

**Testimony of Administrator Scott French, New York City Human Resources  
Administration, New York City Department of Social Services  
Oversight: HRA's Career Services  
before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee  
September 10, 2024**

Good morning Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Scott French and I serve as the Administrator of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) within the Department of Social Services (DSS). I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on the topic of HRA's career services. While we have faced challenging times in recent years, we are very proud of the work we are doing to connect low-income New Yorkers to a diverse array of workforce development services to further clients' education, training and employment goals.

Career services are an onramp to sustainability and independence for New Yorkers. We understand the job-search process can be challenging and as a City, we want to serve as a strong partner in helping New Yorkers achieve career success. Career services encompass the kind of career guidance and coaching any jobseeker might need – that includes exploring career goals, connecting to educational and training opportunities, building professional skills, and serving as a partner in job placement. HRA's career services are a key support in connecting New Yorkers on Cash Assistance with opportunities to secure steady income and live sustainable lives.

While I will be speaking to HRA's career services, I want to note that HRA's offerings exist within a broader network of workforce development programs New York City provides, including offerings led by the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD), the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA), and the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development. Under the leadership of Mayor Adams, we continually work to break down siloes and build networks across government and across our communities to connect New Yorkers to the career services they deserve.

Working with HRA, career services providers use their expertise to equip jobseekers with the tools they need to build skills and experience to remain engaged in what can be a daunting job-search process. By offering wraparound support services, HRA and our provider partners work to assist our clients whatever an individual's starting point.

I would like to spend some time walking through some of the career services available to our clients.

- Career Pathways is a suite of service programs that provide: orientation, intake, assessment, engagement services, job development, placement, and retention services.. Career Pathways has three components
  - CareerCompass works with adult clients to assess their skills and experience. It helps clients find employment, training, education programs, internships, and community service opportunities that suit their abilities and goals.
  - CareerAdvance offers career, education, and training services in specific New York City industries and neighborhoods or to groups, such as those with Limited English Proficiency, individuals who are involved with the Criminal Justice system, homeless households, survivors of domestic violence, or older adults.
  - YouthPathways works with clients ages 18-24 to assess their skills and experience. It provides career, education, and training services and helps clients connect to programs, including internships and community service, tailored to the needs of younger adults.
- Note that the new iteration of the Career Pathways programs will be the Pathways to Access to Careers and Employment (PACE) Workforce Development Program, which I will speak further about in a moment..
- Business Link matches diverse employers with jobseekers through targeted outreach and skills assessments. Business Link hosts job fairs throughout the year and offers access to job opening alerts by text message through TEXT 2 Work.
- The Pathways to Industrial and Construction Careers (PINCC) program is a key initiative arising from the U.S Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge within the American Rescue Plan of 2021. This program bridges the gap between employers seeking a diverse workforce, and the public systems seeking to place high-need, disadvantaged populations in career track positions within the Construction and Industrial/Transportation sectors.
- Jobs Plus Program is a place-based employment program administered by HRA for residents in 40 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments or within proximity of the developments throughout the five boroughs. Jobs-Plus programs help residents build skills and connect to the labor market to increase their incomes and financial security. Jobs-Plus program sites are located within the developments they serve or within walking distance.
- CUNY Educate Develop Graduate Empower (EDGE) is a joint program between HRA and CUNY designed to help HRA clients enrolled at CUNY schools with academic counseling, support, and employment services so they can succeed in their studies and graduate in a timely manner.
- Alternative Engagement Programs (AE): AE assists clients interested in high-demand skill-based training in the fastest growing occupations such as green jobs, technology-based jobs, careers in the medical field and much more. Many of our Training Providers have employment linkages.

- The Wellness, Comprehensive Assessment, Rehabilitation, and Employment (WeCARE) program provides comprehensive services to assist HRA Cash Assistance clients with medical, physical, and/or mental health conditions that impact their ability to obtain employment. Our goal is to help clients achieve self-sufficiency through personalized assessments, rehabilitative support, and employment services.

Having provided that overview of career services available to our clients, I will now turn to recent RFPs and the underlying thought processes we are bringing to the future of HRA's delivery of career services.

HRA succeeds when we connect clients with the long-term financial stability and security that employment provides. Building on years of experience working to further hone our career services offerings, and building upon concept papers that included engagement with experts, providers, and the communities we serve, HRA recently released an RFP in August 2024 with an anticipated contract start date of July 2025; for the Pathways to Access Careers and Employment (PACE) Workforce Development Program and will shortly be releasing another RFP for the WeCARE program..

Key concepts undergird HRA's career services model and inform our strategy in developing these RFPs. Both programs focus on client-centered assessment. That means assessments that identify client needs and interests, and counseling tools to meet the client where they are. Client-centered assessment connects with the concept of progressively improving workforce development practices. That means including an understanding that additional education and training may be the best pathway for a client to meet their goals; GED, ESL, training, vocational, or apprenticeship programs may serve as a pathway into the career a client may have in mind.

In authoring the RFPs, HRA acts as a catalyst to strengthen the network of career services providers, to include community-based organizations and local, small business partners. That is a step towards a neighborhood-centered model, allowing clients to receive services and supports within their communities. Strengthening the network of vendors also includes serving as a convener and platform for sharing best practices among vendors.

A final key concept included in our RFPs is a holistic understanding of client needs. Through Strategic Program Operation Target (SPOT) Goals, we gain a clearer picture of client advancement by taking into account areas beyond employment like educational and financial counseling. In addition, HRA intentionally shifted towards a One Door program model in the PACE Workforce Development Program; this model unifies the previously separate programs of CareerCompass, CareerAdvance, and YouthPathways with the advantage of reducing referrals from one program to the next.

I turn now to the larger legal and regulatory framework in which HRA operates and the impacts on the return to mandatory engagement.

HRA operates in a legal and regulatory framework that obligates us to adhere to an extensive body of federal and New York State laws, rules, and regulations. In addition to oversight at the City level, the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) oversees our operations and provides directives. That serves as important context for the return to mandatory engagement and the imposition of sanctions on clients who do not meet federal and State standards for engagement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this mandatory engagement was paused. The federal and State government determined the timeline for lifting this pause. Alongside other localities, HRA was directed by NYS to resume sanctioning clients who do not participate in mandatory engagement. That said, over time, HRA has been a strong voice in seeking and obtaining a broader understanding of the rubric of mandatory work engagement to include training, education, apprenticeships, and other programs.

In implementing return to mandatory, we have focused on ensuring clients are not surprised by the end of the pause – communicating with clients ahead of time about the reimposition of engagement requirements and the potential sanctions we would be required by law to impose. Furthermore, within the sanction process, we offer opportunities for individuals to come into compliance with the requirements; or alternatively, clients may supply an explanation of the factors that prevent their meeting the work requirements under the Cash Assistance program.

HRA is also leveraging City contracting dollars to help secure employment for clients receiving Cash Assistance through HireNYC: Human Services. In brief, HireNYC: Human Services, administered by Business Link, requires contracted providers to hire a certain number of Cash Assistance recipients based upon overall contract value.

The programs require providers to offer work for at least 20 hours per week, paying at least the mandated minimum wage, and work being for at least one year. HRA also defines best efforts on providers' part; that ensures a provider that genuinely submitted job postings, interviewed candidates, and constructively engaged with Business Link on interviewees can have that work taken into account in seeking a modification or waiver of an unmet Cash Assistance client hiring requirement.

HireNYC succeeds in connecting Cash Assistance clients with career opportunities. When comparing the year-over-year number of Cash Assistance clients receiving employment through HireNYC, that figure has grown from more than 2,300 hires in FY21 to over 8,000 hires in FY24, representing an historic high for this program.

Expanding our optic to include the broader work Business Link pursues to match employers with job seekers, for FY24, there were nearly 10,000 (9,990) job placements through Business Link programs. That includes the more than 8,000 placements through HireNYC, more than 1,400 placements through the Park Jobs Training Program, more than 200 placements through the

Department of Sanitation Jobs Training Program, and more than 100 jobs placements through Employer Incentive Plus.

I will close where I began. We understand job search anxiety – the search for the next step in one’s career can be daunting. We understand that job seeking is a process that includes the morale of the jobseeker, and building the skills and resilience necessary to overcome the challenges posed by a potentially very stressful process. Our message to jobseekers is there is universe of City workforce development and career services programs, including HRA, and our partners at SBS, DYCD, NYCHA, the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development, community partners, and many others. Collectively, we stand ready to assist job seeking New Yorkers.

On behalf of HRA, our partners in government, and our dedicated provider networks, I want to highlight that array of help and support to any feeling discouraged. Help is available. While what we speak to here today will necessarily focus on HRA and Cash Assistance client focused offerings – as a City, we seek to be strong partners in connecting New Yorkers to employment. As HRA’s fiscal year 2024 successes in connecting clients to employment demonstrate, we have made important strides forward. With the RFPs I have outlined, we lay out a pathway for building on that success. I want to reassure the Council that, alongside our partners, HRA will continue to work to help overcome the obstacles New Yorkers face to achieving greater sustainability, independence, and career success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, I welcome your questions.