invested in that. I think
24 we are looking into -- this past year we
25 filed a complaint against Juul

1 manufacturers out in California for
2 their E-cigarettes. I don't want to go
3 into too much detail because it's still
4 privileged and I think if you want to
5 discuss more so in private or any other
6 Councilmember as to some different ideas
7 to brainstorm, but other types of public
8 health issues, so any ways that we can
9 try to further combat opioid usage or
10 any type of targeting in these
11 neighborhoods of color.

12 I had the pleasure of working
13 with Dr. Farley and with Councilman
14 Jones in defending the flavor tobacco
15 ordinance in Federal Court. So right
16 now that case is on appeal, but I think
17 it was that case that sort of made me
18 realize more so that there are other
19 ways that we can try to attack those
20 targeted marketing, so I would be more
21 than happy to talk more about that with
22 you offline and with others.

23 And the last one is
24 environmental. I think as a City, as a
25 country, we need to do things to make

1 changes in climate change, so I'm more
2 than happy to explore that with you or
3 any other Councilmember that has ideas
4 as to how they do that. So that's one
5 of the things I had in mind when I
6 mentioned environmental efforts. But we
7 are very invested that the Affirmative
8 and Special Litigation Group, part of
9 their job is to work with me and others
10 in trying to think of these different
11 ideas, these different types of public
12 policy litigations. And we need as many
13 ideas as possible that will be valuable
14 to the City. So I would be more than
15 happy to discuss that more so with you
16 and again with any other Councilmember
17 who's interested.

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, thank
19 you for your response. Appreciate your
20 career and your work. I look forward to
21 working with you going forward.

22 Also, Council President, I have
23 to leave to go to another matter so I'm
24 leaving my vote as aye on all matters
25 before this Committee this afternoon.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

2 Thank you. Thank you, Councilman.

3 MS. CORTES: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

6 Chair recognizes Councilwoman Gauthier.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
8 you, Council President.

9 Good morning, Ms. Cortes.

10 MS. CORTES: Good morning.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: You
12 talked about additional creative ways of
13 addressing gun violence via affirmative
14 litigation. Beyond the suit that you
15 were just discussing with the Council
16 President, are you able to expound on
17 some of those ideas?

18 MS. CORTES: I think right now
19 we're trying to think of them because
20 right now the Crawford lawsuit is our
21 latest creative and innovative idea for
22 the industry put into, I think, an
23 80-plus page complaint compiled with
24 different data and it's a very novel
25 legal theory as well. So right now

1 that's where our focus is on.

2 But like I said, we also have
3 to think of additional ideas. So right
4 now we're still in the thinking process.
5 And like I had just mentioned to
6 Councilmember Green, if you or your
7 office would like to collaborate with us
8 to try to think of other creative and
9 innovative ideas, we would welcome that
10 opportunity.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Okay.
12 Thank you. In your testimony you
13 mentioned that you will be adding a
14 diversity, equity and inclusion
15 assessment to individual performance
16 evaluations. I'm very excited by that
17 idea and wanted you to expand on the
18 criteria and metrics you'll be using on
19 these DEI assessments.

20 MS. CORTES: Sure. Thank you
21 for that enthusiasm. We're excited
22 about it as well. So I'll be working
23 with our Director of Diversity and
24 Inclusion in Professional Development
25 Nicole Seawright, who is a leader, a

1 trailblazer, a subject matter expert in
2 DEI.

3 So she had done something
4 similar at her last place of employment
5 in Cardozo, so I'm working with her to
6 sort of identify. I think we'll start
7 off with different types of questions
8 that will really gear towards DEI as a
9 core competency and then we'll take it
10 from there. And then we'll start to
11 also work with our Department employees
12 in training them, right, ensuring to
13 guide them as to what these questions
14 are, how they should assess individuals
15 because we want to make sure that it is
16 as best received on both ends in order
17 to appropriately assess that metric.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: What
19 type of questions might be asked?

20 MS. CORTES: I don't know what
21 these questions are yet, to be honest
22 with you. I think she is working with
23 me -- we haven't materialized them yet.
24 But I think once we do, if you have an
25 interest in seeing some of those

1 questions, I will be more than happy to
2 share those with you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Okay.
4 Can you talk about the types of legal
5 claims that cost the City the most money
6 and how you plan to reduce the amount of
7 money that the City pays out in claims?

8 MS. CORTES: Sure. That is a
9 very complicated and challenging
10 question. I think the most claims thus
11 far -- I don't have the exact numbers in
12 front of me -- but historically, most of
13 the claims have been from the Police
14 Department. I think recently in
15 particular it's been overturned
16 convictions. They have taken a large
17 percentage of our Indemnities Fund.

18 So I think just recently
19 Chester Hollman who had been
20 incarcerated for 28 years, we settled
21 with him for I think 9.8 million, but I
22 think that's over a few years. I think
23 we had also settled for a significant
24 other millions of dollars with other
25 overturned conviction individuals. So

1 that is a significant amount. Just
2 right there that is a large percentage
3 of the Indemnities Fund.

4 So one of the things that was
5 started under Marcel was the
6 After-Action Review process, where our
7 attorneys after a significant case like
8 this, in particular with civil rights,
9 any case that is over I believe 100,000,
10 that has settled for over \$100,000, our
11 attorneys will meet with each other and
12 sort of do an assessment as to what went
13 wrong, what can be done, what can be
14 done to prevent this in the future, what
15 can be our proactive advice to the
16 Police Department as to try to avoid
17 this. So we've been working with them
18 on those issues. So I think that's one
19 of the ways that we can try to minimize
20 those lawsuits in the future.

21 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
22 you.

23 MS. CORTES: Thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: No more
25 questions for now.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

2 Thank you, Councilwoman.

3 Chair recognizes Councilman
4 Thomas.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
6 Council President.

7 And good morning barely still,
8 everybody. Good morning, Ms. Cortes, on
9 your position. It's already been a
10 pleasure to work with you. Can't say
11 the same for everybody on your team.
12 But you, it's definitely a pleasure to
13 work with.

14 I want to jump into let's start
15 with what you said in your comments.
16 You talked about the disproportionate
17 number of stops for the people of color.
18 I would like you to elaborate a little
19 bit on that and tell me what your vision
20 is as it relates to how you plan to
21 address that issue.

22 MS. CORTES: Sure. I think
23 when I mentioned that, I was focusing on
24 right now our team -- one of our legal
25 teams is working with the Police

1 Department on the Bailey litigation, so
2 the Bailey settlement. That was an
3 action brought several years ago. It's
4 currently before Judge Codoba. The
5 plaintiff's attorney I think is David
6 Rudovsky and also the ACLU is involved
7 and essentially, we are evaluating all
8 the different stops of the City of
9 Philadelphia and we have been doing that
10 for a number of years.

11 And so, one of the things that
12 has been shown through that study is
13 that there is a disproportionate number
14 of stops of people of color that cannot
15 be explained for any other reason. I
16 think our statistician expert explained
17 that it was because of their color that
18 they were stopped. So based off of
19 that, we are working with the Police
20 Department in ensuring that there is
21 appropriate training and the plaintiffs'
22 counsel and the ACLU have been involved
23 in those discussions with us and also in
24 trying to make sure that that training
25 is done with the commanders of the

1 Police Department and that that training
2 is then brought down to patrol officers.

3 And I believe, Councilmember
4 Thomas, that there's going to be a much
5 more indepth discussion about this. I
6 think we have scheduled that with your
7 office for Friday, where my First Deputy
8 Craig Straw, who has been involved in
9 this case from its inception, so he can
10 definitely provide a lot more details on
11 that.

12 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So yes,
13 definitely. Thank you. I look forward
14 to being a part of that conversation.
15 And I hear you talk about training.
16 Most of us feel like training just
17 doesn't work. That's not essentially
18 going to be what we can do to change
19 people's mindsets.

20 I've been on a number of calls
21 with your team and other folks about
22 this particular issue. And I said this
23 multiple times, when you're talking
24 about someone's instincts, right, it's
25 their subconscious response, it's a

1 knee-jerk reaction and we can't train
2 people to change their perception of a
3 specific group of people, so I'm hoping
4 that we can move in a different
5 direction as it relates to addressing
6 the issue that you talked about, as it
7 relates to a disproportionate number of
8 people of color who've been stopped.

9 Clearly, you know what my
10 recommendation is as it relates to
11 addressing that issue, which actually
12 brings me back to Council President's
13 point which he said he wouldn't belabor,
14 but I'm going to go ahead and do it for
15 him.

16 He talked about this potential
17 of there being a conflict when there's a
18 disagreement. And you said that you'll
19 cross that bridge when you get there. I
20 felt like we crossed that bridge weeks
21 ago. So I'm curious to try to figure
22 out -- and this wasn't prepared in my
23 line of questions so I apologize, but
24 I'm curious to try to figure out why
25 today we're seeing that we're not in a

1 difference as it relates to ideology
2 when I've already had to seek outside
3 counsel to be able to get my legislation
4 introduced.

5 And now that we're at the
6 implementation phase, there's clearly a
7 difference in ideology between the
8 Council side and the Solicitor's side,
9 and I've had to go outside and seek
10 outside counsel, bring those opinions to
11 the Solicitor's Office and still
12 consistently receive pushback and
13 disrespect honestly because the
14 conversations haven't all been 100
15 percent professional.

16 So I'm curious to know, we
17 talked about a conflict of Council, so
18 at what phase do we get to the point
19 where we actually go with some level of
20 conflict of Council or bring in a
21 third-party mediation? And like Council
22 President, why do we have to go through
23 that? Why is it that we have to be the
24 ones who have to seek outside counsel
25 and get a third opinion when the

1 Administration or someone on that side
2 doesn't agree with this? I know I asked
3 you a lot right there.

4 But, Council President, if you
5 don't mind, can we do a deeper dive into
6 some of this stuff?

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes.
8 Absolutely. I had that conversation
9 with Ms. Cortes earlier, and I had it
10 with Sozi and I had it with Marcel. I
11 just don't know how somebody in the
12 Mayor's cabinet can represent us
13 equally. That right there tells you, so
14 absolutely. I had what I thought was a
15 solution, but I was talked out of it.
16 But I think we should follow up,
17 definitely.

18 MS. CORTES: Okay. So are we
19 following up or did you want me to
20 answer?

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I
22 mean, from my perspective it will
23 require a real -- Sozi came up with what
24 he thought was within the jurisdiction
25 that he had, which I thought was a

1 reasonable solution, and I think we got
2 a fair shake. Every time we had a
3 conflict, he came up with a position
4 that I think was reasonable and fair.
5 And I actually felt that Sozi actually
6 weighed more in favor of the legislative
7 branch more so than the executive
8 branch. And I'm not saying that's the
9 solution, but that's how it worked out.
10 I didn't have as much of a challenge.
11 But I'm just saying at some point, and
12 the Councilman just referenced the
13 particular thing going on now --

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Oh, yes, we
15 have a conflict.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes.
17 And there's a couple of issues I had on
18 a couple of calls with some advocates a
19 couple of weeks ago. So at some point
20 we got to really figure this out. I
21 know you're not even the official City
22 Solicitor yet, but be prepared. It's
23 going to have to be a real conversation
24 and some kind of solution about it.

25 MS. CORTES: I know. I will

1 say that I've been in -- like I said, in
2 my remarks I've been in this role since
3 December 11th so it was two months. I
4 don't know what types of conversations
5 predated me, but my commitment is to
6 review any proposed legislation, review
7 it for whether it's legally enforceable
8 or valid. And what I remember
9 communicating during different
10 conversations was that I'm willing to
11 evaluate, if somebody else is saying
12 that this is legally valid, I'm willing
13 to listen to it and have these different
14 conversations.

15 I'm sorry, Councilmember
16 Thomas, that I come in at this late
17 juncture, that it sounds like you sort
18 of had these other conversations that
19 predated me and sort I have to play
20 catch-up on this particular legislation
21 and just the different history of it and
22 the different perspectives and the
23 different legal arguments on it. So I'm
24 more than happy to have these different
25 conversations as to the legal

1 perspective, the legal interpretations
2 of it.

3 And to my knowledge, there
4 hasn't been an official legal opinion,
5 written legal opinion on this as of yet.
6 So in my mind I think until that occurs,
7 then after that occurs, then there is
8 that conflict. And I think if the legal
9 opinion I had you disagreed with, I
10 think there is legal recourse that you
11 or if the City Council wanted to take,
12 they would be able to take it. You
13 would have to go to court and basically
14 declare that whatever legal
15 interpretation I had was incorrect. But
16 again, there has been no legal opinion
17 issued. To my knowledge, my predecessor
18 did not issue a legal opinion on this
19 and I have not done that either.

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Just for
21 the record, Council President and
22 Ms. Cortes, you have my vote. I'm in
23 full support of being there. It's been
24 a pleasure to work for you. But for the
25 record, because I don't want to make it

1 seem like I'm the big bad wolf, you were
2 definitely on the call that we had a
3 couple of weeks ago. And the majority
4 of the calls that have gone south in
5 collaboration with the Solicitor's
6 Office has happened in the year 2021.

7 So the conversation definitely
8 started last summer, but we've been on
9 calls with you. We've been on calls
10 with majority of folks this year.
11 Majority of these issues have happened
12 in 2021. And again, I just want to go
13 on the record and say, we are in the
14 stage of conflict. I don't know how
15 many negative conversations we need to
16 have. I don't know how further south
17 things will go, but actually as we've
18 had the conversations, they've begun to
19 get counterproductive.

20 So I definitely appreciate you
21 talking about addressing the issue of
22 disproportionate stops of people of
23 color. But again, what Council
24 President talked about as far as
25 ideology, we're literally at that point

1 right now. And my team and I, we feel
2 very, very stuck as it relates to that
3 issue because we feel like we have legal
4 precedent while we're being told by the
5 Solicitor's Office that we don't. So I
6 just want to make sure that that goes on
7 the record today.

8 I'm also 100 percent in support
9 of the work being done around Act 111.

10 I am a member of the Police Reform
11 Working Group. Like Councilmember
12 Green, we've been talking to people
13 across the Commonwealth so if there's
14 any support that you need there moving
15 forward, you can reach out to our team
16 in my office and we're 100 percent here.

17 As I close out, the last thing
18 I want to say is as we think about and
19 reimagine a lot of different things, I
20 agree with my colleague Councilmember
21 Gauthier as it relates to dollars spent
22 by the City specifically for lawsuits,
23 that again ties back into the policing
24 issue. So I really just don't want us
25 to think that these institutional

1 problems that have racism at its core
2 can be fixed with training. We can't
3 train people out of the ideology that
4 they have.

5 Thank you, Council President.
6 I appreciate the time.

7 And again congratulations,
8 Ms. Cortes. I definitely look forward
9 to working you.

10 MS. CORTES: Thank you,
11 Councilmember Thomas.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
13 Thank you, Councilman.

14 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
15 Quinones-Sanchez.

16 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
17 Thank you. Good afternoon, Diana
18 Cortes.

19 I'm going to take a little
20 personal privilege here because I want
21 to remind my colleagues and thank them,
22 the historic moment that we are living
23 in, as the first Latina in Council, to
24 have the first Latina as the City
25 Solicitor. And so, I want to recognize

1 you and all the work you've done to get
2 here. And just know that this is one of
3 those times that I am proud, I'm proud
4 of you and I'm proud at the way you're
5 responding to our questions and it just
6 speaks to your character, your
7 qualifications and your willingness to
8 understand that this is an evolving
9 situation. Law is evolving.

10 So I just personally want to
11 say thank you, thank you for your
12 service and I really look forward to
13 working with you. And I know if anybody
14 can fix this, it will be a woman, so
15 here we go.

16 I want to kind of drill down on
17 some of the conversation, policy versus
18 law. And I think what has happened and
19 I understand how my colleagues feel, in
20 the past we have had lawyers in the Law
21 Department use their seat to set policy.
22 And I have a debate with them all the
23 time. And if you know I have debated
24 with some of your staff, they will tell
25 you I told them, if you want to set

1 policy, run for office.

2 I need a lawyer to tell me how,
3 how to get the job done. I don't need a
4 lawyer to tell me no. That's not your
5 role to play. And so, I think part of
6 what you're seeing is this notion, and I
7 think you have to set that tone, that
8 the Law Department is there to serve all
9 of us and to provide legal guidance, not
10 to set policy. So that's where you see
11 the conflict. So when we reach out for
12 legal advice, that's what we want. We
13 want them to guide us to the how.

14 And so, I believe if we look to
15 you to say to folks, that is our role to
16 minimize all these conflicts as we
17 figure out what this relationship is
18 going to be moving forward. One of the
19 areas -- and I know I've said this to
20 you before, things go to the Law
21 Department, contracts go there, they get
22 stalled. Everything is always around
23 the Law Department, and I think unfairly
24 sometimes, right, because I think
25 departments use that as an excuse.

1 Can you speak to me what you've
2 seen if you have any initial reactions
3 to the role, the important role, that
4 the Law Department plays in checking off
5 and signing off, but what streamlining
6 potential do you see there so that stuff
7 doesn't go to the Law Department to die?

8 MS. CORTES: No, thank you for
9 your kind remarks, Councilmember
10 Sanchez, and your question. I think
11 part of the tone set by my predecessors,
12 and I think I will definitely continue
13 and look to improve it is to look for
14 ways to streamline and to receive
15 different feedback from you, your fellow
16 Councilmembers and all of our City
17 clients. So if there are definitely
18 ways from your perspective that we can
19 improve, that we can expedite it. But I
20 think at the same time we have to be
21 mindful and careful that we don't want
22 to expedite a process to the point that
23 certain things are compromised or that
24 certain corners are cut because that is
25 not a good outcome for the City at all.

1 So I think the Law Department has been
2 working to improve that.

3 I believe that -- and the CAO
4 had given us different goals to meet as
5 to these different benchmarks for that
6 process, to meet for the contracting
7 process, and we have met those goals.

8 So it may not seem like that from your
9 end or from others' end, but we have met
10 those goals. And actually the whole
11 process of contracting requires others
12 as well besides the Law Department too.

13 So in the full scale of days
14 that it takes to fully conform the
15 contract, the Law Department's
16 percentage of that is less than a third.
17 So the entire days that it takes the Law
18 Department's time period is less than
19 one-third of that. So all the other
20 times we're waiting for different
21 feedback from folks from different
22 department agencies. With that being
23 said, like with everything else, we're a
24 client service. If we're legal, we're
25 lawyers so we provide legal

1 representation and that's part of client
2 service. So if there are ways that we
3 can improve that, we are more than happy
4 to hear that and listen. So we look
5 forward to hearing from your feedback on
6 that.

7 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

8 Yeah. Thank you. For me, the
9 reoccurring ones are the ones that are
10 most concerning, right. It takes 90
11 days to execute a contract, right. And
12 the ones that are reoccurring for the
13 people, you know, if we call some of our
14 community-based organization
15 stakeholders, and we know we're going to
16 contract them every year, them waiting
17 for December for a conforming contract
18 is pretty challenging. So I just want
19 to see that process with procurement,
20 because that's what limits minority
21 participation, because if they're
22 getting paid 200 days -- there's a
23 ripple effect to those timelines. So
24 any dashboard, anything you can create
25 to incentivize, that will be greatly

1 appreciated.

2 And then just finally, because
3 I think it's important and I know you've
4 entered these conversations as it
5 relates to residents, you're the City
6 Solicitor representing the executive,
7 you're the City Solicitor representing
8 Council. How do you represent the
9 people? And how do you ensure, we're
10 having a debate and discussion, how do
11 you view that and what is the
12 constitutional obligation to the
13 residents as it relates specifically for
14 policies that impact them, whether it's
15 their civil rights violations, with
16 stop-and-frisk or I would say the
17 encampments that we have in Kensington?
18 How do you see your role in that? Thank
19 you.

20 Thank you, Mr. President.

21 MS. CORTES: No, and thank you
22 for that. A very interesting question,
23 Councilmember Sanchez. I view the City
24 Solicitor's role as it's still a lawyer
25 so providing legal advice to you, to the

1 Administration, to any City client that
2 is looking to create legislation or to
3 create policies to address those issues,
4 so I think that is the primary role of
5 the Law Department.

6 I think we're more than happy
7 to be a partner in discussing some of
8 the other consequences. But at the end
9 of the day, it is not the Law
10 Department's role -- I think as you
11 pointed out and others pointed out, it
12 is not the Law Department's role to say
13 what is good policy, what is bad policy.
14 It is what is legally enforceable and
15 what is legally valid.

16 And so, we'll be happy to be
17 involved in any conversation. Because
18 you're absolutely right, these laws do
19 impact our residents and we need to be
20 mindful of that. But at the end of the
21 day, our role is to defend the City in
22 these different lawsuits on the one hand
23 with civil rights, but also to the
24 extent that we're trying to be proactive
25 and address all of these different

1 issues that are arising in our City,
2 viewing those ordinances and those
3 regulations whether they are legally
4 valid and enforceable and can withstand
5 any type of legal challenge, if and when
6 challenged by somebody else in court.
7 So that's another key part in our legal
8 analysis for these.

9 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10 Thank you.

11 Thank you, Mr. President.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

13 Thank you.

14 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
15 Parker.

16 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank
17 you, Council President Clarke.

18 And I want to continue,
19 Ms. Cortes, with the line of questioning
20 or direction that Councilwoman Sanchez
21 left off. This is a pretty historic
22 moment, your being the first Latina to
23 become City Solicitor in the City of
24 Philadelphia. And I just want to note
25 because I'm a student of history and for

1 the record that on today Charisse Lillie
2 and Stephanie Franklin-Suber, and I know
3 I'm missing one, I think her name was
4 Shelly. I think I had just made by
5 transition from Harrisburg when she
6 came, but you stand on the shoulders of
7 some of the women who help to blaze the
8 trail that provided access to this
9 opportunity.

10 And I know based on the
11 historical overview that you gave about
12 who you are, not simply the academic
13 credentials of Cornell which to be quite
14 frank, Katherine Gilmore Richardson just
15 reminded us of today, being prepared is
16 extremely important too, right, and in
17 your experience, you have that. But
18 noting where you come from, you know,
19 that Philadelphians now get an
20 opportunity to see someone in that
21 office who is a product of beginnings
22 that many of them can identify with.
23 Sort of Langston Hughes, life for me
24 ain't been no crystal stair, right.
25 They see you as an attorney. You're

1 accomplished, but knowing where you come
2 from is important. So I want to thank
3 you so very much for saying that and
4 thought it was worth my noting it for
5 the record.

6 Also, right now a little bit of
7 appreciative inquiry for me, because I
8 know how tough and heavy I lay on that
9 Law Department, so let me just state
10 this for the record, Lewis Rosman, Jo
11 Rosenberger Altman, Robert Kieffer,
12 Russell Crofts, Reynelle Staley. I
13 apologize in front of the new Solicitor
14 that I know that I have gotten on your
15 nerves, calling you and emailing you on
16 the weekend.

17 You've been here since
18 December, Ms. Cortes, soon-to-be
19 Solicitor Cortes, and I have worn you
20 out I don't know how much on the weekend
21 with text messages and everything. So I
22 hope you don't consider it an abuse of
23 power. But when we're trying to work to
24 get things done, we need you to help us
25 give answers and you've done that.

1 I want to specifically state to
2 the residents of the 9th District who
3 are listening, as you heard Ms. Cortes
4 lay out her history in this Department,
5 when she mentioned VisionQuest, I
6 immediately thought about the residents
7 of Logan who when the issue was first
8 proposed by the owner of that property,
9 they had never even talked to the
10 residents there to ask them what they
11 thought about it. And the Law
12 Department represented us well, so I
13 want to say thank you for them.

14 Thank you for mentioning lost
15 and stolen guns, which is near and dear
16 to my heart. Foundation of Advocacy,
17 when I was a member of the General
18 Assembly, and the first vote that was
19 ever taken on that issue on the floor of
20 the House started when City Council's
21 own Joe Grace was actually the Executive
22 Director of a group called CeaseFirePA.

23 Cherelle, why are you
24 mentioning all of this on the record?
25 So people can understand that this

1 battle and this fight against these
2 issues that we are working on right now,
3 none of this is new. So thank you for
4 continuing that legacy. I want to say
5 to Mr. Crawford who I know well, thank
6 you for your leadership on the ground
7 from the grassroots level on this issue
8 and I look forward to seeing how we move
9 forward in the court system, Ms. Cortes,
10 under your leadership.

11 Hilary Emerson in my office, my
12 staff lawyer has said, you better thank
13 her for that code enforcement support
14 for closing those nuisance bars in
15 Olney. Why am I getting this on the
16 record? People think Law Department,
17 but I want them to see how your work
18 impacts what happens in the neighborhood
19 that they live in.

20 Finally, I want to say this to
21 you: When we came up with that idea of
22 developing the Dr. Walter P. Lomax
23 Transparency in Business Act
24 legislation, making it transparent who
25 was doing business, how much they were

1 getting paid, how long, peeling back the
2 layers of what the people looked like at
3 those firms, who they are, and making it
4 transparent, like putting it on a
5 website, I had people, Ms. Cortes, who
6 told me I was crazy, that the Law
7 Department would never help us find a
8 way to do it.

9 Reynelle and Lewis, and I'm not
10 talking about just my staff because I
11 was hands-on with this one from the
12 beginning to the end, they worked with
13 us to cross every T, dot every I, with
14 the contracting lawyers along with the
15 City's Procurement Department. So I
16 wanted to say thank you for that.

17 Now, the next thing I want to
18 say to you is that when you just
19 mentioned the lawsuit and you mentioned
20 Commonwealth Court, to all of the
21 residents of the City of Philadelphia
22 who were looking for a reason why we
23 needed to continue paying attention to
24 what happens during elections, you just
25 heard Ms. Cortes talk about the power of

1 a little known court that we know very
2 little about. I'm talking about the
3 average everyday citizen. But she
4 mentioned the role that that court had
5 in deciding how we as a City get the
6 opportunity to respond to the challenges
7 facing us.

8 So those folks who are elected,
9 the Commonwealth, the Superior and
10 Supreme, that impacts us. So we need
11 you to pay attention. I also want to
12 finally say this: I've got a couple of
13 more issues that we are working on with
14 your office and they're before you now
15 and you know how complex they are, and
16 some of them are intergovernmental,
17 require federal, state and local law
18 departments and different entities. But
19 I'm looking forward to getting the
20 solution.

21 My hope is that you all will
22 continue doing what you've been doing in
23 working with us and that when I come, I
24 don't want anybody telling me, no, you
25 can't do that. I want them telling me

1 this is what we're going to do to help
2 you get as close as possible to your
3 goal. And there are three issues. I
4 don't want you to say them out loud.
5 Don't mention them because I want to fix
6 them first. But I want to say we're
7 looking forward to working with you and
8 congratulations once again.

9 MS. CORTES: Thank you so much,
10 Councilmember Parker. I look forward to
11 working with you as well.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
13 Thank you, Councilwoman.

14 I believe Councilwoman Gym.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you
16 very much, Council President.

17 Good afternoon, Solicitor
18 Cortes.

19 MS. CORTES: Afternoon.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I also want
21 to say what an honor to have you here
22 stewarding our City during these times.
23 I think we've had a chance to talk
24 before and I'm really very hopeful. And
25 just as a woman who is trailblazing in

1 this area, it is really hopeful to see
2 you here, so thank you.

3 The other thing, I think I
4 wanted to start a little bit with a
5 comment and then I had a couple of
6 questions. One of the comments, and I
7 think it was alluded to a little bit
8 before, but there are spaces and we have
9 certainly witnessed some of the
10 challenges that the City has faced just
11 even over the last term. It is helpful
12 that the City Solicitor's Office has an
13 unparallel track record around
14 establishing our jurisdictional rights,
15 especially when there was a Presidential
16 Administration that tried to threaten or
17 use its own ideology to curtail cities'
18 and municipalities' rights to protect
19 its own residents, rights to enforce
20 local laws. So I want to congratulate
21 you and also hope that we can continue
22 that excellent track record.

23 But there have also been real
24 challenges that the City has faced. And
25 I don't think it's a question. I think

1 it's just an ongoing area of work. But
2 there will be places where the law is
3 the law of course, but the law is also
4 interpreted. And I think what some of
5 my colleagues were saying earlier was
6 about the need for you to be that moral
7 voice in the room.

8 We know that there are
9 circumstances that people face where the
10 path is uncertain, where it's not clear
11 exactly what the law says, maybe some
12 need to be written afterwards. But
13 there was no question that in many cases
14 I felt that your predecessor Solicitor
15 Pratt, I felt like there was a moral
16 voice in that room.

17 And if there's one thing I say
18 on our day of confirmation is that I
19 hope you will continue that path to be
20 the moral conscience in the room and to
21 consider the impact that your voice
22 carries with not only all of us, but
23 with the broader City and its need for
24 civil rights protection and to recognize
25 that the law lives in our actions and

1 not just, as you know, on paper.

2 So I had a couple of questions:

3 One of them is Councilmember Gauthier
4 talked a little bit about the need for
5 oversight on our settlements, and we
6 recently passed a law that requires the
7 City to come together quarterly to
8 review settlements in a very general
9 way, to try to figure out paths for
10 improvements. I know that COVID has had
11 a difficult impact on it in 2020, but
12 would love to hear how you think this
13 process works moving forward in 2021.

14 MS. CORTES: Thank you,
15 Councilmember Gym. Just a little bit of
16 clarification on the question, how the
17 process of meeting with the Settlement
18 Committee or --

19 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Yes. So the
20 law requests that the City gather a
21 group of individuals to meet quarterly
22 to review settlements to talk about writ
23 large, not specific to the settlements
24 itself, but more broadly are there any
25 patterns, are there things that we can

1 improve and what are the things that
2 we're talking about to ensure and
3 identify any problem areas so that the
4 City isn't paying out millions of
5 dollars in settlement fees.

6 MS. CORTES: No, of course.
7 And I do remember that we did have that
8 one meeting I think back in -- it was a
9 while ago so we're behind in our
10 quarterly meetings. So I think the
11 first step would be for us to schedule
12 that meeting and I think it will be up
13 to me -- well, my team then to reflect
14 on what has been settled during that
15 time and just answering those questions.
16 And I think we just have to be more
17 proactive and I think diligent in making
18 sure that we're scheduling these
19 meetings and preparing for that and just
20 being able to better identify and
21 assess.

22 I think overall the settlements
23 have been lower. I think because the
24 number of settlements have been lower
25 due to the pandemic, so I think that is

1 a good point in the sense of our
2 Indemnities Fund, but there are still
3 areas that we need to improve upon and
4 there's definitely need for oversight.
5 So I look forward to working with you
6 and your team on that.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I'll send
8 some other questions. I know that
9 people have their time short, so I'll
10 send other questions over. But I do
11 think it's important for us to do some
12 of that review and we aren't just
13 looking at larger settlements. We're
14 looking at concentration of settlements
15 within particular departments so that
16 there's an ability to identify. But I
17 know that some of that work should be
18 ongoing, so I look forward to starting
19 those up again, and in particular having
20 as much analysis as possible ahead of
21 the meeting so that we can make the
22 meeting as productive as possible.
23 Thank you very much and we look forward
24 to the confirmation.

25 MS. CORTES: Thank you.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

2 Thank you, Councilwoman.

3 We have Councilwoman Bass next.

4 Councilwoman Bass.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
6 afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon.
7 Can you hear me?

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
9 Barely.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. Hold
11 on. Can you hear me now? Is that
12 better?

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
14 Absolutely.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
16 Great. So I want to start by giving
17 congratulations in advance to our new
18 Madam Solicitor. I know that you are
19 highly qualified, ready to go on day 1.
20 And so, I think that your position as a
21 leader, as a leader within the Latino
22 community, as a leader here in the City
23 of Philadelphia and legal communities, I
24 think that this is going to serve us all
25 well and we're certainly a city in need

1 of significant leadership and direction
2 right now. And I think you're going to
3 do a great job. So I just really wanted
4 to say that first and foremost.

5 Secondly, I also wanted to
6 thank you acknowledging the work that
7 you had done around discrimination
8 within the LGBTQ community by vendors or
9 contractors that the City of
10 Philadelphia was working with when it
11 came time to place children into foster
12 care, so there were a number of agencies
13 that were called on the carpet for
14 discriminating against folks within the
15 LGBTQ community and they would not place
16 young people within those homes. And
17 so, my office called it out. We
18 sponsored a resolution to call for
19 hearings.

20 And I remember, I can only tell
21 you how we got so many calls and
22 contacts from a number of folks in City
23 government who did not want us to go
24 through with that resolution. They did
25 not want us to try to make waves, if you

1 will. And I'm just glad that we did.
2 I'm glad that we're having this
3 conversation on a national level now,
4 and I'm glad to have played a role in
5 it.

6 I thank you for your work and
7 your advocacy, because this is just
8 something that's way too important to be
9 overlooked or to be swept under a rug.
10 So thank you so much for all of your
11 work and I look forward to working with
12 you in the future.

13 MS. CORTES: Thank you so much,
14 Councilmember Bass.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: You're very
16 welcome.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
18 Thank you, Councilwoman.

19 Councilwoman Gilmore
20 Richardson, I think she may have had
21 to -- I think she had to leave. But she
22 wants to be recorded as voting aye on
23 all the bills or the resolutions rather.
24 Let the record reflect that.

25 Any other questions for this

1 witness?

2 (No response.)

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: And
4 there being none, Mr. Christmas.

5 THE CLERK: Yes. The next
6 witness --

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
8 Ms. Cortes, I want to thank you so much.
9 Get out of here while you can. Thank
10 you and look forward to --

11 MS. CORTES: Thank you --

12 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: Council
13 President. Mr. Council President.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes,
15 sir.

16 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: This is
17 Councilman O'Neill.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Oh,
19 I'm sorry. I thought they told me --

20 COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: I just
21 wanted to make sure if I go offline,
22 I've been listening to the whole -- I
23 just want to give my wholehearted
24 (inaudible) to our Acting City Solicitor
25 and can't wait to see her confirmed. We

1 had a great meeting and I think she's
2 the right person for the job at this
3 time and we'll succeed with flying
4 colors.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

6 Thank you. Thank you, Councilman.

7 MS. CORTES: Thank you so much,
8 Councilmember O'Neill.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All
10 right. Madam Solicitor, I think you
11 probably should get out of here while
12 you still can.

13 MS. CORTES: Okay. You don't
14 have to tell me twice. Thank you. Bye.

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
16 Gracias.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
18 Appreciate your testimony. Thank you.
19 Talk to you soon.

20 Mr. Christmas.

21 THE CLERK: Yes, sir,
22 Mr. President.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Can
24 we call our next panel of witnesses. We
25 have our School District employees next.

1 THE CLERK: Yes, sir. We call
2 Ms. Cecelia Thompson, Ms. Lisa Salley
3 and Mr. Reginald Streater, all nominees
4 to the Board of Education to the School
5 District of Philadelphia, and also
6 Mr. Otis Hackney, the City's Chief
7 Education Officer.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
9 Thank you. Are you all connected?

10 MS. SALLEY: Yes.

11 MS. THOMPSON: Yes.

12 MS. SALLEY: Yes. Lisa Salley
13 was the first yes.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: And
15 we need to hear a male's name.
16 Mr. Streater.

17 MR. STREATER: Yes.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
19 There you go, a male's voice.

20 And, Mr. Hackney, are you on
21 also?

22 MR. HACKNEY: Yes. Good
23 afternoon, Council President and members
24 of City Council.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

1 Thank you. All right. Well, I'm going
2 to ask you all -- well, first, if you're
3 not speaking, mute yourself. I'm
4 hearing a little background. I don't
5 know if that's on our side or yours.

6 So we're going to call the
7 first witness to testify. Just state
8 your name for the record and proceed
9 with your testimony.

10 MS. HACKNEY: Cecelia, you want
11 to read your testimony. Cecelia
12 Thompson, you can read your testimony at
13 this time.

14 MS. THOMPSON: Okay. Thank
15 you. I wasn't sure to proceed. Thank
16 you very much. And I'm not sure why my
17 camera's not working. Charge it to my
18 hardware, but I'll read my testimony.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: No
20 problem. Please proceed.

21 MS. THOMPSON: Okay. Good
22 afternoon, Council President Clarke and
23 members of City Council. My name is
24 Cecelia Thompson and I am one of the
25 Mayor's nominees to the Board of

1 Education for the School District of
2 Philadelphia. As a proud graduate of
3 the Philadelphia High School for Girls,
4 my introduction for advocacy with the
5 School District of Philadelphia began
6 with my now 22-year-old June 2020
7 graduate Trevor entering the District
8 from Early Intervention, who lives with
9 severe autism.

10 As a single parent, I learned
11 how to navigate many systems, including
12 Community Behavioral Health and the
13 School District of Philadelphia's array
14 of specialized services. My passion for
15 education and strong desire to see all
16 students living with disabilities
17 succeed in the classroom led to my
18 involvement with various special
19 education, educational and disability
20 organizations.

21 As a result of my volunteerism,
22 I've been selected to sit on many Boards
23 and to serve in leadership positions in
24 the City. Currently, I am the
25 Chairperson of the Philadelphia Right to

1 Education Local Task Force for
2 Intermediate Unit 26, as Philadelphia is
3 a District and an Intermediate Unit in
4 Pennsylvania, and an appointed Panel
5 Member and voted Secretary for the
6 Governor's Special Education Advisory
7 Panel or SEAP.

8 The Philadelphia Right to
9 Education Local Task Force has a
10 longstanding partnership with the
11 District through their Office of
12 Specialized Services or OSS, which
13 provides information on supports for
14 students living with disabilities and an
15 avenue for families to communicate their
16 concerns directly with the Deputy Chief
17 of OSS and their staff on issues
18 pertaining to their children.

19 While SEAP consist of
20 governor-appointed members from across
21 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania whose
22 mission is to provide advice and
23 feedback to the Pennsylvania Department
24 of Education's Bureau of Special
25 Education Staff on various initiatives,

1 interventions, strategies and other
2 topics related to students living with
3 disabilities, to improve the education
4 of students living with all
5 disabilities.

6 Additionally, I was selected as
7 one of the first individuals selected
8 from over 200 applicants to serve on the
9 Board of Education's Parent and
10 Community Advisory Council, whose charge
11 is to provide an input in guidance on
12 the interest and concerns of
13 Philadelphia public school families,
14 caregivers and community members while
15 serving as a vital link of community
16 engagement with the Board of Education
17 in the School District of Philadelphia
18 and school communities.

19 In January 2021, I resigned
20 from this position to continue moving
21 forward with the Mayor's nomination to
22 serve on the Board of Education.
23 Currently, I'm pursuing a Master's in
24 Special Education to learn what is
25 expected of special educators, so I have

1 the tools to further assist families of
2 students living with disabilities who
3 are receiving special education,
4 supports and services.

5 Additionally, I serve as a peer
6 parent with the PA Bureau of Special
7 Education Cyclical Monitoring team and a
8 parent member of the Philadelphia
9 Coalition of Special Education
10 Advocates. Moreover, I'm a founding
11 Board member for Philadelphia Family
12 Voices. And last fall, Mayor James F.
13 Kenney appointed me as a Commissioner to
14 the Mayor's Commission on People with
15 Disabilities and was recently selected
16 in January 2021 to serve on the Philly
17 Autism Project Advisory Board, a group
18 near and dear to my heart as I'm a
19 single parent of a 22-year-old young man
20 living with severe autism.

21 Furthermore, I'm also active in
22 the (inaudible) zone where I reside,
23 participating on two committees, which
24 are Health and Wellness and the
25 Workforce and Economic Opportunity

1 Committee, providing information from
2 the perspective of a low-income resident
3 to better my community, which is
4 primarily low-income residents.

5 With all I do to advocate for
6 my son and his needs, I continue to
7 volunteer and advocate to all children
8 with or without disabilities because I
9 believe all families should have the
10 information needed to advocate for the
11 support and services and activities
12 leading towards academic success and
13 becoming an overall contributor to
14 society and having the skills to compete
15 in this global society.

16 As a lifelong advocate of
17 public education with experience serving
18 at the state and local levels, I offer
19 unique skills and experiences. I have
20 been involved with the Board of
21 Education, the School Reform Commission
22 and now the new Board of Education for
23 over 15 years. I provided testimony
24 regarding special education and other
25 initiatives related to children and

1 families.

2 I've taken everything I've
3 learned in this information and provided
4 to families so that they are informed
5 and can advocate for their school
6 communities. I've been a constant
7 advocate for special education over 15
8 years to ensure students with
9 disabilities and their families are
10 included in all decisions at the School
11 District.

12 I also advocate for families
13 living in low-income neighborhoods
14 because I am a family of many of those
15 low-income neighborhoods, so I have the
16 same struggles as my neighbors.
17 Becoming a servant to improve the
18 educational, recreational and other
19 supports to students becoming a holistic
20 citizen is a mission I would be humbled
21 to endeavor.

22 I am humbled and grateful for
23 being selected by Mayor James F. Kenney
24 to serve the children of our public and
25 charter schools and appreciate the

1 opportunity to participate in this City
2 Council hearing. And if confirmed, am
3 eager to begin service to the children
4 as a member of the Board of Education
5 for the School District of Philadelphia.
6 Again, thank you for the opportunity and
7 I welcome any questions.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

9 Thank you. Thank you so much for your
10 testimony.

11 We're going to just go through
12 the testimony and then we'll ask
13 questions. Next up is Lisa Salley, and
14 then we'll be followed by Reginald
15 Streater.

16 MS. SALLEY: Can you guys hear
17 me okay?

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

19 Okay. A little muffled but --

20 MS. SALLEY: Okay. I'll try to
21 speak up. I'll use my outside voice.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

23 There you go.

24 MS. SALLEY: Okay. Thank you.
25 Let me just start by saying that I'm

1 humbled and thankful for the Mayor's
2 vote of confidence and also very humbled
3 and thankful to present to the City
4 Council this afternoon. I want to read
5 through my written testimony first.

6 So good afternoon, President
7 Clarke and members of City Council. My
8 name is Lisa Salley and I identify as a
9 proud product of the Philadelphia School
10 District. I am an alum of the
11 Philadelphia High School for Girls and I
12 completed junior high at Masterman. And
13 I also completed graduate and
14 undergraduate in engineering, completing
15 a B.S. in Metallurgical Engineering and
16 Material Science from Carnegie Mellon
17 University and an M.S. in Decision
18 Sciences in Engineering Systems from
19 Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

20 I have 25 years experience
21 working in Corporate America, leading
22 operations and energy and industrials,
23 specialty chemicals and emerging
24 technologies. These assignments
25 included senior executive or officary

1 level positions at General Electric, GE,
2 Dow Chemical, Underwriters Laboratories
3 and the American Petroleum Institute.

4 I began my career as a
5 Materials Nuclear Engineer, served as
6 Chief Strategy and Growth Officer and
7 served multiple times as Senior
8 Vice-president of a global
9 manufacturing-based business. I have
10 led organizations ranging in size from 3
11 to over 5,000 persons, developing
12 talent, building and strengthening
13 stakeholder relationships, evolving
14 culture and generating financial
15 improvement over 30 percent in billion
16 dollar markets. My career focus has
17 been business strategy, innovation,
18 product safety and emerging technologies
19 and I am typically engaged as a change
20 agent.

21 Additionally, I have sat on
22 numerous panels across the world to
23 discuss technical topics as well as
24 Women in STEM in diversity
25 conversations. I have collaborated with

1 federal entities and international
2 governments on the topics of strategic
3 growth partnerships, innovation,
4 standards and public safety. For
5 example, last year I was one of three
6 judges selected by the Department of
7 Energy to judge the 2020 Solar
8 Competition prize. I also previously
9 participated in the Department of
10 Commerce 2015 Energy Trade Mission to
11 Africa and served as a White House
12 roundtable expert, evaluating whether to
13 continue tax credits associated with
14 solar energy.

15 Although my career has
16 literally taken me all over the world, I
17 have never lost sight of my community or
18 my desire to create paths to help
19 sustain future generations. For this
20 reason, I have shared my expertise by
21 teaching growth and risk assessment
22 part-time at Babson College in the
23 Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business
24 course for the past eight years.

25 I've also judged business

1 planning competitions at Temple
2 University, served as guest lecturer in
3 the Business School at Carnegie Mellon
4 University and I've testified before the
5 Pennsylvania Legislature to request
6 support for Alzheimer's research and
7 services. I also serve our local
8 community as a Silver Star member of
9 Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and a
10 member of Enon Tabernacle Baptist
11 Church.

12 As I hear local or statewide
13 news on the condition of the
14 Philadelphia School District, I'm often
15 saddened. I've often wondered what
16 happened to the District that prepared
17 me to compete on a global basis. It was
18 a District that worked well and served
19 all abilities and all social economic
20 levels.

21 Generally, as an engineer, I
22 have been trained to solve legacy
23 problems and to shape emerging
24 technological challenges. As an
25 executive, I also counted part of my

1 responsibility to train future
2 generations. The essence of this
3 mindset is what I would hope to bring to
4 the Philadelphia School District through
5 the Board of Education.

6 I would like to transition my
7 concern for the state of the
8 Philadelphia School District to be in
9 the part of the strategy and solutions
10 that continue to equip our youth to be
11 global citizens who see the world as
12 their playground and a District that
13 again works for all abilities and all
14 social economics.

15 My hope is that every
16 Philadelphia child and family has access
17 to quality education that allows them to
18 make dreams realities. Thank you for
19 your time and attention this afternoon.
20 I'm happy to answer any questions you
21 may have.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

23 Thank you for your testimony.

24 Mr. Streater.

25 MR. STREATER: Good morning,

1 Council President Clarke and members of
2 City of Council. My name is Reginald
3 Streater. I come to you today to
4 express my deep and sincere interest in
5 serving as one of the members of the
6 Philadelphia Board of Education. I know
7 that I have the passion and life
8 experience necessary to be an excellent
9 Board member.

10 I am, number one, a product of
11 the Philadelphia public school system;
12 number two, a parent of two children who
13 currently attend the Philadelphia public
14 school; number three, an attorney;
15 number four, an active member to various
16 nonprofit executive boards and other
17 community-based organizations; and
18 number five, a proud Black man.

19 In sum, I am intentional on
20 staying connected to my community and it
21 has further empowered me to be an
22 effective advocate for them in all the
23 spaces that I serve. I am a product of
24 the Philadelphia public school system.
25 I graduated from the neighborhood

1 schools of Leeds Middle School in 1997
2 and now the shuttered Germantown High
3 School in 2001.

4 Going to and successfully
5 matriculating through public schools
6 gave me invaluable insight as to the
7 multi-varied positions impact that
8 public schools can have on someone such
9 as myself. I am from the Northwest
10 portion of the City and have spent much
11 of my formative years in Mount Airy and
12 then in Germantown. Going to Leeds and
13 Germantown High gave me access to an
14 education and social atmosphere that
15 became the springboard as to who I am
16 today.

17 Moreover, these schools were
18 cultural and historical hubs of
19 intangible information that related not
20 just to the greater community, but to
21 discrete communities they serve. Just
22 as many students in the District, I had
23 my difficulties in high school. I was
24 not focused on school, but on the many
25 distractions that sadly many students of

1 Philadelphia must overcome to be
2 successful in school.

3 These distractions include
4 economic inequality, economic apartheid,
5 vis-à-vis, their suburban counterparts,
6 food deserts, lack of funding, and in a
7 lack of funding are all substantial
8 barriers to learning. However, I had an
9 interaction with a teacher at Germantown
10 High School. I remember her name today,
11 Mrs. Altman, who challenged me to
12 overcome these barriers and be better.
13 I can honestly say that her words of
14 tough love helped propel me to
15 eventually complete my Bachelor's and
16 Juris Doctorate degrees.

17 Based on my personal experience
18 at Philadelphia public schools, it was a
19 no-brainer when the mother of my
20 children and I decided to send our
21 children to C.W. Henry Public School. I
22 have witnessed firsthand the logistic
23 issues that beset the children, parents,
24 the faculty and the administration of
25 the school before and during the

1 pandemic. All and all, I am passionate
2 about children of Philadelphia having
3 access to quality education regardless
4 of the school, of the zip code they live
5 in or their race, gender and other forms
6 of status.

7 In my current role as an
8 attorney at a law firm, I am charged
9 with reading, reviewing and synthesizing
10 arguments for the purpose of motion
11 practice or in preparation for oral
12 arguments to the court. I also am
13 published in an international law
14 journal and political and civil rights
15 journal, matters that relate to critical
16 race theory. In short, I excel in
17 reading this information and presenting
18 this information to others in a way that
19 is readily accessible.

20 Finally, my commitment to the
21 Philadelphia community is made evident
22 by my nonprofit Board and other
23 organizational commitments and
24 activities. As the Vice-president of
25 the Greater Philadelphia ACLU Executive

1 Board, I have spearheaded an effort to
2 make the ACLU more accessible to the
3 Black community by planning and
4 executing programs and outreach in the
5 Germantown section of Philadelphia.

6 As an Executive Board Member of
7 the Barristers' Association of
8 Philadelphia, I have personally engaged
9 in helping members of the community
10 expunging their records. Also, as a
11 Barrister I have volunteered to teach
12 other lawyers about voting laws and
13 rules in Philadelphia in preparation of
14 voter-protection efforts in the 2020
15 federal and state elections.

16 Finally, I also volunteer as a
17 mentor and to distribute food and other
18 necessities to needy Philadelphians and
19 I'm a proud brother and member of Alpha
20 Psi Fraternity, Inc. At bottom, I
21 perceive my role as being an advocate to
22 and for the community in executing my
23 fiduciary duty as a Board member. I
24 will be honored to serve the
25 Philadelphia community as a Board

1 member. Thank you for your time and
2 consideration.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

4 Thank you. Thank you all so much for
5 your testimony. I appreciate you. I
6 appreciate the fact that you have shown
7 an interest in serving the public
8 service, particularly since you're not
9 getting paid, so that really tells me
10 that you're really, really interested in
11 doing the best that you can for the City
12 of Philadelphia.

13 This is a challenge and we need
14 good people. And I just heard your
15 testimony and you guys have a wide range
16 of skill sets and wide range of
17 interest, and that's really good for
18 this particular time. I just want to
19 say that your commitment is generally
20 appreciated and we're going to be
21 partners in all of this.

22 We got a long ways to go to get
23 our children out of the challenges that
24 they face now more than ever.
25 Hopefully, at some point in the near

1 future we get kids back into school so
2 they can socialize because that aspect
3 is almost as important as the book
4 learning, being able to interact. I'm a
5 grandfather, I know all about that.

6 And so, the reality is we
7 appreciate what you've done and we look
8 forward to working with you. And please
9 feel free -- my assumption is that you
10 guys will obviously be nominated and
11 approved and confirmed by Council. But
12 please feel free to interact with us.
13 And don't think only during the course
14 of a budget hearing or some other
15 official formal setting, if you have
16 some ideas and if you have some
17 perspectives, I want you all to please
18 feel free to reach out to members of
19 Council because we're in this together.
20 It's going to take all of us to get us
21 to a better path, so thank you.

22 With that, I want to recognize
23 Councilwoman Brooks.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
25 so much, Council President. I want to

1 start by saying thank you guys, as
2 Council President said, for taking on
3 this huge volunteer task that is before
4 you. So I have a few questions.

5 But my first question is for
6 Ms. Salley: As I listened to your
7 testimony, I didn't hear you talk about
8 local and neighborhood and community
9 volunteering. So I would like to hear
10 more about that. I applaud your global
11 perspective in the work that you've done
12 around the world. But I would like to
13 hear about what have you done
14 specifically for communities in
15 surrounding neighborhoods.

16 MS. SALLEY: Sure. So I grew
17 up -- and I didn't say this earlier. I
18 grew up in West Oak Lane. And so, I'm
19 from West Oak Lane. I live in Mount
20 Airy now. I actually graduated from
21 Girls' High at 16 years old, and I've
22 been working literally in Corporate from
23 that time on, where I really see this as
24 the next chapter of my life and where I
25 have more time to volunteer and give

1 back to my local community.

2 Thus far in the community, I've
3 worked with the Mount Airy USA. I've
4 served previously when they had a Board
5 that worked with local businesses,
6 because big business is one thing, but
7 big business doesn't even work without
8 small business. I've always had a
9 passion for small business in the local
10 neighborhood and taking the skills that
11 I've learned in big businesses actually
12 to help small business run well. So
13 I've done it through Mount Airy USA a
14 number of years.

15 I've also served on the Board
16 for CARIE, which is an aging
17 organization in Philadelphia. I've been
18 a member and a lot of the volunteer work
19 that I've done over the years has come
20 through Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church,
21 where I volunteer there in the Financial
22 Literacy Ministry previously, and also
23 done work on the strategy and the vision
24 of the church as well. And I've done
25 work through the local chapters of Alpha

1 Kappa Alpha. Also, I teach at Community
2 College just for small businesses in the
3 Goldman Sachs program, and I've taught
4 for the last eight years. I've taught
5 since the inception. I'm one of the
6 original people when the program was
7 still started up in Philadelphia.

8 So the reason I started by
9 answering your question was I've kind of
10 being working all my life and the
11 corporate career literally took me
12 around the world so when I was in
13 Philadelphia, I tended to volunteer
14 through more organized activities and my
15 commitment is really transitioned in the
16 last 10 years to do more hands-on within
17 the community.

18 Also, in West Oak Lane, and
19 Ms. Parker, Ms. Cherelle Parker is aware
20 of this, I led the community voice
21 around St. Athanasius, which is where I
22 went to grade school. They transitioned
23 their convent to a dormitory for
24 homeless students. And so, I led and
25 worked hands-on with the local precinct,

1 the St. Athanasius community, to open
2 that dormitory in 2020. And I've been
3 able to be reflective during the years
4 of the pandemic. I also just want to
5 continue to give back to the community
6 that made me essentially, and
7 Philadelphia is a huge part of that. I
8 hope that answers your question. Does
9 it?

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yes.
11 Thank you so much. My next question is
12 for all of you: What do you view as
13 your main responsibility on the School
14 Board and how you define success in the
15 School District of Philadelphia? Any
16 one you of guys can -- I would like all
17 of you guys to answer that question.

18 MR. STREATER: I can take a
19 stab at that. So I think the attorney
20 in me thinks about big picture and also
21 the incremental picture. So I think for
22 me success is incremental steps that are
23 leading to a goal, hard goals of which
24 our children are being educated in a way
25 in which they are most qualified -- not

1 qualified, most prepared to navigate the
2 world of Philadelphia, their lives
3 educationally, economically and
4 spiritually to the point where our
5 School District can help implement those
6 things in them.

7 In addition to that, I would
8 say that I think for me from an attorney
9 perspective as it relates to family law,
10 there's a thing called the best interest
11 of the child standard. So my goal is to
12 always think about what is the best
13 interest of our children. Obviously, I
14 understand that there are other
15 stakeholders and they are also top of
16 mine as it relates to parents, as it
17 relates to teacher.

18 Currently, as you all know, we
19 are in a pandemic and there's the issues
20 of reopening and things of that nature.
21 So I think for me the goal is what is in
22 the best interest of the children in the
23 way that is the safest and best way for
24 their families and other stakeholders.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank

1 you. Cecelia or Ms. Salley.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

3 Ms. Thompson.

4 MS. SALLEY: Yeah, I can -- go
5 ahead, Cecel -- all right. I'll go.
6 Sorry. I think one of the things I
7 bring is a keen ability to listen and to
8 make sure that all stakeholders' voices
9 are important. I concur and agree 100
10 percent with everything that Reggie said
11 first, so not only building on that, but
12 are we listening to the stakeholders'
13 voice, not just having conversations or
14 throwing rocks at each other or a lot of
15 emotional conversation, making sure that
16 we can convert the conversations or the
17 voices to data that help us create the
18 requirements for solutions that we
19 ultimately agree and have the community
20 backing to implement and all of those
21 solutions to implement things that help
22 our students to be the best productive
23 citizens that they need for themselves
24 and their families in the world at
25 large.

1 I also think that using the
2 data of stakeholders, the data of their
3 voice in particular, is helpful in
4 making sure that not only the schools
5 run well but that the schools are safe
6 and that the schools create a
7 preparedness for all students
8 irrespective of the immediate support
9 that they might have at home. And so, I
10 think just coming from a corporate and
11 business background and trying to make
12 sure that as one person, not just my
13 opinion but understanding the total
14 voice of the community and also not
15 losing sight of the number one aim of
16 educating our children is a skill set
17 that I can bring.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

19 Ms. Thompson.

20 MS. THOMPSON: Okay. I believe
21 that -- not I believe. I know that the
22 number one responsibility is fiduciary.
23 But other than that, I am a firm
24 believer in equity of education for all
25 of our children. It shouldn't matter

1 what zip code you live. If you're able
2 to read in 19104, you should be able to
3 read in the Overbrook section of West
4 Philadelphia or you should be able to
5 read with the same vigor and have the
6 same resources as other zip codes that
7 tend to have higher resources.

8 I also believe that our role on
9 the Board is to develop policies which
10 protect our children and also make sure
11 that our children have the academic
12 resources that they need to be, as I
13 stated in my testimony, able to compete
14 globally as well as to maintain their
15 neighborhoods locally. We don't always
16 have to leave our neighborhoods, and
17 that's one thing that I'm very firm
18 about.

19 Our children need to see what
20 success looks like. Success does not
21 always have to be moving out. Success
22 can be staying here and making a stand
23 on certain things going on in our
24 neighborhood and being able to give back
25 and volunteer and participate in our

1 neighborhoods, so I hope that answers
2 your question.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
4 so much.

5 I have a second round of
6 questions. Thank you, Council
7 President.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
9 Thank you, Councilwoman.

10 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
11 Quinones-Sanchez.

12 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
13 Thank you. I also want to thank you.
14 As Council President Clarke and
15 Councilmember Brooks stated, this is a
16 volunteer job, sometimes a thankless
17 job. But it is not lost on me that we
18 have three highly-qualified
19 African-American folks in consideration
20 for the School Board. I've been in
21 Council 13 years. I don't know when we
22 always get this diversity. I'm
23 celebrating Diana Cortes. I just want
24 to acknowledge that there are
25 highly-qualified people ready to serve.

1 And I thank the Mayor's nomination
2 committee and the folks who have
3 volunteered throughout this process to
4 get us to this point.

5 I had a couple of questions.
6 Councilmember Brooks asked one of them
7 around your role on the Board. These
8 are really fast questions, more for the
9 record. We're going to spend a lot of
10 time, and as Chair of Education, I look
11 forward to working with you.

12 So a lot of people fought for
13 local control. Really quickly, all
14 three of you can answer, what does local
15 control mean to you? How are you going
16 to talk about local control and what it
17 means? Given the history and the
18 mistrust that exists between some of our
19 stakeholders, what role do you see you
20 playing as the fiduciary policy Board,
21 City Council and the Mayor, for us
22 together to work towards building trust
23 of all of the community stakeholders in
24 the education field. And I'll leave it
25 at those two. And again, thank you for

1 your willingness. So local control,
2 what does it mean to you? What do you
3 see us doing together to win public
4 trust?

5 MS. THOMPSON: This is Cecelia
6 Thompson. Building local trust is just
7 being transparent. I'm always for that.
8 Just letting families know what they
9 need to know what we're doing, because I
10 believe that sometimes it is unclear as
11 to what the Board of Ed. is doing
12 because certain matters for legality
13 reasons have to be confidential, but as
14 long as families and communities know
15 what we're doing minus things that
16 pertain to personnel issues, I believe
17 that's how we build local trust.

18 One is having more community
19 engagement other than the action meeting
20 that's held on a monthly basis. I know
21 that it was announced at a recent
22 meeting that moving forward instead of
23 having that one-and-done community
24 engagement, that community engagement
25 will be in the neighborhoods so that you

1 can get different perspectives, because
2 we are a City of neighborhoods and every
3 neighborhood has their own unique
4 footprint and they need to be heard
5 concerning the children in their
6 schools. Do you want me to do the local
7 control as well?

8 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
9 (Nodded affirmatively).

10 MS. THOMPSON: Okay. Great.
11 Local control for me means having people
12 from the City selected by the City to
13 represent the City. I didn't have a
14 problem with the process. And while it
15 was rigorous, I believe it was
16 necessary, because as it was stated
17 earlier, you don't get any money for
18 this. This is strictly volunteer. If
19 you really want to do this, you have to
20 be invested in this City and more
21 importantly, invested in the education
22 of our children. So again, local
23 control for me is being from the City,
24 having lived in the City for a number of
25 years and being passionate about the

1 children and going through this process.
2 Yes, that's what it means to me. I hope
3 that answered your question.

4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
5 Yes.

6 MS. SALLEY: I'll try to answer
7 in this way: As I think about local
8 control, I think about two things that
9 are key to ensuring that local control
10 can kind of be the output. And the
11 first one is what I talked about earlier
12 is listening, right, and not just
13 talking at each other or not just going
14 on the record or just a lot of emotional
15 discussions without resolve in general.
16 So some kind of way finding the ability
17 to sit and work through the issues and
18 to actually have a dialogue about it
19 versus just presenting information.

20 I think the second thing as a
21 part of this would also be important to
22 think about not so much no, so when we
23 are considering recommendations or
24 specific things to implement for the
25 School District, that we think about how

1 more so than no. And what I would refer
2 and reference us to is if we think back
3 to 9/11, 9/11 like the pandemic ended up
4 teaching new normals.

5 And with new normals, there
6 were things that we didn't know how to
7 do. We were going to have to do more
8 things locally also, but over time we
9 learned and figured out the how. So I
10 think with the School District, the
11 current state of the School District,
12 the things that we have to address even
13 post-pandemic and to get us the rest of
14 the way through the pandemic, we have to
15 learn to focus on instead of a quick no,
16 working together collaboratively and
17 focused on the how. And just even
18 adopting, we're going to figure out the
19 how versus the rejection I think is a
20 key part.

21 I also see Philadelphia,
22 Philadelphia is one of my first loves.
23 It is very neighborhood-centric. I have
24 lived a good chunk of my life on
25 Germantown Avenue, just from being from

1 the Northwest. And I think even with
2 all of the changes in the City of
3 Philadelphia, that local control says
4 taking the passion that we know from our
5 neighborhoods and converting it to the
6 passion of how we run our schools and
7 involving all of the stakeholders, the
8 students, the administrators, the
9 teacher themselves.

10 And then the last thing I'll
11 say is that I think we have to keep in
12 mind to keep us on track with local
13 control, we can compare being a teacher
14 or an educator like being a teacher or a
15 clergy of some sort. And in particular,
16 you're involved with people's souls,
17 right. The classroom in itself is a
18 very sacred place, and it's a place that
19 we have to restore and in order to
20 ensure or what we want to restore is
21 that learning can happen and does happen
22 and is repeatable in the classroom. But
23 I think the local control required to do
24 that begins with listening and begins
25 with being focused on how we drive the

1 solutions together and how we work
2 collaboratively to ensure they're
3 implementing neighborhood by
4 neighborhood.

5 MR. STREATER: Yes, I agree
6 with everything that my colleagues just
7 said. I think I want to answer the
8 trust question first. So at the outset,
9 I just want to mention that I'm very
10 Afrocentric, very village-oriented. So
11 my leadership style, my collaboration
12 style is based upon that model or that
13 iteration of that model.

14 As far as trust goes, I tend to
15 use a quote over and over again. And
16 I'm sure that many are going to get
17 tired of hearing this quote, but I think
18 it's an amazing quote. It's by John
19 Mbiti, "I am, because we are; because we
20 are, therefore I am." And I think if
21 for myself that is how I purport to
22 build trust and with that being said,
23 what that means to me is supporting and
24 elevating other agencies or other
25 individuals who want to support their

1 agency, I think that many individuals
2 may believe that they're not being heard
3 or that they don't have the outlet to be
4 heard. So I think just knowing that
5 you're heard can help you get the
6 feeling of trust, in addition to that
7 open communication and honest
8 communication.

9 Obviously, there's issues of
10 confidentiality, attorney-client
11 privilege, all of those things. Try not
12 to bore everybody with the lawyer stuff
13 today. But I think finding ways to have
14 open dialogue and open communication in
15 layman's terms and taking something
16 that's complex and packaging it in a way
17 that is still honest, but it's easily
18 accessible by the public, it's helpful.

19 As my colleague Lisa said,
20 we're a City of neighborhoods, but we're
21 also a City of neighborhoods and zip
22 codes that have varying levels of
23 education and access to certain things.
24 So I think that again we have to think
25 about equity, even how we communicate.

1 Number three, I think we should
2 also affirm people. Take the time to
3 affirm people. If someone says
4 something or has a great idea or even if
5 they're just speaking from their worldly
6 perspective, I think it's important to
7 affirm people's humanity so that we can
8 always come back and remember we're
9 always on the same side even though
10 there are many, many stakeholders that
11 are involved.

12 And number four, I think
13 getting results. So obviously, all the
14 things I said should be happening, but
15 it's really about getting the results or
16 at least showing that we're having
17 incremental results. I'm a big
18 proponent of the belief that an ounce of
19 prevention is worth a pound of cure.
20 But in the past, it's sad to say, due to
21 things like white flight or economic
22 apartheid, the School District has fell
23 into disrepair. So understanding
24 there's huge issues that need to be
25 tackled, and we got COVID, so

1 understanding a way to communicate but
2 also communicating those things as an
3 issue so that this incremental change is
4 leading us to the right way, to where we
5 need to get to. And I think that my
6 answer for trust kind of leads to local
7 control.

8 Again, I think that many of the
9 same things I say can also support and
10 also maintain and perfect local control,
11 right. I'm a big proponent of having
12 local control. Being Afrocentric, this
13 belief that the best people who know how
14 to rule themselves are the people who
15 typically are ruled by others far away.

16 So I think that as
17 Philadelphians, from various different
18 neighborhoods and things of that nature,
19 if we come together as a village, invite
20 third-party stakeholders such as, for
21 example, my fraternity does a
22 mentorship. I've mentored a few times
23 at Imhotep, a charter school right here
24 in Germantown, things like that, we can
25 have local control outside of the

1 purview of the institutional spaces, but
2 also in the greater village space.

3 Hopefully, that answers your question.

4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

5 Yes.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

7 Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you,
8 Councilwoman.

9 Councilwoman Gauthier I don't
10 think got back yet. So let's go to
11 Councilwoman Gym.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you
13 very much, Council President.

14 Good afternoon, everybody. I
15 certainly welcome you to the
16 confirmation hearing. And to my
17 colleague Cecelia Thompson, having
18 started Parent United together with you
19 15 years ago now, it's a great journey
20 to see us where we are and doing exactly
21 the work that we wanted to do as parents
22 in the School District, and I know you
23 will be bringing that voice there.

24 I want to move relatively
25 quickly because I know that there is a

1 lot of time and I will certainly look
2 forward to meeting with all three of you
3 individually in particular. And also,
4 Reginald, thank you so much for your
5 work at ACLU, particularly in the space
6 of juvenile justice issues and
7 militarization. Those are areas that we
8 are very active and engaged in, even
9 beyond your School District role, I
10 think it will be great just to have you
11 as a wonderful thought partner in that
12 area.

13 My question is if you could
14 very quickly, and recognizing that this
15 is a longer question, but I'm interested
16 in where you see as your top priority
17 need for action within the School
18 District of Philadelphia. And I know
19 there's a lot, but I'm interested in
20 your top priority of need and the role
21 you think you can play to advance it.
22 So I'll start with Mr. Streater and then
23 Ms. Salley and then Ms. Thompson.

24 MR. STREATER: I have other
25 goals so I don't want it to be

1 misconstrued that this is all I'm
2 thinking about. So right now we have
3 COVID, right. And the thing that I
4 worry about, so I've been blessed --
5 actually, my daughter is here. She
6 actually just got finished gym class
7 here, but I have been blessed to have a
8 job where I can work remotely and have a
9 co-parent who's very active as well in
10 making sure that our child doesn't fall
11 behind, and I'm blessed to be in a
12 school environment where there's a
13 community where parents are very active
14 and things of that nature.

15 Active in a way that -- because
16 I don't want to disparage other parents
17 at other schools who may be active in
18 different ways, active with the PTA and
19 things like that in a more institutional
20 way. I worry about a huge percentage of
21 our children falling behind, where next
22 year when they -- hopefully next year
23 are nearing their future whenever
24 everybody's back in school, I worry that
25 we may have such a disparate impact on

1 certain area codes, certain zip codes,
2 that the gap between certain
3 neighborhoods gets even bigger as far as
4 reading, math and things of that nature.

5 So I worry about Internet
6 access. I worry about are there any
7 ways that we can give people the help
8 that they need. Again, I'm one of nine.
9 I know that the School Board can do but
10 so much. But even as a private citizen,
11 I'm willing to use my resources, my
12 network to think or to help get third
13 parties like my fraternity or other
14 fraternities, like the D-Nine, I'm
15 definitely shouting y'all out today, to
16 help us with our babies. Because at the
17 end of the day, the last thing I would
18 want is it seems like economically some
19 people are doing well, but our children
20 are let behind, so that's my role.

21 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you.
22 Ms. Salley.

23 MS. SALLEY: Sure. I actually
24 have a similar concern for the children.
25 Probably about I'll just say a few years

1 back because I don't remember the exact
2 year, I had the opportunity to attend
3 the annual luncheon at Girls' High, so
4 I'm a lifetime member of the Girls' High
5 Alumnae Association, and there was a
6 report given on the state of the School
7 District at that time. And the person
8 that gave the report said -- and this
9 arrested at that time and has haunted me
10 since then, but what she shared was that
11 50 percent of the 9th grade repeats the
12 9th grade, and the statistic bothered me
13 second. What bothered me first was our
14 inability to call failure.

15 And so, when I talk about data
16 in some kind of a way being able to put
17 the data together to understand the
18 state and the condition of the school I
19 think is very important. But from that
20 day on, I kind of purposed within myself
21 that I wanted to have a voice and
22 actually have a civic responsibility to
23 help the same District that gave me a
24 quality education that allowed me to do
25 the things that I've seen and done in

1 the world. So probably more than five
2 years ago, the seed was planted from
3 hearing that report of the Philadelphia
4 School District.

5 The second thing --

6 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: I just want
7 to be quick because I only have a few
8 minutes and I do want to get everybody
9 through and I actually have a number of
10 other questions. So if you can just let
11 me know -- and we're going to have a
12 longer conversation about this.

13 MS. SALLEY: Okay. Okay.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So I just
15 want to kind of have a little bit on the
16 record what your top area of priority is
17 and how you see yourself in your
18 capacity as a School Board member moving
19 that issue forward.

20 MS. SALLEY: Yes. So how I see
21 myself is to really be data-incentive to
22 help with the governance and execution
23 of the school, that's one, because we
24 are a governance body. Two, I can't
25 answer more specifically at this time

1 because we haven't been fully briefed
2 yet. And so, I would expect to come
3 back to you in the subsequent
4 conversations to identify, say, my top
5 priority and not only identify it,
6 expect you and the other Councilmembers
7 and all of the School District to hold
8 me accountable to those priorities as
9 well. Does that answer your question?

10 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: We should
11 keep talking.

12 Ms. Thompson.

13 MS. SALLEY: Okay.

14 MS. THOMPSON: Thank you,
15 Councilmember Gym. One priority that's
16 near and dear to me obviously is the
17 lack of education for those students
18 living with complex needs, some of them
19 have not been educated since March 2020
20 due to their inability to work in this
21 remote environment for a variety of
22 reasons. And secondly, meaningful
23 family engagement among low-income
24 families and those where English is not
25 their first language.

1 My role, I believe, is just
2 going into those communities and just
3 having those conversations with the
4 proper translation and even those in the
5 Deaf and hearing-impaired communities.
6 Nobody has ever asked their opinion, so
7 I want meaningful engagement from those
8 stakeholders who inform what we're doing
9 at the School District.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Cecelia,
11 your experience and your kind of insight
12 and your attention to communities and
13 families and networks of communities and
14 families, such as individuals, you're
15 not an anecdotal person. I know you
16 spend time with broad networks and not
17 just look at data, but look at
18 experiences that reflect realities that
19 then get slightly captured in data.

20 I think you more than -- what I
21 think I value so much about your
22 presence on the School Board is we need
23 that so much. I am so beyond myself at
24 how far we leave behind special needs
25 families, so your presence, your voice,

1 your attention to and your engagement
2 with -- because I know you'll do more
3 than just be on the School Board. I
4 know you will go out to these families.
5 I know you will go out into
6 neighborhoods. I know you will go out
7 and listen beyond what the School
8 District just tells you. And that's why
9 that kind of approach and experience,
10 and you have lived this as well as the
11 consequences of this, means a lot. And
12 your experience, I hope, will be
13 invaluable to the rest of your Board
14 colleagues.

15 Council President, I'll just
16 wait until the next round. Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank you
18 so much, Councilmember Gym.

19 The Chair recognizes
20 Councilmember Thomas.

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you,
22 Madam Chair.

23 And good afternoon, everybody.
24 I am not going to be too long with it.
25 I want to first say thank you to all

1 three members for stepping up to the
2 plate and agreeing to volunteer and take
3 on this tough endeavor. It's not an
4 easy position. It's going to be a lot
5 of hours, a lot of scrutiny. And I
6 appreciate you taking the time not just
7 here today to have this conversation,
8 but other conversations prior to this.

9 I know I reached out to you
10 individually to have some dialogue
11 around some things that I know are a
12 priority to me, and we can't dare do a
13 deep dive into all the issues as it
14 relates to education because our schools
15 are that complex and there are so many
16 issues.

17 But for the record, I am on the
18 Education Committee along with three of
19 my colleagues who are on the call which
20 is led by Councilmember Sanchez, who's
21 done a great job leading our team and
22 fighting for our children and making
23 sure that we're putting our best foot
24 forward.

25 I do look forward to working

1 with you and hearing from you about some
2 of the issues that we have around our
3 finances. Of course, our curriculum is
4 significantly outdated, how can we
5 become much more innovative. I have a
6 number of ideas around what we can do to
7 address issues to support our
8 neighborhood schools. We definitely
9 need to have an indepth conversation
10 around what happens with Black charters,
11 as you heard from me before,
12 specifically charters that are ran and
13 operated by Black people in the City of
14 Philadelphia are closed at a higher rate
15 than anybody else. And we know similar
16 to other issues that we talked about,
17 that disproportionately impacts Black
18 people. That is more than just a
19 coincidence.

20 And so, all of these issues
21 impact all of our children, our families
22 and people of color in the City of
23 Philadelphia, but it impacts everybody
24 and I think you guys have an important
25 job. And so, I want to say thank you

1 for doing this. This means a lot to me.
2 I still coach high school basketball to
3 this day. I lost a tough game in
4 overtime last night so that's still on
5 my heart and on my mind. But I am the
6 Chair of the Coaches Association for the
7 Public League. The public league means
8 a lot to me. Our schools across the
9 City mean a lot to me, and I look
10 forward to your confirmation and to
11 working with each of you over the next
12 couple of months to tackle and to
13 address these important issues.

14 Thank you, Madam Chair. I just
15 wanted to put my comments on the record.

16 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank
17 you, Councilmember Thomas. Thank you so
18 very much for your questions. And
19 listen, sorry about that, Councilmember.
20 You'll get to come back again. Just
21 tell the team to get ready, you'll be
22 prepared for the next game.

23 With that being said, let me
24 say to you, Cecelia to Reginald to Lisa
25 and to the Nominations panel, that of

1 all of the people who were nominated and
2 who applied and who you had to compete
3 with, they had the foresight to see that
4 each of you in your other respective
5 rights bring value. None more or one
6 more important than the other but
7 equally, all equally important.

8 And why do I say that? I say
9 that because I have seen so many people,
10 particularly when it comes to the
11 African-American community -- and let me
12 just put it on the record, it's my time
13 so I get to use it any way I see fit,
14 okay -- they will attempt to use race,
15 sex, class and socioeconomic status to
16 tell you who is supposed to matter when
17 it comes to your position and how you
18 will function in whatever role it is
19 that you are nominated to, elected to or
20 appointed to.

21 It's like a little black box.
22 And if you don't operate and function in
23 that little black box in a way that they
24 think is appropriate, there is something
25 wrong with whatever perspective it is

1 that you take. And I want you all to
2 know I've been a good listener, from
3 Cecelia to Reginald and Lisa. I've
4 listened to your responses to all of the
5 questions that have been proffered
6 before you. Each of you in your own
7 right from your own space bring so much
8 to the table.

9 With that in mind, I want you
10 guys to answer a question that comes
11 from a place of bias in me. I'm a '70s
12 baby who was raised by my grandparents,
13 and I'm a product of very, very humble
14 beginnings, okay. When people ask where
15 did I go to school, very specifically I
16 say this, I am a product of the
17 Dr. Constance E. Clayton public school
18 system here in the City of Philadelphia.

19 There was something about the
20 teachers in Rowen School that I went to
21 at 19th and Haines Street. They
22 represented the United Nations. They
23 were not just Black teachers. They were
24 Black teachers, they were White
25 teachers, they were a part of every

1 ethnicity you can think of. But I would
2 argue there was a certain something that
3 we felt as students during my
4 generation, and I'm about to hit the 5-0
5 stage in about a year or two.

6 Tell me what are we doing wrong
7 or what we should be doing differently
8 to recruit teachers in the School
9 District of Philadelphia who, one, we
10 could encourage, and I don't care if
11 we're talking about Cheyney or Lincoln
12 or any of the other institutions of
13 higher learning in the nation, we could
14 encourage them to choose Philadelphia,
15 those who are education majors, right.

16 And we know those who are
17 enrolling in institutions of higher
18 learning in the undergraduate area,
19 there are fewer and fewer and fewer
20 students who are choosing English as a
21 major or education as a major -- I was
22 an English Ed. major, I'm a Certified
23 Secondary English Teacher by
24 profession -- but for those who are, how
25 do we get them to choose the School

1 District of Philadelphia and what do we
2 need to do in order to compete to
3 recruit teachers? And I want to hear
4 from each of you about that.

5 And I will start with you,
6 Reginald, because you represent a
7 constituency that I've been raising Cain
8 about in the School District of
9 Philadelphia. And if Councilmember
10 Kenyatta Johnson were here, he would be
11 doing the same thing. The presence
12 of --

13 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I'm here,
14 Madam Chair.

15 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank
16 you, Councilman.

17 The presence of Black men in
18 the School District in front of these
19 classes, because you can't be what you
20 don't see. So tell us, if you will,
21 what we should be doing to add value.

22 MR. STREATER: First,
23 Councilmember Parker, I really
24 appreciate the question. I really
25 appreciate your energy. So with that

1 being said, obviously as of this point I
2 don't know exactly what I can do or what
3 the Board can do, but I can definitely
4 tell you what I think as an individual
5 what we can do.

6 As many of you who are Black
7 educators or allies have read, there's a
8 brother named Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu who
9 talks about how Black boys, for example,
10 as you asked me as a Black man, so I'm
11 going to put my -- actually, I'm always
12 a Black man. I don't have to put that
13 hat on, how Jawanza Kunjufu discussed
14 the idea that Black boys at an early age
15 are just as excited and very happy and
16 want to learn and have analogous grades
17 to their female Black, non-White
18 counterparts and White counterparts, but
19 something tends to happen.

20 And I think what happens is you
21 have people who are teaching our Black
22 boys who either don't look like them and
23 either don't have any relatable
24 characteristics as it relates to race,
25 gender, socioeconomic, don't live in the

1 neighborhoods with our babies. And I
2 think also you have individuals who may
3 mean well, while they may be booksmart,
4 they don't learn our social norms as
5 Black folk, right.

6 I will tell you as a young man,
7 my Black teachers didn't have to have
8 certain discussions with me. It was
9 just a certain level of respect and a
10 certain level of energy that I guess was
11 a second sense because I was raised by a
12 Black mother and many kin or Black men
13 and my father. So I think that that has
14 to be something that is intentional and
15 I think that that kind of thinking has
16 to be intentional.

17 And I think you're right, there
18 are some individuals who believe that
19 when you start talking about Black
20 anything, the reverse racism card comes
21 up or other ways of trying to mitigate
22 that discussion when that is actually
23 the elephant in the room. So with that
24 being said I think, number one, be
25 intentional like, hey, there's a problem

1 here.

2 Number two, I think obviously
3 in the meantime before we fill our
4 schools with people who look like us as
5 Black folk and look like me as a Black
6 man, I think that there should be some
7 way to train teachers that, hey, studies
8 have shown that people from your
9 background or White individuals or
10 non-Black individuals tend to view Black
11 students as older than they really are,
12 right, aging them up and then trying to
13 punish them as adults when they're
14 children, which as we know could have a
15 psychological impact on them not wanting
16 to go school in the first place, for
17 doing what they're supposed to do as
18 little boys or young men.

19 So I think recognizing that and
20 being intentional about that, I believe
21 that might be under Dr. Hite's kind of
22 purview to do that type of training, but
23 that's something that I am very much
24 passionate about. So then after that,
25 it's where do you recruit. You

1 mentioned you have Lincoln University,
2 Cheyney. I know they always debated
3 about who was the first HBCU, you know
4 what I mean. But with that being said,
5 I think you have to actually go out and
6 recruit.

7 So in law firms, we have some
8 of the similar issues, how do you
9 recruit, how do you recruit. It's about
10 intentionality. It's about going out
11 and telling people we want you here.

12 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank --

13 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Madam
14 Chair.

15 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: -- you.
16 Thank you for that response. I want to
17 get everybody, all three of you on the
18 record for that issue.

19 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Point of
20 information, if it's okay, Madam Chair.

21 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Oh, I'm
22 sorry. Sure. Yes, sir.

23 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I just
24 want Mr. Reginald Streater just to
25 clarify. I know he said that would be

1 something that would be under the
2 purview of Dr. Hite. But I want to ask
3 as a Board nominee would this be part of
4 your platform as a Black man who is
5 sitting on the School Board to impress
6 upon, demand, advocate for the District
7 to move in this direction?

8 MR. STREATER: I apologize. I
9 assume -- but I guess you can't assume
10 anything. Yes, sir, this is something
11 that is the top of my -- yes. That's
12 the answer. I don't want to go too far
13 into --

14 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I had to
15 clarify that because we've been talking
16 about this issue for a long time. And
17 obviously, no one on the Board has
18 actually raised it to the level of
19 importance that it should be. Because
20 thus far as of today, we haven't seen
21 the numbers or strategy around the
22 recruitment of Black men in the
23 Philadelphia of School District.

24 Thank you, Council President.
25 And thank you, Majority Leader, for your

1 patience.

2 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Sure.

3 Ms. Cecelia Thompson, your thinking
4 about that, recruitment.

5 MS. THOMPSON: Sure. When I
6 transferred as a child from Christ
7 Memorial Church to Henry C. Lea, the
8 first person that I saw was Mr. Horne, a
9 Black man. The principal was Charles E.
10 Thompson, a Black man. When I went up
11 to the third floor I can't remember all
12 the African-American men I saw, I
13 remember Robert Masey. I forget what he
14 taught, but he was also the track coach
15 so I ran track. The Ed. TAs, whatever
16 you want to call them, they were former
17 or retired either military or police
18 people, Black men. That's all I saw in
19 that school when I transferred were
20 Black men and Black women who did not
21 think it robbery to say, we're going to
22 have to as African-Americans do twice as
23 much or as this one lady would say,
24 thrice as much, to get where we have to
25 go.

1 So I wholeheartedly believe
2 that that motivated me because I saw
3 people who looked like me, who cared
4 enough about me to tell me what my
5 challenges were going to be as I went to
6 college and became an adult. Now, when
7 I went to Girls' High, Girls' High was
8 Girls' High. It was just an
9 amalgamation of everything.

10 So I don't know what the hiring
11 process is, but since we are fortunate
12 to my knowledge to have two people who
13 are affiliated with African-American
14 fraternities and sororities to partner
15 with them to say, okay, these are
16 individuals who grew up without
17 everything, you're seeing them now, but
18 they grew up without everything and they
19 worked hard despite the temptations of
20 the neighborhood to get where they are
21 today.

22 So that would be a strategy,
23 you know, outside of the things that we
24 have to do to recruit more, so this way
25 you can't say they're not applying,

1 because as somebody who was on the other
2 side of the table providing testimony,
3 it was always they're not applying. I
4 don't know if they're applying or not.
5 But to answer your question, that is
6 important to me and that's something
7 that I would charge Dr. Hite's team, we
8 need to do something different. I hope
9 that answered your question.

10 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: No,
11 Cecelia, just Johnny-on-the-spot, and
12 that's the power of your experience,
13 lived experience. And that's the value
14 that all three of you bring to the
15 table.

16 Ms. Lisa Salley, and ultimately
17 I have to state this for the record, I'm
18 extremely biased when it comes to
19 Ms. Salley. I'm listening to you
20 provide this testimony and I'm thinking
21 about all of the residents in our
22 community, the one that many of us grew
23 up in and still live in today. I want
24 you all to know that she has always used
25 her intellectual prowess to even help

1 her neighborhood.

2 Father O at St. A's and all of
3 that 200 or 300 people who were at that
4 meeting when we were trying to determine
5 whether or not the community would
6 support the variance to allow the nuns
7 their former residence to turn it into a
8 facility for homeless college students,
9 you know everybody is always weary of
10 change, but you were the steady hand,
11 Lisa, to provide that sort of honesty
12 and you are a honest broker. So we want
13 to say thank you.

14 But I also want to hear your
15 perspective about recruitment and how do
16 we be intentional about making sure that
17 there are more Black men and women
18 leading the classrooms like there were
19 during those years that I described when
20 I grew up in the public school system?

21 MS. SALLEY: Yes. And I
22 think -- and thank you for your
23 compliments and your kind words. Let me
24 start with that. But I think the thing
25 is just what you're doing. The first

1 thing we have to do is raise the
2 specific question, right. Raise it and
3 literally kind of what I call time and
4 space to sit it down as a specific
5 agenda that has to be answered.

6 I think what we have now -- and
7 I grow up in West Oak Lane also as you,
8 right. And so, something about the
9 magic of West Oak Lane, the parents were
10 there, they were involved, whether it
11 was Rowen, whether it is St. A's,
12 whether it was Pennypacker, right,
13 whether it was the West Oak Lane Boys
14 and Girls Club or the Ogontz Boys and
15 Girls Club. I think we have to raise
16 the question of where are the Black
17 teachers and where are the Black men in
18 the education process just as we raised
19 that question in the '70s and the '80s
20 which formed NOBLE, for the Black
21 policemen coming together and so forth.
22 It begins with asking the questions, so
23 I think there's a lot of wisdom in you
24 raising it.

25 I also heard just now that it

1 sounds like we've raised it or the
2 Council has raised it to either the
3 Board and the School District previously
4 without a specific plan. So I think we
5 start with literally a who, what and
6 when and I think as an immediate, get
7 started. We also have the opportunity
8 to leverage people from the communities
9 in what I call second careers, which
10 happens all over now, right.

11 Second careers in a sense that
12 maybe people went off and did something
13 in other -- no different than myself.
14 You see me in West Oak Lane. You see in
15 Mount Airy, not coming as Lisa the
16 corporate exec, but rolled up with my
17 hands in the middle of things. Most
18 people don't even know what I do
19 necessarily because I keep my mouth
20 shut, my head down and I work in
21 general, right. And not only do I work,
22 but I collaborate with all people.

23 And I think those are important
24 things, to start with the answer. I
25 talked about earlier raising the

1 question of how, not no. So if there is
2 going to be more Black teachers, we need
3 to say how are we going to do it, when
4 are we going to do it and what's the two
5 or three critical things that we have to
6 monitor, pulse and push to make sure it
7 gets there. And then I think what we do
8 is we're tenacious about it, right. Not
9 only do we raise the question, but we
10 continue to drive it through the
11 neighborhood and then we can share
12 across neighborhoods what worked in one.

13 When we did some of the preview
14 for coming to you guys this afternoon,
15 one of the Councilmembers shared
16 statistics that said 11 zip codes in
17 Philadelphia constitute 90 percent of
18 people that are in the jails on State
19 Road. That data even by itself
20 neighborhood by neighborhood helps us to
21 now specify action plans neighborhood by
22 neighborhood. But in order to have an
23 action plan, you have to start with the
24 problem statement. You have to have a
25 hypothesis of the question to be raised.

1 So those are just some raw thoughts.

2 And I look forward to jumping
3 in with the other eight on the School
4 Board, but holding ourselves
5 accountable, holding the District
6 accountable and then working
7 collaboratively with the neighborhoods
8 and with the Council to get the specific
9 action plan moving. Who, what and when
10 is what we have to strive for.

11 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank you
12 all so very much.

13 And, Mr. President, thank you
14 so very much for the latitude you just
15 provided me.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
17 Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you all
18 so much for your perspective. Look
19 forward to working with you.

20 Councilman Thomas.

21 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER:
22 Councilmember Johnson, Mr. President,
23 and then Councilwoman Gym on the second
24 record.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I'm

1 sorry. Okay. I got old data. So

2 Councilwoman Gym is next.

3 Councilwoman Gym.

4 (No response.)

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

6 Okay. So Councilman, what'd you say,
7 Johnson?

8 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Yes,
9 Mr. President.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

11 Councilman, go ahead.

12 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Well,
13 thank you very much. I just wanted to
14 take a moment to acknowledge the three
15 nominees and really express my support
16 for them. I had an opportunity to sit
17 in a meeting with brother Reginald
18 Streater with the Philadelphia Community
19 of Leaders organization which consists
20 of Black African-American leaders here
21 in the City of Philadelphia that has an
22 interest on the quality of life of our
23 people in the City. And I also had a
24 chance to meet Cecelia with that group
25 as well, and I had a chance to meet with

1 Lisa through hearings that would help
2 our Chairperson Maria Quinones-Sanchez.
3 And I just want to say I believe that
4 all three will bring a unique set of
5 skills, and activism and spirit to this
6 position.

7 And I want to just acknowledge
8 what Majority Leader Parker talked
9 about. I do come from the Dr. Constance
10 Clayton era of schooling here in the
11 City of Philadelphia. And I remember it
12 was a time where when I would get in
13 trouble in school, it would be a teacher
14 outside my doorstep prior to me getting
15 home. And so, it was a spirit of love
16 and compassion but most importantly,
17 accountability that we face as it
18 relates to how we were taught under
19 Dr. Constance Clayton.

20 But this is a new day. I
21 support Dr. Hite. Nevertheless, I also
22 advocate and support for those students
23 and those parents to make sure that our
24 young people receive a quality education
25 regardless if they go to a traditional

1 public school or a traditional charter
2 school. Because at the end of the day,
3 they are basically Black and Brown
4 children who are attending school to get
5 educated here in the City of
6 Philadelphia.

7 And I know for a fact if it was
8 not for some teachers that invested in
9 me early on, I would not be a graduate
10 of the University of Pennsylvania, I
11 would not be a graduate of Mansfield
12 University and I would not have taken
13 courses at Harvard Business School. And
14 so, I just want to impress upon from all
15 three of you that I already know that
16 you know that it's critically important
17 that when you see that things aren't
18 going right as it relates to the
19 Philadelphia School District and our
20 children, all I ask for and anything
21 else when you take this position, just
22 step up and say something. That's all.

23 Don't be uncomfortable ruffling
24 feathers. Because at the end of the
25 day, we're fighting for our children.

1 They don't have lobbyists at the end of
2 the day. We're their lobbyists for the
3 parents, right. And it's critically
4 important that we hold the District
5 accountable to make sure that there's a
6 culture of achievement in every school
7 here in the City of Philadelphia.

8 I often think about how
9 particularly as Black people, we come
10 from a history where we didn't have
11 laptops and we didn't have cell phones,
12 but yet we produced the best and
13 brightest leaders in America. So it's
14 no way in the world that we have these
15 things now and I think the achievement
16 rate is somewhere around 33 percent
17 based upon the last report during our
18 last educational hearing.

19 And so, Lisa, I just thank your
20 pragmatic business approach. You talked
21 about hypothesis the other day -- I
22 mean, excuse me, in your last statement
23 regarding recruiting Black teachers. I
24 love Cecelia's spirit that she's
25 fighting on the front line similar to

1 Kendra Brooks, to how she takes a no
2 holds barred attitude toward making sure
3 our children is educated.

4 And, Reginald Streater, Bro, I
5 don't mean to put the whole Black male
6 race on your shoulders. But
7 nevertheless, I know you're part of A
8 Phi A. You're born for this, Bro. And
9 so, I had a great time talking to you
10 and you come highly recommended.

11 And, Council President, I have
12 to step off the call for another
13 meeting, but just wanted to for the
14 record say I enthusiastically endorse
15 and support all three nominees, Council
16 President. And I'll leave whenever you
17 tell me I can, Council President.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes,
19 because --

20 COUNCIL JOHNSON: You summoned
21 me. I have to stay.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: --
23 we have to have a quorum to vote, so --

24 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I will
25 stick around, Council President.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Just
2 for a second.

3 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you
4 very much for my time.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
6 Thank you. I think we have Councilman
7 Thomas and then Councilman Green. And I
8 think we have to take inventory to make
9 sure we have a quorum so we can --

10 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Council
11 President, I think it's Councilmember
12 Brooks. And I spoke already.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
14 Councilwoman Brooks, okay. It changed.

15 Councilwoman Brooks. I'm
16 sorry.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:
18 Councilmember Green and Gilmore
19 Richardson didn't get a first round, so
20 I can wait until after they speak.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
22 Okay. They keep changing this inventory
23 on me.

24 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Not just
25 you, Council President. It's all of us.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I'm
2 a little convoluted over here. So who's
3 next?

4 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Well, thank
5 you. I think I will be next,
6 Councilmember Brooks. Thank you for the
7 opportunity to speak.

8 Council President, thank you.

9 To our three nominees for the
10 School Board, thank you for your
11 willingness to step up and to be a
12 public servant. I've had a chance to
13 meet Brother Streater. And,
14 Councilmember Johnson, you did make
15 reference to his fraternal organization,
16 which is a nice collective of men that
17 are doing great work in our City. I've
18 learned about your background. We had a
19 chance to meet virtually. And when you
20 mentioned Jawanza Kunjufu in the
21 presentation, that really excited me.
22 That demonstrates your focus on Black
23 children, specifically African-American
24 boys.

25 Ms. Salley, I've known you for

1 some time as well. You're also a
2 product of that outstanding high school
3 that I have to mention. If I don't, I
4 will be chastised by my mother and my
5 wife, the Philadelphia High School for
6 Girls. But thank you for your
7 leadership and the fact you have a
8 business acumen that you're trying to
9 bring to the School District. You and
10 Brother Streater, he being an attorney
11 and you having a business background,
12 it's important to bring that and show to
13 our young people what they can achieve
14 by coming through the School District of
15 Philadelphia.

16 And I close by saying I want to
17 thank Ms. Thompson for her stepping up
18 as well. She's always stepped up for
19 children that have a physical and
20 learning difference like her son and my
21 son. She has been a leader, someone
22 that many of us who are parents on the
23 autism spectrum look to and has been
24 following her work, and she speaks for a
25 lot of the things that we try to speak

1 for. So I want to thank you for
2 bringing that type of advocacy that has
3 been needed at the School Board for a
4 parent that has a child with a physical
5 learning difference to be represented at
6 the Board of Education.

7 So thank you, Council
8 President.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
10 Thank you, Councilman.

11 Okay. Now, I believe it's
12 Councilwoman Gilmore Richardson and then
13 Councilwoman Brooks is what I have.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
15 RICHARDSON: Thank you, Council
16 President. And thank you to my freshman
17 colleague Councilmember Brooks for the
18 leeway.

19 I wanted to echo the sentiments
20 of our colleagues and just thanking all
21 of the nominees to the School Board for
22 your service and for your willingness to
23 serve. I think we all recognize that
24 we're at a critical juncture as it
25 relates to education in our City, and

1 for me particularly as a School District
2 graduate and a former teacher and now I
3 have two children in the School
4 District, I know how vitally important
5 it is that we continue to invest in our
6 School District and do all we can on
7 behalf of the young people we serve.

8 I specifically wanted to give
9 kudos to Ms. Salley and to Cecelia, who
10 I have worked with over the years for
11 quite some time in the Wynnefield
12 community. Both are Girls' High
13 graduates, representing the Philadelphia
14 High School for Girls. So I just wanted
15 to put that on the record as a Girls'
16 High graduate. We thank you so much for
17 the opportunity to work with you.

18 And then also for Mr. Streater,
19 my Leadership Philadelphia classmate and
20 Divine Nine brother of A Phi A, I thank
21 you for your willingness to serve and
22 really prioritize African-American young
23 people. Now, I did want to put a few
24 things on the record for you relative to
25 some issues that I care about most with

1 the District that relate to career and
2 technical education and how we are
3 looking at our labor market indicators
4 in the City to ensure that we have
5 programs that will help our young people
6 stay on a pathway and get into a
7 pipeline for job opportunities of the
8 future.

9 And also conflict resolution,
10 working with the Board and the School
11 District to figure out how we can with
12 the City create a conflict resolution
13 and curriculum so that all of our young
14 people have the opportunity to gain the
15 skills to know how to resolve conflicts.
16 That's something that I learned when I
17 was a teacher at Overbrook High School,
18 and that's something I think that we
19 need to implement throughout the City
20 city-wide. So I wanted to put those two
21 things on the record. So I want to work
22 with you in those two areas, and I look
23 forward to your service on the School
24 Board.

25 Thank you so much,

1 Mr. President.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

3 (Muted).

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: You're on
5 mute.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

7 Councilwoman Brooks. I'm sorry.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
9 so much, Council President.

10 I have a bunch of questions,
11 but I'm going to narrow it down to one
12 because one of my favorite constituents
13 and one of the persons that we all care
14 about which are young people, and my
15 16-year-old daughter, this is something
16 that she's very passionate about so I
17 definitely have to put this on the
18 record because I will be or we will both
19 be in trouble for the rest of the day.

20 So for the past two years,
21 there's been a lot of discussion around
22 policing in schools. And the District
23 has spent upwards towards \$30 million on
24 school police. Now, we call them school
25 safety officers. They wear uniforms and

1 carry handcuffs. What are your thoughts
2 on this? Whoever wants to go first.

3 MR. STREATER: I'll be happy to
4 go first. So I implore the
5 school-to-prison pipeline, anything that
6 makes schools look analogous or feel
7 analogous to a prison. When I was with
8 the Innocence Project, I got an
9 opportunity to go to Graterford and meet
10 a client. And I was actually kind of
11 surprised how analogous the spaces were,
12 the feel, the smell, the concrete. And
13 I know we can' physically change our
14 buildings, but also the fact that there
15 are people watching and making sure
16 everybody -- the authority is there in a
17 police kind of way, so I think that it
18 is not conducive to learning to have
19 individuals in the schools who are
20 actively carrying handcuffs and guns and
21 things of that nature.

22 I know those who believe they
23 should be there would say, well, it's a
24 pragmatic thing to do because of living
25 in dangerous neighborhoods. But I think

1 there's a better way. There has to be a
2 better way. I think that it has no
3 place in schools. Obviously, I'm not
4 sure what my ro -- what the role of the
5 Board is. I need to be briefed on this
6 so I can even be more educated as to
7 what should be done. But you asked what
8 my view is. I'm antithetical to the
9 idea of having a police state within
10 schools.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
12 you, Mr. Streater.

13 MS. SALLEY: I concur. Kids
14 behave a lot around what's expected of
15 them in the environment that's set
16 before them and the images set before
17 them. And so, having a police state as
18 essentially their environment that
19 becomes their psychology that becomes
20 their behavior, I think is fundamentally
21 wrong, any kind of way you describe it.

22 So I share what Mr. Streater
23 said relative to I'm vehemently opposed
24 to it. That is my statement as to my
25 personal view. What we then have to do

1 is take that statement and that personal
2 philosophy, it's more than a philosophy,
3 and I'll share another part of my
4 philosophy that I believe. One of the
5 most or probably the only unfair thing
6 in life is the parents that you're born
7 to or even the environment. And so,
8 something like a school, that school
9 environment can become your
10 apprenticeship, if you will, in life and
11 it becomes your expectation and fills
12 your dream in general.

13 So when I talk about vehemently
14 opposed is that when a kid's environment
15 to essentially set the trajectory for
16 their dreams and even their ability to
17 dream and think of themselves in very
18 positive ways, we have to reinforce
19 that. We have to be intentional about
20 the reinforcement in a school
21 environment, what it looks like, smells
22 like, feels like, whether it's the
23 teacher in the classroom or it not be in
24 the jail state are all really, really
25 important pieces.

1 Like Mr. Streater said, we
2 haven't been briefed yet on the Board.
3 But I look forward to and welcome the
4 challenge to figure out how to work
5 within the governance and hold ourselves
6 accountable and hold the District
7 accountable in changing that.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you
9 for that, Ms. Salley.

10 MS. THOMPSON: Yes. So
11 right -- okay, my camera's working. My
12 personal opinion is nobody should be
13 handcuffed. I don't think the school
14 resource person should be handcuffing
15 anybody. I think they should be
16 providing resources. I think they
17 should be consulting with the school
18 psychologist, the school counselor, the
19 school's behavioral health people. I
20 think those things should be in place
21 before any handcuffing occurs.

22 And I hate to sound like, you
23 know, I need to be brief, but I don't
24 know what the laws are around if they
25 are allowed to even handcuff or that

1 type of thing is only for the
2 Philadelphia police. But once I get
3 that information, I'm looking forward
4 hopefully as a Board member to put a
5 policy in place where that's not done by
6 our school resource employees, but if
7 that's done under certain circumstances
8 and only done by the Philadelphia
9 police. But again, I would have to be
10 briefed as to what the particulars are
11 on who needs to handle handcuffs. So I
12 hope I was able to answer that.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yes.

14 Thank you so much, Ms. Thompson. And I
15 just want to say again thank you guys so
16 much for stepping up to this challenge.

17 Ms. Salley, you're the only one
18 I haven't had an opportunity to meet
19 one-on-one with, so I look forward to
20 meeting with you very soon and I have a
21 slew of other questions just because I'm
22 a long-time education activist, a new
23 Councilmember, and education is my
24 passion and it's also a passion of my
25 young folks that are still attending

1 Philadelphia public schools. So once
2 again, thank you so much and I look
3 forward to meeting with all of you guys.

4 MS. SALLEY: Thank you. We
5 look forward to it.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
7 Thank you. Thank you, Councilwoman.

8 All right. Now, according to
9 what I have, that concludes our
10 questions for these witnesses. If
11 anybody wants to correct me, I stand
12 corrected.

13 (No response.)

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
15 There being none, thank you all very
16 much, and thank you all. Thank you for
17 your interest. Look forward to working
18 with you all. It's going to be a little
19 challenging for you. I mean, trust me.
20 Public comment will be very interesting.
21 I must tell you, but it's good. We
22 really appreciate the fact that you're
23 getting engaged in this very significant
24 and probably the most important thing
25 that we can do is help educate our young

1 people, so thank you so much.

2 Okay. So there being no
3 further questions from the Members, then
4 you all can disengage please.

5 MR. STREATER: Thank you.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
7 There being no other questions from
8 members of the Committee, and I think we
9 may have one other --

10 THE CLERK: Yes, Mr. President.
11 We have --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Is
13 it Ms. Haver?

14 THE CLERK: Yes, sir.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All
16 right. Let me recognize, is Ms. Haver
17 connected?

18 MS. HAVER: Hello.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
20 Ms. Haver?

21 MS. HAVER: Yes. Am I
22 connected, Council President?

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes,
24 you're the next witness. I'm sorry.
25 You're connected. We can hear you.

1 Thank you so much. State your name for
2 the record. Well, you know the drill
3 and proceed with your testimony.

4 MS. HAVER: Good afternoon,
5 Council President and members of City
6 Council. My name is Lisa Haver. I'm
7 Co-founder and Coordinator of the
8 Alliance for Philadelphia Public
9 Schools, a grassroots organization that
10 attends all Board meetings and reports
11 on Board activities and to which we send
12 all to Councilmembers.

13 Council should join in the
14 effort to stop the disenfranchisement of
15 Philadelphians and the choice of Board
16 Education members and advocate for an
17 elected School Board. Until then, we
18 must make sure that Philadelphians are
19 not shut out of the nominating process
20 as they have been since the
21 reinstatement of the Board in 2018.

22 The issues that apply to this
23 process is accountability. And the most
24 important question for the nominees is
25 whether they are willing to be

1 independent of the Board leadership and
2 the Administration. The Board has taken
3 several steps recently to cut back on
4 public speaking, including cutting time
5 from three minutes to two and limiting
6 the number of speakers. The new Board
7 members should commit to reversing those
8 steps.

9 Ms. Thompson has been a regular
10 speak at SRC and Board meetings for
11 years. Her constructive comments have
12 led to better quality of education for
13 students, especially those with special
14 needs. Public school advocates like
15 Ms. Thompson should not be muzzled.

16 I did not hear any questions on
17 these specific topics, and I don't know
18 whether they will since the hearing is
19 just about over. I think that Board
20 nominees should answer the questions
21 about how they will hold charter schools
22 accountable, whether they are willing to
23 re-examine the Renaissance Charter
24 School program, which as former Board
25 member Chris McGinley characterized it,

1 the most expensive failure in the
2 history of the District; should the
3 Board not have charter renewal hearings
4 when a charter applies for a renewal
5 every five years; what will Board
6 members do to make sure that students
7 have smaller class sizes; and what will
8 Board members do to bring back school
9 libraries.

10 Currently, the District has
11 fewer than 10 certified school
12 librarians across the City line in any
13 direction, and you will not find a
14 school district where children do not
15 have school libraries. So I ask you, if
16 possible, to ask the nominees those
17 questions. Thank you for your time.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

19 Thank you. Thank you so much for your
20 testimony, Ms. Haver.

21 Mr. Christmas, do we have any
22 other witnesses?

23 THE CLERK: No further
24 questions, Mr. President.

25 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

1 Thank you very much. Thank you.

2 So there being no further
3 questions from members of the Committee
4 and no other witnesses to testify, I
5 will ask if there is anyone else present
6 in this hearing whose name we have
7 failed to call and wishes to offer
8 testimony on Resolution Nos. 200715,
9 200716, 210031, 210032 and 210033?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

12 Hearing none, I want to thank the
13 witnesses for their participation today
14 and we value their opinions. I now
15 invite the witnesses to please
16 disconnect, which my understanding is
17 they have done. Now, as far as the
18 proceedings as witnesses leave the
19 hearing, this concludes the public
20 hearing on the Council Committee of the
21 Whole on Resolution Nos. 200715, 200716,
22 210031, 210032 and 210033.

23 We will now convene the public
24 meeting to consider the actions to be
25 taken on Resolution Nos. 200715, 200716,

1 210031, 210032 and 210033.

2 Mr. Christmas, please call the
3 roll to take attendance. Members that
4 are present, please indicate so when
5 your name is called. Ms. Christmas,
6 please call the roll.

7 THE CLERK: Council Lady Bass.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
9 afternoon. I am present.

10 THE CLERK: Council Lady
11 Brooks.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good
13 afternoon. I'm present.

14 THE CLERK: Councilman Domb.
15 (No response.)

16 THE CLERK: Council Lady
17 Gauthier.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Good
19 afternoon. Present.

20 THE CLERK: Council Lady
21 Gilmore Richardson.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
23 RICHARDSON: Good afternoon. I'm
24 present.

25 THE CLERK: Councilman Green.

1 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Good
2 afternoon. I'm present.
3 THE CLERK: Council Lady Gym.
4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Good
5 afternoon. Present.
6 THE CLERK: Councilman Henon.
7 (No response.)
8 THE CLERK: Councilman Johnson.
9 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Good
10 afternoon. Present.
11 THE CLERK: Councilman Jones.
12 (No response.)
13 THE CLERK: Councilman O'Neill.
14 (No response.)
15 THE CLERK: Councilman Oh.
16 COUNCILMAN OH: Good afternoon.
17 I'm present.
18 THE CLERK: Council Lady Parker.
19 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Present,
20 Mr. Christmas.
21 THE CLERK: Council Lady
22 Quinones-Sanchez.
23 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
24 Good afternoon. Present.
25 THE CLERK: Councilman Squilla.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good
2 afternoon, Mr. President, colleagues.
3 Present.

4 THE CLERK: Councilman Thomas.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
6 afternoon. Present.

7 THE CLERK: Council President
8 Clarke.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
10 Present. Thank you, Mr. Christmas.
11 We have established a quorum of the
12 Committee. We now will begin our public
13 meeting.

14 The Chair recognizes
15 Councilmember Parker for a motion on
16 Resolution Nos. 200715 and 200716.

17 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Thank
18 you, Mr. Chairman.

19 I move that Resolution Nos.
20 200715 and 200716 be reported from this
21 Committee with a favorable
22 recommendation.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Can
24 I get a second?

25 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

1 Second.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

3 Thank you. It's been moved and properly
4 seconded that Resolution No. 200715 and
5 200716 be reported from this Committee
6 with a favorable recommendation.

7 All those in favor of the
8 motion will signify by saying aye.

9 (Aye.)

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

11 Those opposed?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: The
14 ayes have it and the motion carries.
15 Resolution Nos. 200715 and 200716 will
16 be reported from this Committee with a
17 favorable recommendation.

18 Chair recognizes Councilmember
19 Quinones-Sanchez for a motion on
20 Resolution Nos. 210031, 210032 and
21 210033.

22 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

23 Thank you, Mr. President.

24 I move that Resolution Nos.
25 210031, 210032, 210033 be moved out of

1 this Committee with a favorable
2 recommendation.

3 COUNCILWOMAN PARKER: Second.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

5 Thank you. It's been moved and properly
6 seconded that Resolution Nos. 210031,
7 210032 and 210033 be reported from the
8 Committee with a favorable
9 recommendation.

10 All those in favor of the
11 motion will signify by saying aye.

12 (Aye.)

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

14 Those opposed?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: And
17 the motion carries. Resolution Nos.
18 210031, 210032 and 210033 will be
19 reported from this Committee with a
20 favorable recommendation.

21 That concludes the business
22 before the Council Committee of the
23 Whole today. Thank you all very much.
24 I appreciate you guys.

25 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

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1 Thank you.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
3 Mr. President.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Thank you, Mr. President.

6 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
7 Council President.

8 (Committee of the Whole
9 concluded at 2:00 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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