CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

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July 15, 2026
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

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Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
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Carmen N. De La Rosa
Harvey D. Epstein
Simcha Felder
James F. Gennaro
Christopher Marte
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John Chiarello
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Connor McHugh
Carriage Driver

Christina Hansen
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Equine Surgeon

Angel J.

Sharase Dubose
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Kraig Kulikowski
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David Saltonstall
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Roger Mosier

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John Quadrozzi

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Humane Society of New York

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Kyle Passekg

Michael Petrelli
Equine Advocacy Alliance

Janet White
Carriage Horse Freedom

Letty Gomeziollo

Carolina Roberts

Helen David
Pedi-cab Driver

Jim Keen
Veterinarian

Susan Wagner
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Allison Bowling
Red Feather Equine Sanctuary

Jamie Baldanza
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Marty Irby

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Clara Bright

Francesco Riccobono

Abdurahim Sanginov

Joseph Conigliaro

Giovanni Vallone

Natalie Riccobono

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Timberlaine Sanctuary

Paola Gavino
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April Lang

Sam Moon
Catskill Animal Sanctuary

John DiLeonardo
Humane Long Island

Nicole Rivard
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Nicole Greevy

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Drew McCormick
Animal Defenders International

Nicoline Von Finck

Deborah Thomas

Eva Usadi

Maddy Johnson

Patrick Norton

Donny Moss

Kathy Nizzari
Lights Out Coalition

Laura Leopardo

Chris Ramirez

Linda Mann

Tillie the Clown

Lisa Goldberg

Margaret Lee

Skyler Hoffman

Steve Battista

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Ed Schultz

Ellen Sunstein

Benjamin Konigsberg

Rosemary Espinal

Marilyn Galfin
Voices for Shelter Animals

Kathleen Raab
SPCA International

Diane Petruzzelli
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Delmar Leon

Fiorella Valdivia

Yalda Moslehian

Roxanne Delgado

Donna Stein

Nellie Mckay

Christopher Leon Johnson

Raul Rivera

Caitlin Gamble

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Clara Tavakoli-Ghosh

Victoria Moran

Una Rose

Sherry Ramsey
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Pauline Burns
New York State Horse Council

Nora Marino

Nina Marie Perino

Nathan Semmel

Nancy DeJesus

Monica Sharma

Melissa Pellicer
One Kind World

Jennifer Garrett

Faith Rashid

Emily Harting

Lauren Linder

Cindy Anthony Favia

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Allison Soule

Audra Gibson

Dee Shroff

Elaine Cury

Marietta Horr

Daniel Chappuis

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Folks in the balcony, please have a seat. Please find a seat. Good morning. Welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for the Committee on Health. At this time, please silence all cell phones and electronic devices. Moving forward, no one is to approach the dais. Please keep decorum in here. This is government proceeding. Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Good morning. I am Council Member Lynn Schulman, Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on Health. Today the Committee on Health will hear Introduction 943 sponsored by Councilmember Marte in relation to prohibiting the operation of horse-drawn cabs. I would like to recognize that we have been joined by Speaker Menin and by Council Members Marte, Gennaro, Wong, Epstein, De La Rosa, Wilson, and Ariola. Last month, Romanch Mahajan and his family were visiting New York City from India when they took a horse carriage ride in Central Park. During the ride, the carriage driver stepped away from the carriage to take a photograph of the family. The horse bolted, causing Romanch's mother, Priya, to fall out of the carriage. Romanch then either jumped or fell from the

carriage suffering a severe head injury. He tragically died later that day. My heart goes out to the Mahajan family for the unimaginable loss they have endured. Please join me in a moment of silence in memory of Romanch. Thank you. I will now turn it over to Speaker Menin for her opening remarks.

SPEAKER MENIN: Thank you, everyone. I'm Julie Menin, Speaker of the New York City Council, and I want to welcome all of you to this important hearing. I first of all want to thank my colleague, our Health Chair, Council Member Schulman, for convening today's hearing, and I want to thank my colleague, Councilmember Marte, the sponsor of Romanch's Law. So to the Mahajan family, there are no words for Romanch's death. When I spoke to you this morning and I heard the pain in your voice, we— there is nothing we can do to bring him back, but what we can do is honor his legacy, which is what we're doing today at this hearing to make sure that this type of tragedy never, ever happens again. And so I just want to thank you for your courage in being here. I know this is not easy, and we're going to hear from you in a few minutes, and our condolences extend to your whole family. We know when a young person is taken

from us, cut off in their prime of life, as Romanch was, with a world of potential, going to college ahead of him, it is— and I say this as a mom— it's, like, really deeply heart-wrenching. When that death was avoidable, where he could be alive if only we had acted sooner. It is a call to action for all people of good conscience, for your family, for all the families, and for our city. We are here to ensure that this never happens again. This issue is not new to our city. It's certainly not new to city government. There are many people who are in this chambers who've been working on this issue for many, many years. But it has never come to fruition. The matter of horse carriages or maintenance or safety and operation has come up under previous mayors and previous city councils every year for almost four decades. The time to act is now. This is not a simple issue because this industry is historically and culturally significant. For years, horse carriages have been synonymous with our iconic world-class tourism. The rides they provide have given visitors an opportunity to slow down and take in the sights of our city. And they have given hundreds of hardworking immigrant New Yorkers the dignity of a good-paying

job. These are drivers who care deeply for their horses and who take the safety of their passengers and pedestrians extremely seriously. I do not take these considerations lightly. Anytime there is possibility of ending an industry, the possibility of job losses for small business owners and employees, we obviously need to think carefully about that. I'm a former small business owner myself. I understand the challenges and burdens of operating and working for one. So I'm committing here today that we are going to chart a path forward to protect the workers and ensure that they have good-paying jobs moving forward, whether it be in the hospitality or tourism or other industry. We know that you are a vital thread of the fabric of this city, and we will not exclude you from this conversation. I'm also very committed to ensuring that horses involved are treated fairly and compassionately. And we will ensure through this bill that we will guarantee their safety and well-being as well. So that brings us to the pivotal crossroads where we stand today. As public servants, we must respond to the concerns of our constituents, and we must recognize that the appetite towards banning horse carriages has grown

significantly over the past four decades. New Yorkers have long been concerned about public safety. With scores of accidents and close calls involving horses, passengers, commuters, maintaining large and naturally skittish animals in our chaotic city is a dangerous combination. And sadly, with Romanch's death, we have now reached a turning point. We have also become a city that is overwhelmingly supportive of the humane treatment of animals. And there have been many incidents involving horses collapsing in the hot, congested environment of our streets. Accordingly, nearly 70 percent of New Yorkers are supportive of phasing out this practice. And we want to be clear, the Council's focus is on ending this tradition while protecting the workers whose livelihoods depend on it. And we will ensure strong worker protections in this bill. We can and we should have this conversation today with respect and with empathy, no matter where we stand on this issue. I hope and I know that this hearing will maintain a tone of somberness, of sensitivity, and civility for everyone who has come here today. I'm looking forward to hearing from the administration, from the industry, from advocates, and most of all, from

Romanch's family. I'm also so incredibly sorry, as I said from the beginning, for your loss. And for those of you that don't know this aspect, Romanch died in an act of heroism as he tried to protect his mother. Now, a law named in his honor will protect countless others— residents, tourists, humans, and horses. While there is nothing we can do to sadly change the tragedy of his death, passing his law is one way to seek justice for him and his family, to keep his blessed memory alive, and to carry his brave and compassionate spirit forward. So I now want to turn it over to Council Member Schulman again. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Speaker Menin. The circumstances surrounding Romanch's death are deeply disturbing. The driver's conduct was reckless, unacceptable, and this young man's death was entirely preventable. This recent tragedy comes on the heels of other high-profile incidents in which carriage horses have broken free, collapsed, or died. These include Deniz, a carriage horse who died in June after eating a plant toxic to horses, and Ryder, a horse who collapsed in Hell's Kitchen in 2022 and was later euthanized. These incidents have intensified a debate that has been taking place for

years in our city about the welfare of carriage horses, the safety of our residents and visitors, the livelihoods of carriage drivers, and the future of the horse carriage industry. Today we are discussing legislation that, if enacted, would wind down the horse carriage industry. Introduction 943 would prohibit the issuance of new horse carriage operator licenses after June 1st, 2028, and would also prohibit the operation of horse-drawn cabs after that date. The bill would also require the humane disposition of former carriage horses, including prohibiting their sale or transfer for slaughter or for use in another horse-drawn cab business. Finally, the bill would require the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development to develop a job retraining program for former drivers and other workers involved in the industry, with the goal of facilitating their transition to other fields of employment. This is an industry with a long history in New York City, and for generations, carriage drivers have built their livelihoods around this work. But times are changing, and we cannot ignore these tragic incidents or the serious public safety concerns they have raised. The

landscape of our city has changed dramatically. Central Park and the surrounding streets are busier and more congested with pedestrians, bicycles, e-bikes, pedicabs, scooters, vehicles, and horse-drawn carriages increasingly competing for space. When a horse becomes distressed, collapses, or breaks free in this environment, the consequences are devastating, not only for the horse, but for drivers, passengers, and everyone sharing our streets and public spaces. This is fundamentally an issue that greatly affects the public. These concerns are not based on a single incident. For years, New Yorkers, advocates, elected officials, and others have raised questions about animal welfare and public safety within the horse carriage industry. Last month's devastating tragedy has forced us to confront these concerns in a new light and consider whether it is time for a new path forward. As we consider the future of this industry, we must carefully examine what a responsible transition would require, both for the horses and for the people whose livelihoods depend on this work. We must consider how to protect the horses by placing them in safe and caring homes. We must also recognize the drivers and workers who

have devoted years— and in some cases generations to this industry, as well as the significant investments they have made in their carriage licenses. We must consider how to provide drivers with meaningful opportunities for new employment. My hope is that we can bring people together around these shared responsibilities. I know emotions are running high today on all sides of this issue, and I want to conclude by reminding everyone that although there may be strong opinions on this legislation and on the future of this industry, we must maintain a civil and respectful proceeding. The purpose of this hearing is to ensure that all voices and all perspectives can be heard today. We must maintain decorum throughout the proceedings. I would like— I would also like to thank the representatives for the administration for being here. I want to thank the committee staff, and I want to make mention the committee staff has worked an enormous amount of hours and enormous amount of days and worked really hard on this, and so I really want to thank them from the bottom of my heart. Chris Peppe, Josh Newman, Elizabeth Artz [sp?] for their hard work in preparing for this hearing, as well as my team, Jonathan Boucher [sp?], Kevin McAleer [sp?],

and Samie New [sp?]. Before I hand it over to Councilmember Marte for a brief statement on his legislation, I want to let people know that you can request translation in the following languages: Spanish, Hindi, Tajik, Turkish, and Russian. So if anybody needs anything, please let the sergeants know. Now I will turn it over to Council Member Marte for a brief statement on his legislation.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to give a huge thank you to Speaker Menin and Chair Schulman for holding today's historic hearing, and to the thousands of advocates and everyday New Yorkers who for years have been demanding we take action on horse carriages in Central Park. For decades, we've seen horse carriages live in cramped stables. We've seen them walk through Midtown traffic, breathing in exhaust. We've seen them pull thousands of pounds in the heat and in the cold. We've seen them get scared, run off, and die in the streets. Every time an incident occurs, we are given an excuse. We are told it's just an isolated incident, and the industry is completely safe. But the reality is that in the past 34 years, there have been 128 documented horse carriage accidents. 30

horses have died. Dozens of horses and people have been injured and hospitalized. Vehicles have been damaged and destroyed. And most recently, we lost the life of a young tourist, Romanch Mahajan. As legislators, now is the time for serious accountability. While the City Council has dragged its feet through endless debates, we now have the loss of a boy on our hand. These are not unrelated accidents, but a pattern of failure that proves this industry does not work in modern-day New York City. During this hearing, we're going to hear a lot of more excuses. We'll be told that the industry is safe, yet somehow also needs safety reforms. If the drivers are just trained better, this will never happen again, that if we just add additional infrastructure to Central Park, such as hitching posts, that will solve the problem. We'll be told that the issue is just the lack of government oversight, and we'll be threatened that if we pass this bill, all the horses will be sent to the slaughter house. However, these excuses don't hold up. The Department of Health had tried to provide oversight over the carriage industry, but when the agency ordered independent veterinarians to inspect

the stables and the horses, the workers refused to allow them to test their horses. That veteran— veterinarian found horses stuck in stables too small, covered in scarring, and exhibiting signs of many medical issues that could disqualify them from working. It was not the city who did not enforce. It was the industry that refused to comply. After 128 horse carriage accidents, it was only when someone was killed that additional training was provided to the drivers. Legislation has never been required to make better training. Either the owners have ignored training their drivers, or the training has not been working. For days after Romanch's death, we were promised that drivers were going to be trained to never leave their horses unattended. Drivers were documented doing exactly that. No amount of driver training will change the nature of horses. They can and will get scared and run off. Even hitching posts, which we are told are the magic bullet to stop horse accidents, are not a real solution. A 1,500-pound horse will still get scared while tied to a hitching post. Their halters can snap under extreme pressures, and the horses can run off. They can even pull the post onto the ground. If a horse pulls back

violently, he may fall with the carriage and capsize. And even if the harness does not snap, the extreme pressures on the top of the head can result in serious, deep, and lasting injuries. It can even break their neck. Lastly, we must put to rest the idea that banning horse carriages will lead to the death of horses. We are going to hear today from a broad coalition of sanctuaries and farms willing to pay owners full prices for their horses. Sending the horses to the slaughter house is completely unnecessary. If we all work together, we can pass this bill, compensate the owners, let the horses live their lives on open pastures. The preventable death of Romanch has proven that we can't reform our way out of this. But there's a way forward, and that is Romanch Law, Intro 943. With this bill, we can end this inhumane industry, find safe homes for the horses, and transition workers to other jobs. My office has already been in discussion with this— with City Hall, and they're in the process of developing proposals for workforce development programs for workers. Romanch Law is how we can truly honor Romanch, so we can offer his family more than just words, but action. We can protect the horses, take

care of the workers, and make sure that this tragedy never happens again, ever. I look forward to today's discussion and urge my colleagues to sponsor this legislation so we can finally put an end to this form of legalized animal cruelty. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Councilmember Marte. I would now like to recognize— we've been joined by Council Members Abreu and Narcisse and Felder. Did I miss anybody? Okay. Before we hear testimony from the administration, we will hear directly from Romanch's family who have joined us here in chambers and online to provide testimony. First, we will hear from— sorry— Priya Mahajan and Deepak Mahajan. Do we have them?

DEEPAK MAHAJAN: Members of the Council, we are Roman's mother and father, Priya and Deepak Mahajan. We brought our son to New York from India to celebrate Romanch finishing school. The day we landed, he found out that he had been accepted to one of the most prestigious universities in India. Two days later, we took a carriage ride in Central Park And near the end of the ride, the driver stepped away from the horse to take our family pictures. The horse ran away out of control. I cannot properly describe

to you the real true fear inside that carriage. It was shaking, it was speeding, there was no one holding the reins, and we could do nothing but hold on to each other and scream. My wife fell. Romanch tried to help his mother and he too fell. Then he hit his hand on the ground and he did not move- head to the ground. He never moved again. I kept shouting his name, but he did not move. He was 18, six-foot two, obedient, smart, the boy who helped everyone whether he knew them or not, who was always sharing his ideas with me. He wanted to build something of his own. He died that day. He took his last breath in his mother's arm while his 11-year-old brother and I stood watching. This was the last day of his life. No one plans for this or expected it to happen to their child, but it happened to us. Now we live inside that day over and over again. We are shattered. Our whole family is shattered. The pain does not go away. Every morning we wake up and think of nothing but the loss of our son. We came to New York as a family of four. We are learning, hour by hours to cope up with life as we are three now. Our home is so- our home is no longer the same. We still have not unpacked Romanch's luggage from that trip. Every time we enter his room,

we break down. His books, his belongings, and his dreams are exactly where he left him— left them. His friends are shattered. They had plans with him for college, for life, for the future. They still struggle to believe that he's gone. Our younger son Mani, who is now our only son, is unable to cope up with that trauma and horror he witnessed that day. He watched his brother die. He lost not only his sibling but his companion, his guide, and his best friend. No child should ever have to carry memories like this for the rest of their life. And for us, every night is a nightmare. We close our eyes and relive that carriage ride, the screams, the helplessness and the moment our son's life ended before ours. I want you to imagine what it is like watching your son die right in front of you. I would not wish one hour of any of this on any family in this world. Romanch was wearing a red striped shirt and blue jeans. Sometimes when we think back to those final moments, it feels as though he was wrapped in the color of American flag. A young boy who came to America full of dreams and left us for too soon. This was not an unpredictable accident. It was a safety violation, a system failure to protect the people who visit our

city, your city. And everyone responsible has admitted the driver should never have left that carriage. And still the ride went back on the streets while we were planning our son's funeral. As if our boy was a temporary inconvenience. But we will not let that be Romanch's legacy. Now we are asking you plainly, act now. A version of this law sat before this council last year, and if it had passed, the carriages would have stopped on June 1st, 2026. Romanch died on June 17th. If the City Council has passed the law banning horse-drawn carriages last year, our son would still be alive today. The only measure that can prevent another death or injury is a full and complete ban. Pass Intro 943, Romanch's Law. Let our son be the last victim of the industry. Let his death not be in vain. Thank you. [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. So sorry for your loss. Next we have Gorav Mahajan and— sorry, Nuvjeet Mangana.

GORAV MAHAJAN: Members of the committee, my name is Gorav Mahajan. Romanch was my nephew. I'm speaking in front of you, but I want to be honest with you. A part of me died with him that day, and it has not come back. Let me tell you who he was,

because he was not a headline. Romanch was a brilliant boy. He didn't have small dreams. He wanted to build something big, to be an entrepreneur. And he talked about it constantly to his father, to me, and anyone who would listen. He had a smile that pulled you in and a heart that could still sit still if someone needed help, whether he knew them or not. That is not a story we made up for this room. That is who he was, and that is exactly how he died, reaching for his mother when the horse bolted. In the most terrifying moment of his life, with no one at the reins and everything out of control, my 18-year-old nephew showed true bravery. Grief takes the future from you a piece at a time. Romanch collected sneakers. He loved them. It wrecks me that I will never be able to buy him another pair. I should be watching him build his business, instead I catch myself staring at the door, waiting for him to walk through it, knowing he won't. We did not ask to become advocates. A broken system forced us into it. Romanch's Law is written in our tears, but it's not just written in our tears. It's written in the tears of those individuals and their families who were injured in the 1983 West Drive mass casualty incident

and the 1985 incident involving the horse named Chester who left four women in wheelchairs and one woman blind due to severe head trauma. And the list of tragedies and injuries caused by horse-drawn carriages goes on and on for decades, ending with our Romanch and his mother Priya. If this law had already existed, my nephew would be alive today. Changing everything he dreamed about. You have the power to stop this from happening to another family. I'm asking you, look at us. Remember his face and pass the law so his soul can finally rest. In closing, we request a permanent physical memorial at the exact site of the tragedy. Romanch's unmatched bravery defined the very best of humanity on New York soil. The ground where he took his final breath must stand forever as a monument to their love, ensuring the city never forgets the boy who gave everything to protect his mother. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next, we will hear from Anuj Thukral. I'm sorry. They have one more. Oh, okay. I'm sorry, I didn't realize that. Okay. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

NAVDEEP MAGAT: My name is Navdeep Magat [sp?] and I'm Roman's aunt. I came here today with a

broken heart because our beautiful boy is gone. And where he used to be, there is now a silence I cannot describe. Before this, Romanch was a sunshine. I know every family says that, but I need you to hear it about him. Charming, loving, full of life. 18 years old, celebrating his graduation with every dream still in front of him. He trusted the city. He got into the carriage believing that if New York allowed these rides, on its streets, they must be safe. That trust is what makes this unbearable. A happy family trip turned into pure terror when that horse became wild and uncontrollable. And in those last moments, my nephew was so brave, braver than any child should ever have to be facing something like that. Never should have been allowed to happen to him. Every day since the quiet in our house is deafening. Some mornings the grief is so heavy it is hard to take a breath. I look at the empty space where Romanch should be and the weight of it sits on my chest and does not move. Please do not let him become a case number on a piece of paper. If you have children or a niece or a nephew, think of them tonight. Imagine that fear for one second and then follow your heart. The horse-drawn carriage ban must come to an end,

which is why Romanch's death was preventable and why only a ban will do. Pass Romanch's Law immediately. Please help us spare the next family from this nightmare. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Now I'll call up Anuj Thukral and Sovia Thukral. You're here, right? Come up to the table. Go ahead.

SOVIA THUKRAL: Good morning, members of the committee, and thank you for letting us speak. My name is Sovia Thukral. I'm along with my husband Anuj Thukral. We are here for our nephew, Romanch Mahajan, who lost his life in Central Park on June 17, 2026. He arrived to New York just two days prior on June 15th. He was so excited to start college. He had been accepted to one of the top universities in India, and at 18, he had every dream and his entire life still ahead of him. He was kind, sincere, he loved being around little children, and he carried himself with an honesty and loyalty to his family that you don't see in someone that young. I need to tell you about one phone call. On June 17th, that afternoon, I called my brother, Deepak Mahajan, expecting to hear that they were having a wonderful day. Instead, I

heard him crying, begging me, begging the officers at the scene. Telling them, save my son. I heard my sister-in-law Priya Mahajan. I heard Romanch's little brother Manik Mahajan crying horrified. Those screams, those cries, those sounds of agony and despair, those sounds have not left me, and they haunt me every single time. They come back to me, and they will for the rest of my life. A boy who came here to celebrate the start of his new future in the city he was so excited to see never went home. The unattended horse spooked and bolted, and when it did, Romanch tried to save his mother, and it cost him his life. Romanch is not a tragedy on a page. He was a son, a grandson, a brother, a nephew, a young man with a future that belonged to him. He was a part of a family, just like the elderly woman who was catastrophically injured and the tourist who was dragged by two spooked horses in 1997, just like two passengers who were injured by the runaway horse Nikki in 1998, 61st Street and 5th Avenue, two carriage incidents of 2003. Years of injured victims, years life-changing events, years of families getting broken. The difference here is that Romanch is the first death from decades and decades of horse-drawn

carriages injuries and catastrophes. Now, will you finally act and put a stop to this industry? I am standing here in support of Romanch's Law so that his death will not go unremembered. His passing will not be forgotten, that forces society to change so that no other family ever has to carry what we carry now. Please remember his name. Romanch Mahajan. Remember the life he lived and the love he gave to everyone around him. And make sure— make sure he's the last person to die from this industry. I'm sorry. Make sure he's the last person to die from this industry. Sorry, guys. I think his mother is shattered. She doesn't want to speak anything. She's numbed, devastated, losing her 18-year-old son. It's painful for everybody in the house. The house is empty there now. There is no sound of him. His room is dark. Nobody can enter that room anymore.

SPEAKER MENIN: We just want to thank you for coming here today. We know how painful this is for you. You have our deepest condolences, and I just want to thank you for your courage in being able to share what the family is going through. We know this is very, very difficult for you, and we really

appreciate your whole family coming here and testifying before us today.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes, I want to reiterate what the speaker said. Thank you for your courage, and thank you for sharing with us today. Really appreciate that. So did you have some words, or—

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you everyone. I just— I just want to say that when this whole incident happened, the entire family was helpless. When the— when the horse bolted, they were helpless. When Romanch fell, they were helpless. His mom telling us that he literally took his last breath in front of her. And she said he was breathing in front of me, but he couldn't open his eyes. And they were helpless. At least now, with all of what your effort and the efforts of everybody in this room, including the Speaker and, and all of you guys, maybe you can pass the law to be a help to them. Their house literally went from— they have kids everywhere— to have an energy of a Disneyland to becoming like an energy of a graveyard. That's the energy that they're living with because that's what they are going through every single day. Thank you again.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you very— thank you very much. Are there— did you— are you good?

SAGAR CHADHA: Thank you to the committee here today, to Speaker Menin, to Councilman Marte, to Councilman Schulman. My name is Sagar Chadha. I'm a partner at Liakas Law. I represent the estate and the family of Romanch Mahajan. I just want to first of all point out what everyone else here has already said, but to highlight the fact that this incident was entirely avoidable. Romancha's death will not be in vain. He came to this city as a tourist, and he died as a son of this city. And we will hold the city accountable for the decades of failures in enforcing and preventing this action from taking place. Hitching posts, tethering points, no safety devices whatsoever to secure a 2,000-pound animal from consistently getting spooked and bolting. This incident could have been avoided. It should have never happened. And if this law had been passed a year ago, on June 1st, 2026, there would be no horses in this city. Romanch, unfortunately, passed away on June 17th. His death will not be in vain. This is not about the workers and the union members. They too

have called for better safety. The Conservancy for decades has called for better safety, and we will hold the city accountable. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: All right, thank you very much to all of you. Now, are there any other family members that are here before I move on? No? Okay. I want to also recognize that we've been joined by Council Member Morano, and now the administration will present their testimony. So thank you. Will the administration come up? I will turn it over to the Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Good morning. If you could both please raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this committee and to respond honestly to council member questions? Deputy Commissioner? Deputy Commissioner?

UNIDENTIFIED: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may proceed with your testimony.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: Good morning. Madam Speaker, Chair Schulman, members of the committee— of the Health Committee, and other council members. I am Corinne Schiff, Deputy Commissioner for

Environmental Health at the New York City Health Department. On behalf of Commissioner Martin, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Introduction 943. I am joined by Carlos Ortiz, Chief of Staff and Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs at the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. Before discussing the legislation, I want to express my deep condolences and those of the Health Commissioner and all of us at the Health Department to the family of Romanch Mahajan. His death associated with a horse carriage ride was a terrible tragedy. It is unimaginable what his family is going through. The oversight of the carriage horse industry requires citywide coordination, and the Health Department works closely with many other agencies also involved, including DCWP, NYPD, DOT, and New York City Parks. We also work closely with the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare. The Health Department is charged with, with issuing initial and renewal licenses for the carriage horses under the Administrative Code. Our process includes reviewing the horses' health certificates to check the horses are examined by their veterinarian every four to eight months, as well as reviewing owner records

showing that the horses have had at least five weeks a year of vacation or furlough at a horse stable that allows daily access to a paddock or pasture. We make periodic observations of the horses' movement and overall body condition at the three Central Park hack stands where carriages must pick up and discharge passengers, and monitor weather and issue weather-related suspensions. We also conduct the training course for aspiring carriage horse drivers that is a prerequisite to obtain a horse carriage driver's license from DCWP. Mayor Mamdani has been clear that New York City should join the other cities that no longer allow operation of a horse carriage industry, and the administration supports the intent of Introduction 943. To promote a good outcome for the horses, the bill would require the Health Department to provide horse owners with information about individuals and organizations that can receive or acquire horses for humane purposes and require owners to certify that they are not transferring or selling their horse for an inhumane purpose. The bill provides a two-year phase-out period providing time for owners and drivers to make this transition and requires a workforce development program. The

administration is, however, critical of the insufficiencies of the worker protections in the bill, and we look forward to working with the council to address those concerns as we move forward on this important issue for New Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Deputy Commissioner Ortiz and I can now take your questions.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Did Commissioner Ortiz— did you have a separate— no? Council Member Gennaro?

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Yes, thank you, Deputy Commissioner, for your statement. It's primarily your agency and also PD that really looks after the, you know, the drivers. By the way, how much time do I have? Okay. So, in the last 167 years of the industry, or as far back as you have records, has there ever been a situation where a driver's— where a horse carriage driver's license has been suspended or revoked? The answer is no, but I can, you know—

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I actually don't know if that's true. I- in recent years, there have not been suspensions or revocations, but I believe in prior administrations there were.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: No, there weren't.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: But I can, I can pull the— I can—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Yeah, you can do it.

SPEAKER MENIN: I'm sorry, Council Member Genaro, I know we'll give you extra time for this. I was Commissioner of DCWP. We actually did do a suspension due to conduct when I was Commissioner, so it has happened. And-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] Yeah, I think it was due to conduct that had to do with like financial, not like safety. But in any event, I was offered the opportunity by the Speaker to make a statement at the outset of the hearing, but I was told by staff that now tells the Speaker what to do that I was, like, not able to make a statement. And so that's- okay. And so, now when it comes to medallions, have medallions been revoked or suspended? To your knowledge?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: To my knowledge, in recent years they have not, sir.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you. In terms of- in terms of what the Health Department and the Mountain Unit that's out there, what are the levels of tickets and violations for safety? And also- and I also will note that, you know, after, you know- incidents have happened. I noticed that there have not been— I don't think there have been violations issued to drivers, meaning that the people— that would be you— who are in charge of this kind of thing thought that it was explainable or something. And so, I'm trying to find out how you come here today to support the elimination of the industry just because the Mayor thinks so. But what I'm— what I'm looking for here are actual facts because, you know, you are the oversight thing, and it was nothing in your testimony that said— I'm sure that if you had actual data, facts, violations, episodes, or whatever, you would have made mention of them in your testimony. You did not. Can you explain that?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Thank you for the question, Council Member. I think I would like to take a step back in a sense and—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] No, I want you to answer the question.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: recognize- well, I would like to recognize that I think this issue around horse-drawn carriages in Central Park has been an ongoing discourse for many administrations now.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: It doesn't matter whether it's a discourse. We're based— like, we're doing things based on facts. And if you had information about— that supports the elimination of the industry, you would have put it in your statement. You did not. The bell rang. I yield.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] No, no, no. It's just like was—

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: [interposing] I would like-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I am— I get to ask the questions. I, you know, close with a statement. You don't get to say anything now.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Thank you, Council Member. I intend to comment that—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] I didn't ask for comments. I asked for facts.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: To echo– to echo my colleague's testimony that the administration supports winding down this industry. We recognize—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: That's your full statement. That's all you have is, you know, is that the mayor wants it. I like to operate based on fact and what you've guys done to enforce and recommendation— and, you know, recommendations that you might have made to make it safe. I didn't hear any of that in the testimony, and there's no dancing that's going to get you out of that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think we have done significant efforts in the city over the many years—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] Well, you should have put it in your testimony—

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: [interposing] to try and improve regulations around this industry, whether that is limitations around where these carriages can operate, how many carriages there are, how many horses are licensed. We have all engaged in robust efforts to try and bring additional actionable

summonses. We have worked with the industry across multiple administrations to try and address what's happening. The reality is—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] Madam Chair, he's not being responsive and he's just—he's just, you know–

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] So, um, Councilmember—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] I'm not looking for a word salad here. I'm looking for answers which I didn't get.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Council Member, your time is up, and you answered the question, yes?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes, Chair, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Councilman— I'm sorry, Speaker Menin.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay, thank you so much, Chair. So a number of questions. Thank you for your testimony today. So the question is for DCWP. During the fatal incident involving Romanch in June, the driver reportedly left the horse and carriage unattended to take a photograph of the family members, after which the horse became startled and

bolted. What is the agency's— both agencies' position on this incident?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The Administrative Code is very clear that drivers may not leave the horse unattended. The Health Department, as I noted in my testimony, provides the training course for aspiring carriage horse drivers, and we do include that key safety provision in that training. The enforcement of that action is under review at the Health Department right now.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would also add, Speaker, please, to echo, I believe, testimony has been submitted by the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, is that I think the incident overall, it goes back to the inherent challenges that exist when horses are working in these busy urban environments. And ultimately why I think the administration is supportive of a long-term solution to the horse-drawn carriage industry, keeping in mind, of course, outcomes and pathways that are sustainable for the workers in this industry as well, which is of critical importance for the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. You mentioned in your testimony, the Health Department testimony, about worker protections in the bill, which is something I am focused on as well. What are the specific worker protections, and I guess why is that testimony coming not from DCWP?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Thank you, Speaker. I think just for an operational side, I just have one testimony to represent the administration's position. Of course, I'm here to comment on the worker touchpoint as well. You know, certainly I think to provide some concrete feedback, workforce development is not necessarily something that DCWP engages in now. There are many other agencies that do that work. Notwithstanding, we would like to be actively involved in this conversation as well as it relates to outcomes for the workers and ensuring that we have sustainable pathways forward for them.

SPEAKER MENIN: Is there specific language that the administration is recommending?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I don't have language available at this time, but I think as we move through the legislative process, we will be providing language.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. How many workers would be affected by the ban? We obviously know how many licenses DCWP has. We've been looking at the Open Data portal, but I want to get on the record this information, which is why I'm asking these questions. So how many workers would be affected by a ban, included carriage drivers, stable workers, and other staff?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Apologies, Speaker. I don't know if I have the stable worker numbers. I do know that there are- there are 208 licensed horse-drawn carriage drivers. My understanding from public reporting is that approximately 170 of them are engaging in the work day in, day out.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. And what does the administration's view in terms of the proper phase-out timeline that both agencies would recommend? Do you agree with the language in the bill currently? Do you believe differently?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think— and just permit me to confer with my colleague— I don't think we have concerns necessarily with the phase-out timeline itself. I think a setting such as this to

hear from the stakeholders, whether that's industry and workers and other advocates is an important step in legislative process to know if the timeline is appropriate.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. And what are the administration's plans to support the workers?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, I think, we're having ongoing conversations with our partners in labor about what outcomes we can support, what outcomes we can– what we can do to support outcomes for workers. I'm sorry. I know I've heard— I've heard of your public comments recently as well, Speaker, about securing employment for workers as well. I think for us, all options are on the table. We want to make sure that this works.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. Okay. I'm going to turn it back over to Council Member Schulman. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. First, I want to say that we've been joined by Council Members Feliz, Maloney, and Brewer. So, how many carriage horses are currently licensed and operating in New York City? Please provide the number of horses, the number of stables, the number of

carriage licenses, and drivers. I guess that's divided between the two of you?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: Yes. As of the end of June, we had just under 160 horses licensed, and there are three stables that serve the industry.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: The former mayor issued Executive Order 56 directing agencies to prepare for the cessation of horse-drawn carriages in New York City. What inspections or other work did DOHMH begin, how much was completed, and what continued after the order was rescinded?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We conduct routine inspections of the stables, routine inspections of horses, both at the stables, and these are sort of observations of the horses as well as inspections of paperwork. And also we make periodic observations at the hack stands.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would also add, Chair, that DCP conducts compliance inspections three times a year on each of the carriages. And to touch upon your other part of your question, I know that the previous administration and the de Blasio administration, I would say my entire career in city

government, that we've been working on this issue as well.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Over the past five years, how many horses have been removed from service due to medical concerns?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So it is a— it is a very routine process for us to take in complaints, often by video, to make observations ourselves or to take in referrals from NYPD, which is often at the hack stands. And we will, depending on our veterinarian's assessment of those, we will require the owner to have its veterinarian assess the horse, and during that time, the horse is not in service, and we require the veterinarian to– the owner to provide the veterinarian's determination before the horse can be returned to work. I do— I do not have the count. We can continue to work on that to try to provide it.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We— we want the count, so we want you to get that to us. And I want to know what are the most common concerns that lead to removal?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I can say some of the common concerns would mean that the horse

is lame, for example. And we might- we might see a video that either shows that it is or that it needs further assessment to be able to determine that. That would be a common consideration.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. DOHMH is responsible for enforcing requirements governing stable conditions including adequate heating and ventilation, sufficient food and drinking water, and minimum stall dimensions. Over the past five years, how many violations has DOHMH issued for failure to comply with stable requirements? And please provide a breakdown by violation type. If you don't have it here, then you need to send it to us. But answer whatever you can answer right now.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We do make routine inspections of the stables two to three times a year. I don't have the violation numbers, so we will get back to you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. How many staff does DOHMH currently employ to inspect and oversee horse carriage stables?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We have six health inspectors who work in our veterinary public health program. They do a variety of work including

the inspections of the horse carriages. And we have equine veterinarians we work with on a contract basis.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Have any stables repeatedly failed inspections or required corrective action plans?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The stables have not required corrective action plans.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Local Law 203 of 2019 prohibits horse carriages from working when the temperature is 90 degrees or above, or when the temperature is 80 degrees and the equine heat index reaches 150 or above. Since the law took effect, how many written warnings and violations has DOHMH issued for non-compliance?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: What I can tell you is the suspensions in the last three years, there have been 102 weather-related suspensions in the last three years. I'd like to confer with NYPD on violations. They are typically at the HAC stands at the time of the suspension, and so I'd want to, like- would like to check with them to see- to get you a full count. We have not issued violations for violating the suspension, but it is typically NYPD

who is actually on site at the HAC stand. So let me– let me confer with them to be able to provide that.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. How does DOHMH monitor compliance when temperatures approach the statutory thresholds?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I'm sorry, I missed the beginning of your question.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How does DOHMH monitor compliance when temperatures approach the statutory thresholds?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So we are– when we know that it is a day where we are potentially going to reach one of those thresholds–

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Like today?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The horses have been suspended today, yes.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We are monitoring the weather. The Administrative Code sets out very specific protocols for how to measure that temperature, including the type of equipment that the Health Department is required— and the NYPD are required to use. So we do have that equipment that

the Council has required. And so we take those measurements as the– as we understand the temperature threshold may be approaching, and that lets us be able to suspend the activity when that threshold is met.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How often are readings taken?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I will have to get back to you about the number of times the readings are taken.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Global temperatures are rising and New York City is increasingly experiencing extreme heat and high humidity. How many days in 2025 and 2026 were carriage horses prohibited from working because the temperature reached 90 degrees and equine heat index reached the threshold?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: What I have is the total weather-related suspensions. There is also a cold weather threshold, and we also will suspend for other extreme weather conditions, for example, if the paths are icy. So I have the total numbers. In 2025, it was 28, and 2026, from January to June, 19.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. DOHMH administers the horse-drawn carriage operator's course, which includes testing for safe driving practices. Horses can become startled by bicycles, scooters, vehicles, and other unexpected activity. What training do drivers receive on responding to a horse that becomes frightened or bolts? Is that response tested as part of the driver training?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So our— the course that we administer as a prerequisite for the DCWP license includes information about horse behavior and maintaining control of the horse. And as I noted, it in— also includes training that it is prohibited under the Administrative Code to leave a horse unattended. And there is a written component, a classroom component to the exam and the aspiring driver has to pass a test at the end of the classroom component. And then there is a practical component with a horse and our equine veterinarian, where then that is the opportunity for the aspiring driver to demonstrate that they are able to manage the horse properly.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Does DOHMH believe there are any inherent risks that cannot be

addressed through DOHMH's carriage operator's training course?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I will say that the course is designed to be comprehensive to teach the aspiring driver about horse anatomy, to look for signs of illness and other issues, and to address- to cover the health and safety requirements of the multiple city agencies.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would add to that, Chair, that echoing the testimony, that was submitted by the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, that there seem to be inherent challenges with operating the horse-drawn carriages in New York City, in a busy urban environment in situations where we have exacerbated weather situations now because of climate change. I think these do pose inherent challenges to the industry that is a part of this conversation.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. During the fatal incident in June, the driver stepped away from the carriage. We understand that this goes against safety protocols and violates DOT rules, which require the driver to hold the reins at all

times. Are these safety protocols identified in the horse-drawn carriage operator's course?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: They are. It is also— it is very clear in the Administrative Code as well that the drivers are required— are prohibited from leaving the horse unattended. It is covered in our course.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How is the curriculum for the course developed and what experts are consulted on its development?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The course was developed by our equine veterinarians in consultation with many others, with, for example, the ASPCA, NYPD, and our agency colleagues because it covers- it addresses the regulations that live in many other agencies' codes.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is DOHMH considering any updates to its protocols to prevent future incidents?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The laws, the regulations, and the protocols are all designed to prohibit the incidents. We conduct outreach and education. We have delivered notices to the stables

for posting to remind drivers that they cannot leave the horse unattended.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would add to that as well. I think that the administration is certainly open to changes we can make, marginal changes we can make around the edges to try and reform this industry in the short term. But the long-term question I think is, is what is paramount right now. And winding down the industry. Ultimately, I think that if there's— in general, in the work that we do at DCWP, if there's business activity that is causing harm, we can't necessarily think first of, like, how do we facilitate the activity continuing. I think our first question, the hard question the government has to ask itself, is how do we stop the harm? And so I think that's part of the- that's, that's how we want to approach this, with the guiding principles, of course, of ensuring that worker outcomes are protected, that the animal outcomes are protected as well.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. The horse-drawn carriage operators course is offered four times a year. In 2025, how many people enrolled in the course?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I do want to note that we have not been able to meet that four-time-a-year offering of late. We have equine veterinarians on contract. We have not been able to hire a staff person to fulfill that role. So we are a little constrained in being able to offer it four times a year. In 2025, 18 people took the course.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So how many times a year do you do it, since you don't have the—

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: [interposing] It has varied. So let me get you- let me get you the the last couple of years, but it has varied because of the staffing constraints.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is that being addressed? I mean, I know we have this bill on the— but is that being addressed?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We have been actively recruiting for an equine veterinarian.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: And just to reiterate, we do have equine veterinarians there, just on a contract, and so that that can hamper the number of times we can offer the course.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Drivers speak multiple languages including Spanish, Turkish, and Tajik. In what languages is the course offered and are there gaps in language access?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: There are— there are gaps in language access. It is an English language course.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is there a fee to register for the course? What about for any course materials or examinations?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: It is a $25 course.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And that includes course materials and everything else, or—

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I think that's the total course—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: cost, but if there's something additional, I'll correct that, but I believe it's a total of $25.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Please describe the practical examination component of the course. What does this exam consist of, and who conducts it?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The practical exam is conducted by an equine veterinarian with a horse. And the driver needs to demonstrate, for example, the proper fitting of the bridle and the harness, proper hitching and unhitching, managing and control of the horse.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: The committee has heard from many animal sanctuaries across the country that have stated they are willing to accept the horses in the event that the industry is phased out. Is DOHMH equipped to coordinate with city agencies, sanctuaries, and animal welfare organizations to transition horses to safe and caring homes, and to ensure that none are sold or disposed of in a manner that leads to slaughter or mistreatment?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the bill would require the Health Department to collect information about sanctuaries and similar organizations and people, and to provide that information to the owners and then to collect certifications from the owners about the disposition of their horse. We are reviewing the bill, so we don't have exactly the details for how we would

implement that, but we would be prepared to implement should the bill pass.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: That's what I'm asking you, if you're prepared and do you need- do you need other resources to facilitate that?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We haven't fully evaluated the requirements of the bill. We are still reviewing.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: How many staff positions does DOHMH dedicate to carriage horses?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So we have six inspectors who work on this industry but also other animal-related industries. And then we have, you know, program leads, administrative staff, and then equine veterinarians on contract.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If the council enacts Intro 943, does DOHMH have a plan to transition those staff?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So these staff work on a number of different programs, and so there's no concern about having them— there will be other work for them to do.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Please describe how DOHMH communicates and works with DCWP to enforce

local laws governing the carriage horse industry. Is there a multi-agency team that regularly coordinates on enforcement, trainings, and emergency response?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We do communicate regularly with the many agencies that have a role in oversight of the industry.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would add to that, I know I've personally participated in a citywide task force that is essential— that is focused on Central Park and issues as it relates to particularly horse-drawn carriages. That also- work happens in coordination with local stakeholders as well.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Are any other agencies such as Parks and NYPD involved in this process?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes, they are. They both are.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: The Rental Horse Advisory Board is required to advise the Commission on regulations affecting the health, safety, and welfare of carriage horses and the public. Has the Advisory Board met in recent years, and if so, what

recommendations or actions has it taken to improve passenger safety?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the Advisory Board is established in the local law. It has been constituted. There isn't a formal role for the Health Department beyond once the Health Commissioner has designated the members. So we are aware of meetings, but we don't have a role in those meetings, so I can't speak to really their meeting schedule. There have— they have not delivered recommendations to the Commissioner, the Health Commissioner in many, many years.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: The Rental Horse Advisory Board is required to advise the Commissioner on regulations affecting the health, safety, and welfare of carriage horses in the public. What? Oh, I did? I'm sorry. Oh yeah, sorry about that. Does the agency envision any potential challenges should Intro 943 be enacted?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We are continuing to review the bill, but as you have heard from both Deputy Commissioner Ortiz and myself, the administration supports the bill with some interest

in continuing to discuss some of the provisions with the council.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, I'm going to ask some questions for you, Carlos. How many active carriage owner licenses exist currently? Our research shows the number at 52.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: There are 68 carriage licenses currently, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright. How many carriages are currently in operation?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'm not sure how much are operating throughout the day, but there's 68 that are authorized to work.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is that number different than the number of owner licenses?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: 68 should correspond to the— it is the owner license.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. But does that differ from what's in operation? That's what I'm asking.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: So there are 68 licenses that relate to the carriage. Those are the owner licenses. There are 208 licenses for drivers. I wouldn't say every driver is operating

every day. The carriages, I think it fluctuates based on what the owner wants to put out that day.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What is the average value of a carriage owner license?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Now we looked over the bills of sales. I think on average, there's— over the many years, there's maybe $70,000 approximately. I think that that could fluctuate. It could be— there could be different negotiating terms in each contract. So, it's something we can continue to evaluate with the council.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Are owner licenses transferable? If so, how?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: They are transferable. Right now there's a cap on the category that I think was instituted 10 or so years ago. It requires an agreement between the previous owner and then the new one and the notification to the agency as well.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What happens to an owner license if it expires? Can it be renewed?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes, if- I believe we were able to issue up to the cap, which is

68. So if there's an expiration, we'd be able to issue a license.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Can expired licenses be recovered in any way?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: There's typically— once there's a- there's typically a grace period we provide after an expiration to allow a business to come back in and renew. This is applicable to all of our categories. The grace period is 59 days. If you're coming back for a license after the 59-day period, generally you're going to have to get a new license.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you. Council Member Marte.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Chair. Last year the Department of Health ordered an independent veterinarian to inspect the stables and test the horses. What was the process in choosing that veterinarian?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: In late 2025, the Health Department undertook a pilot initiative to conduct exams, clinical exams, as part of our stable inspection. So we put out a solicitation broadly to sending it to equine

veterinarians we could identify in New York State and the surrounding states. We- there was one response.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Okay. And so you say that this veterinarian was completely independent from the administration, willing to do the work with an independent mindset?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The veterinarian who responded to the solicitation met the requirements of the solicitation, which was that they were not- we wanted someone who was not engaged already in the industry.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: And can you elaborate on the investigation and the findings of the veterinarian?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The veterinarian did an assessment of 12 horses, and following the same- the administrative code sets out really a lot of the details, the details for the assessment that a veterinarian needs to do of the horse to show that the horse is fit to work in the industry. And so this veterinarian was doing that same assessment with the caveat that it— these assessments were conducted in the stable. So there were some limitations, because of that environment.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: And is 12 an average amount of inspection of horses that typically happen, or is that far below the average if someone were to go and investigate fully the stables and the horses?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The pilot program that we did at the end of 2025 looked at— was completed for 12 horses.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Okay. I have a question for Mr. Ortiz. Would the administration be open to a shorter phase-out period if we included worker protections that will allow workers to find new employment sooner?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think we would have to discuss. I'm certainly encouraged by the perspective of ensuring that we have pathways for workers. I think on balance we'd have to review the bill in totality to see if a shorter phase-out is accomplished— it was something we can accomplish. But I think we're very much open to ideas right now on the table for this.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: One final question. I'll come back. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Ask the one final question, but we're trying to keep on time here because we have a lot of people testifying.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I resp— I don't need to ask this question.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You sure?

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I respect that.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Alright. Council member- before I do that, I just want to say one thing. You know, I'm a big fan of- well, two things. One is we've been joined by Council Member Hanif. The other is that I'm a big fan of DOHMH, but I'm disappointed at the data questions that we asked that we didn't get answers to, because those questions were submitted to you guys beforehand. So I just want to make mention of that. I'm going to ask Councilmember Epstein to ask questions.

CHAIRPERSON EPSTEIN: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Speaker. Can I just ask about the six staff? You said they are working in other industries. What percentage of their time are dealing with horse issues for the six staff?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I don't have a percentage of time. I would estimate what's probably equivalent to one FTE.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: One FTE for all the horses? Great. Thank you very much. Carlos, can I talk about the transitions? You flagged the concerns about making sure there's sufficient worker protections in this transition. When you say that, when you say worker protections, do you mean helping them transition to a new industry or transition into a related industry just without the horses?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think it's really about securing outcomes for the workers. So I think a transition into employment, I think, is something that we'd be interested in exploring. I know it's come up in our conversations with labor partners. I know the bill already contemplates workforce development, for example.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Right.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: So I think that's what we're referring to.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So, workforce development, but you- they could be in this industry

like tourism or within a separate industry? Is that what you're flagging?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think– well, I think part of that conversation needs to happen with workers as well in terms of what industries they wanna be moving into. And, yeah, I think that's an important question for them. I think we are certainly open to facilitating what outcomes they need.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: And what is your timeline for that? Just so— obviously this is, you know, a pressing issue. Unfortunately, we've already just had a loss of life. So are you thinking that conversations are going to be happening in the next couple of weeks?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think the conversations are already happening on this, and I think the timeline will have to align with the prospective timeline for this bill to engage in legislative process.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Alright, thank you very much, and thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I do– Chair, I just want to clarify my comment on the work on our

staff was about our health inspectors. There are other staff who work in the industry– who work on this industry as well, reviewing documentation, and as I mentioned, our equine veterinarians.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Yeah, one full-time equivalent of person going out for a health—

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: [interposing] For the health inspector. I just want to make sure that was clear.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: For the health inspector, exactly.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Thank you. Helpful. Thank you. Council Member Wilson?

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for your testimony. So I live across the street from the stables in Hell's Kitchen. I— they— the stables are called— are homed in District 3. So I see the horses quite a bit walking to and from the park every morning. And, you know, my partner is a lifelong equestrian, so horse care is like very important to me and my family. So I have a couple of questions about the transition for the

horses. I respect that you said you're still putting this together, but you mentioned in your testimony that you would collect information about the sanctuaries or I guess retirement farms, that these horses would go to. So, approximately how long will that process take? And once that's given to the drivers, will that be the list of who they can go to, or would they be allowed to find other homes for the horses?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the bill specifies the— gives the department direction for information to collect and to provide to the owners. We are still looking at that, and should the bill pass, which as you know we support with caveats, we would be refining that process.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: So would there be any— once the horse is there, is thought to how— would there be any follow-up at the sanctuaries or retirement homes, retirement farms, to ensure that they are indeed being taken care of?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So I think we're continuing to review the bill to assess that.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: Okay. I guess my point is that, you know, it's very nice to say that

they, you know, they'll be transitioned and sent to a retirement farm or sanctuary, but oftentimes there's more to it than that for the well-being of the horses. The transition from one environment to another can be disruptive, and we'd want to just make sure that they are actually being taken care for, and it's not just a line written on the page, but something the city continues to follow up on to ensure.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think that point is well taken, Council Member. And we're also encouraged that our colleagues in the Mayor's Office on Animal Welfare have already received outreach from equestrian sanctuaries to engage in this work. But I think, even as we phase out, it'll have to be an interdisciplinary and multi-agency effort and ensuring, for example, that that office is involved and running checks on this is important too.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: Okay, thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Council Member Morano.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Chair, for your willingness to hold this hearing. I know

it's been a long time coming. I also want to thank the Speaker for her leadership on this issue. I know it takes a lot of courage to be the first sitting Speaker to take this particular position on this issue. But aside from taking a position that I happen to agree with, I want to commend you for the really responsible way in which you're addressing concerns about job loss and things of that nature and not seeking to demagogue the issue at all. And it's a— it's a tough thing to do, and I want to thank you for your leadership on that. I'd also be remiss if I didn't mention the leadership of former Councilman Holden. And had we acted on this legislation when he was in the council, perhaps a young man would still be alive today. That being said, thank you, Deputy Commissioner, for your testimony. And to the extent that you need Mr. Ortiz to assist you with my questions, please just have him do so. I want to start with something in your testimony that really jumped out at me. You tell us the health department reviews health certificates. You check that horses are examined every four to eight months. You review furlough records. You make periodic observations. You monitor you issue weather-related suspensions, and

you actually conduct the training course that aspiring carriage drivers must complete. That's a lot of regulation, and yet an 18-year-old young man is dead. So I want to ask you a question that I don't mean rhetorically at all. At what point does a regulator have an obligation to say, well, we've regulated this activity as much as we reasonably can, and the inherent risk remains?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So I would say that the Health Department is exercising the authority that the City Council has given to us. And my understanding is that is— your question is why we are here today.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Right. And because I keep hearing proposals for another inspection, another training requirement, another rule, another layer of enforcement. I'm wondering, can you identify for me a regulation that would eliminate a horse's instinct to bolt when frightened?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think– I think, Councilmember, this is— I would say this is probably the third administration I've worked in now where we as an administration are supportive of winding down this industry. And I think your point is

well taken that, you know, we could be working on the margins to try and address what's happening in the industry to find short-term solutions, but ultimately we as administration are supportive of a long-term solution that protects the conditions of workers, the horses, and New Yorkers.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Let me ask you something else, and I'll be considerate of everyone else's time. If there were no horse-drawn carriage industry in New York City today, and someone came to your department with a proposal to create one, to place large prey animals in one of the most heavily visited urban parks in the world, attach open passenger carriages to them, and sell rides to to the public, knowing everything your department knows today, would the health department recommend that the city approve that new industry?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: It is- you're in the— what you imply is well taken, and I think as my colleague is saying, that is why we are here today.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thanks very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much, Council Member Morano. Next is Council Member Narcisse.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, Chair, and first foremost, thank you, Madam Speaker, and the family. I feel you. Thank you so much for being here, being present, and using the time to let us know what's going on with you. It's difficult time, and as a mother of four, I can feel you sitting here. Now, is it difficult for me to even— Let me go to the question. This is a— the– you know, listening to you is just in my head. What is the administration's plan for the horses themselves, rehoming, sanctuaries, placement oversight, and who is financially responsible for that transition? That's one. The bill that we have here in our hands focus on the licensing of the drivers. What happens to the stable— I mean, the stable hands and other workers– Local 100 and the union have said the industry supports. Are they eligible for any of this transition benefits? Third, what specific industries or role is DCWP targeting for placement? Is this a real pipeline into union jobs or a genetic resume workshop program? Do you know?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I'll start with the questions about the horses, and the bill is quite detailed, directing the health department to collect information about where the horses might go and to provide that information to the owners and then requiring that the owners certify to the disposition of the horses and provide that certification to the Health department. We are still reviewing those provisions and to determine exactly how we would do that should the bill pass. And as Deputy Commissioner Ortiz mentioned, and I agree, we would work very closely with the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare on that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: And I would add, Council Member, you know, the bill already describes a workforce development program for horse-drawn carriage drivers and other workers engaged in the business of operating such horse-drawn cabs. To me, that— I mean, I'm encouraged that the council has already drafted or is keeping these workers in mind, both the drivers and the stablehands. I think we want to make sure that that is preserved throughout a final version of the bill

in whichever mechanism we decide to be able to support the workers.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Tough one. What could have done here in this situation to prevent the death of this young man?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: You know, as the Speaker eloquently articulated, this was preventable. The council has set out a law that clearly says that a horse must be attended to, cannot be left unattended.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And one life is too many. Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. A couple of questions. One is just in terms of how does Health Department and NYPD, how do they communicate? You said that when there is a situation where the Health Department has perhaps given some summonses, but the NYPD does the actual violations depending on the situation. How does that communication take place?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We're in regular communication with NYPD, particularly on days

days like today and yesterday where we know it's— we're most likely going to meet those reach those weather thresholds, those temperature and humidity thresholds. So it is routine. What I— what I meant to say about the summonses is that we are not necessarily at the HAC stands at the time that those suspensions occur. So in order to provide the Chair with full information about violations, I wanted to be able to get that to talk to NYPD first.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so you basically back and forth with email situations?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: Emails, phone calls, you know, not only during the business day, off hours, weekends. It is a regular communication.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, go ahead.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'll also add- I'm sorry, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Go ahead, Carlos.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would just add to the processes of having this joint task force that we've had centralized in Central Park. The DCWP has also facilitated training that we provide Central Park, and Parks Enforcement Patrol as well on what

issues they need to look out for as they conduct their on-street or in-park enforcement.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you. Other cities— in the briefing paper talks about Philly and other places. My issue is workers. In some cases they've had job fairs. They're much smaller numbers. I think it were 10 people who actually— or Chicago was even fewer. But have you looked to see what worker programs have been effective in other cities, or they're too small to even consider? Because you have obviously many more.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We— thus far, the DCWP has not looked into other worker programs. I know we've had initial conversations with our colleagues, such as at the Mayor's Office of Talent Workforce Development that will have feedback on how to build a sustainable program. But I think if there's lessons to be learned from other municipalities about how they transitioned out, we are certainly open to taking that feedback.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I mean, obviously the briefing paper had some— you could get the same, but there were some ideas there. I've been on this bill- I've been in the City Council, 2002, a long

time. And I've been on this bill except when there was an electric car. I am absolutely opposed to any car more in Central Park. I'm the author of the bill to get them out. So I want to make sure that the administration is not talking about electric cars or anything like it in terms of this discussion.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I, thus far, have had no conversations on my end related to electric cars.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Health Department?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: Nor have I, and I did not see that in the bill.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I know it's not in the bill. I want to make sure nobody pops up with it. Okay, and then the other— so we got workers, horses, jobs, and tourists. And so I am supportive of tourists using pedicabs. Is that something that you support? Have you had any thoughts about it? Obviously, we have legislation that hasn't been finalized, but we're thinking about it. Is that something that you think could address the need for tourists? I take pedicabs. You should see me, I know how to do it. But I know how to organize how much I

pay. So I'm just wondering what you're thinking about tourism for the future in Central Park.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think pedicabs will still be an ongoing activity that's happening in Central Park. You know, I did notice, a few months back, I think that the Midtown Community Justice Center released a report of recommendations as it relates to the pedicab industry. I think many of the recommendations in there were well taken, and certainly if we're looking to strengthen or improve the pedicab industry as a substitute in the future, DCWP will be ready to engage in that conversation too.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. I had a lot to do with that report, so I appreciate it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Council Member Hanif?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, Chair. I just want to begin by talking to the Mahajan family. Thank you for being here. I'm so sorry for your loss, and thank you for trusting the council with Romanch's story. I'm thinking of you and your family, and passing this piece of legislation is the

most important thing that must come out of today's hearing, and we're grateful that the speaker and our mayor are supportive. I'd like to know, what oversight does DOHMH currently have over the health and welfare of carriage horses, and what are the limits of that authority? And if you could keep it brief. It's a big question.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The [inaudible] is quite specific in the role— in setting out the role of the health department and what we can require from the industry. So there is- as I mentioned in my testimony, that's highlighting some of the key areas. The horse owners are required to have veterinary exams every four to eight months and to submit certifications of those exams to us. We are reviewing those. They are required to submit documentation showing proof of vacation furlough five weeks a year at a place where there is a pasture opportunity for turnout. The license is renewable. So there's all of those things that we are checking.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it. And then is there a standardized criteria for determining when a horse is not fit?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: There— we have a form. We have a certification form that a veterinarian licensed in New York State signs off on. And our equine veterinarian reviews those.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: How frequently are vets checking horses' health?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the owners' vets have—

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] Is there a DOHMH vet and then an owner's vet? And what's the frequency?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the Administrative Code requires a veterinarian check every four to eight months. The owners have veterinarians who check their horses. We have veterinarians who over— who review those certifications. A veterinarian would also— we also, as I noted earlier, when we have reason to think that there's need for an assessment of a horse because of our observation or something referred to us by NYPD or we are observing based on a complaint, we will also direct the owner to have the veterinarian, its veterinarian, assess the horse.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And are you able to share how many violations DOHMH issued over the last five years for non-compliance or adherence to the many forms and check-ins?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I have the— I have 2023 through April 2026. So for lacking a record of a medical exam or the exam not within the time frame, we've issued 17 summonses. Missing proof of five weeks of furlough, we have 12.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I'll come back for a second round.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Council Member Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Chair. A question regarding the mayor's executive order. Let me get to that. Mayor Eric Adams issued Executive Order 56 in September 2025 directing your agency, that's DCWP, to identify alternative employment for carriage workers. Between September 2025 and today, were any workers contacted, and how many were offered services, and how many were placed in new jobs? Please answer that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Thank you for the question, Council Member. Well, my understanding

at the time is the First Deputy Mayor's office actually ended up taking the lead on engaging with the industry on winding down pursuant to the executive order. And I know they engaged in active conversations, particularly with labor partners, but also had staff operating in the field in Central Park to liaise with workers. That's my understanding of the touchpoint of what Mayor's- the Adams administration ended up doing under that executive order.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: So that's not the responsibility of DCW to reach out, the carriage workers?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We work closely with them to provide them contact information, data, and then the mayor's office ended up taking the lead on the next steps on that. You know, I think as I mentioned as well earlier in my testimony, workforce development is not necessarily something that DCWP currently administers or engages in. There are other agencies across the city that do that work, and I think are part of the conver— a part of the administration's now response to implementing this bill. Alright, thank you. Question on the— for

DOHMH. Your agency has been responsible for inspecting and licensing carriage horses in the city. The horse rider was cleared as fit to work, yet was found to be nearly 30 years old and suffering from a neurological pathological disease. The horse Lady died in the street. Another horse Deniz died in the park. Question, how many inspections were conducted on each of these horses in the 12 months before their deaths? And what did those inspections actually find? Please answer that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So, for Deniz, I did want to note that our- the report following Deniz's death, as everyone will probably remember, was that that horse had ingested a toxic plant. And I did want to highlight that our course for drivers includes the Parks Department requirement that horses not disturb the vegetation.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Well, there were— were there any inspections done on these horses-

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: [interposing] So we can pull up—

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: before they died?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We can pull up the certifications that the horses' veterinarians would have provided to us in order to be licensed.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you very much. Council Member Ariola?

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for coming to testify. So I have a question. I would want to go back to the vet. Who is the contracted vet for the Department of Health?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: We have multiple contracted veterinarians.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Okay. Who would be one that is a large animal veterinarian, an equine veterinarian?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The veteran— the veterinarians— we have other veterinarians. The veterinarians I've been speaking about are equine veterinarians.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Do you know the names of those veterinarians? Or the one that you mo— use most of the time?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: There are multiple veterinarians that— equine veterinarians that we work with.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: And do you have their names?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I would rather not provide their names here.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Why would that be?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: The equine veterinarians work with us at the Health Department under contract, and I would prefer not to provide their names.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: Is the reason why you do not want to provide their names is because they have been suspended in the past, or relieved from their position at the ASPCA, or have any type of history of using steroids in horses, or submitting certificates that— of examination for horses to the department without doing those exams? Would that be why you wouldn't want to mention their names?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I'm not aware of those- the implications that you're making. I don't— I'm trying to protect their privacy.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: This is an issue that is very important because part and parcel of why this legislation is so important is because we're just as concerned about the health of the horses, the

health and well-being of the horses, and if we have compromised veterinarians that are checking the health of the horses before they're going out onto the street, then that is a problem. That is why it's important that this committee— and perhaps you'd like to share those names with the Chair privately so that it's not made public.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: I understand. I appreciate that. I do want to say that the veterinarians- the veterinarians that certify the horses as fit to work are are not Health Department veterinarians. Those are the veterinarians that the owners engage to be the veterinarians for their own horses. And I don't have— I don't have their names, but we would be happy to communicate privately.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: So, then what oversight do you have over the veterinarians that the owners choose to examine their horses, which could benefit them if they got a very good health report on their horse?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the horses need to be licensed in New York state and to sign off under their license. But again, to just

remind everybody, we are here to support the intent of this bill.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARIOLA: We are here to provide reasons why the intent of this bill is necessary. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Council Member. Council Member De La Rosa?

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you, Chair. First, I want to thank the Chair and the Speaker for their leadership on this issue. Certainly one that is important for us to be taking up today. I'm the former Labor Chair of this council, and so last session we had a spirited discussion around labor protections, and it is a part of the bill that I am interested in us digging into. Would you agree, Commissioners, that the horse-drawn carriage industry is part of the tourism industry in New York City?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think historically it's been a part of the tourist industry in New York City, yes. Even including in new outreach materials that we've developed at the agency pursuant to council legislation, we've incorporated information on horse-drawn carriages.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Great. And I want to also join the choir of council members. I think all of us are reeling over the death of Romanch, and his family's pain is something that we all feel. A lot of us here on the council are parents. Those of us that aren't parents can certainly see the pain and the anguish in these families' lives after this incident. I want to ask you, however, about other families that have experienced similar deaths in New York City due to tourism-related activities. In April 10th, 2025, a sightseeing helicopter crashed into the Hudson and six tourists in New York City were killed. In July 2021, a pedicab driver was hit by an SUV. The pedicab driver passed, and the two people who were in the pedicabs were injured. Would the administration also be in favor of banning those industries as they exist today in New York City?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Thank you for the question, Councilmember. You know, I think– to answer your question directly, this is not something we're prepared to talk to you about today or– and not something that we've been presented on to discuss. I don't think we're there yet necessarily with those

industries. Albeit I think we're open to any types of reforms, I could say to the pedicab industry, for example. I think when it comes to horse-drawn carriages, I think your initial question, is it a part of the tourist industry in New York City? Yes. I think what this hearing is about is, should it be? And our position is that it should not be. Ultimately, there's a tragic death, and I'm a father as well, and I can't imagine the pain that the family's feeling right now. And on top of that, there's been deaths of animals, and it's seemingly happening every year. After robust efforts that many administrations have made to try and reform this industry, I think we are past the point of reform of the industry, and we're now at a place of looking to wind down the industry, keeping in mind the livelihoods of workers and how we can phase those out responsibly as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: I appreciate your response. I would urge us to also look at those other industries because one death is one too many, whether it's a human death, an animal death, a person on a helicopter's death. You know, all of these people come to New York City to take advantage of the

amenities that New York City have to offer. And these activities have been part of the cultural and touristic experiences of people who come all over the world to visit our city. So as we look to reform this industry, we should also be taking a look at those other industries. I know Gale is brave and will get in a pedicab, but if an accident happens two years from now in a pedicab in Central Park, then we will be in this same position. And I maintain that if previous administrations would have done what they needed to do, in 2026 we would not be here having this conversation once again. It's easy to say we could have passed a bill one year ago, we could have passed a bill 10 years ago, and still here we are in 2026. So it is on all of us as we legislate to also look at what future industry issues could arise, so that we're not creating a situation where we're ending one industry in exchange for another industry that is equally unsafe.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, DCWP, I should say, has never shied away from a hard conversation about what we have to do in the city to improve outcomes for New Yorkers. And in particularly, I would just stress that the ethos of

our agency is to deliver concrete outcomes that improve the lives of New Yorkers. So if that's a conversation that the council wants to have about those industries that we regulate in particular, I am quite willing to have that conversation.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Great. I appreciate it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Council Member Feliz?

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you, Chair, for this hearing, and thank you, DOH and DCWP, for your testimony and for all the work you've been doing on this issue. I just want to start by briefly speaking in favor of the legislation. We've seen a lot of issues related to these horse carriages, animal welfare issues, including horses literally dying in our streets. Also escalating public safety incidents, including the incident that we saw last month. These are issues that cannot be resolved through legislation or reform or training. We have to do what's right. So just want to thank everyone who has joined today and also everyone who has been in this fight since day one. So a few questions first about— on the workers and also then

on the horses. So you mentioned there's approximately 170 workers in the horse carriage industry?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say that there are 208 licensed horse carriage drivers. My understanding from some reporting is that not all of those folks are actively engaged in the work. And then, I don't know if we have a count necessarily yet on the amount of folks involved in the stables.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Is this seasonal work, or is it year-round work? And also, what's the general salary?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: What was the last part of the question? I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: What's their average salary for these workers?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'm not sure if I'm aware of the salary. I think that would be helpful to learn through this hearing process. I think we see horse-drawn carriages out there throughout the year. Albeit there are limitations when there are severe weather conditions that my colleague referred to on when they can operate. There are also time restrictions that have been put in place. There are geographic restrictions that have

been put in place in this industry over the very many years.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Right, so would you say this is seasonal employment? Let's say like 8 months out of the 12 months per year?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'm not sure if I can speak to if it's seasonal or not.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Would you say it could potentially be possible to- for example, if it's 200 workers, we obviously have a lot, as you know, we obviously have a lot of vacancies in almost every single city agency. Do you think it could potentially be possible to bring all of these workers to our city agencies, or do we see any obstacles that are foreseeable?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'm not- I know that the city hiring process itself- I guess it would depend on what role, and certainly people can apply to positions that are available right now. They can sign up for civil service exams right now. These, these- this option already exists for workers across the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: A few questions related to the horses. How many incidents related to

medical issues have we had in the last more or less two years that you're aware of?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCHIFF: So the administrative code does not require reporting to us of medical incidents. So that is part of the challenge in responding to some of the data questions. We certainly follow the news and get complaints that we follow up on and get referrals from NYPD. The administrative code does not allow horses to be worked when they are ill or injured. So, that's part of why we don't— why we don't have a count. There have been counts in the press of incidents, and we would have those same counts based on our review of new— you know, the news that we monitor.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Give us one second. We're trying to see— we think one of our- one of the members is online. We're just trying to check on that. So give us a second. No. Alright. I want to thank the admin. We're going take a five-minute break, and then we're gonna resume with the rest of the testimony. Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Thank you, Chair.

[break]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Ladies and gentlemen, please find your seats. The hearing's about to re-begin. Ladies and gentlemen, quiet on the Floor. Find your seats, please. The hearing's about to start again. Please find your seats. Thank you. Please find your seats. Please take conversations outside. Quiet on the floor, quiet on the floor, please, please find your seats, please find your seats. We will be starting momentarily.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [gavel] Alright, everyone, we're back in session. I want to call up— want to call up State Senator Eric Bottcher.

SENATOR BOTTCHER: It's just me up here.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: It's just you because you're— I don't know, your colleagues were supposed to come. I don't know where they are, but go ahead.

SENATOR BOTTCHER: Good morning, Chair Schulman, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I represent New York State District— New York State Senate District 47,

which includes Hell's Kitchen, where the horse carriage stables are located, and parts of Central Park where these carriages operate every day. And every day, I and my colleagues who also represent this district— Council Member Carl Wilson, Council Member Brewer, we witness 1,500-pound animals pulling carriages nose to tailpipe through Manhattan gridlock, behind buses, trucks, taxis, through construction sites. And I've watched this issue unfold firsthand. Our district has been the site of multiple horse carriage deaths. Including Ryder and Lady. And after years of seeing these tragedies repeat themselves, I've reached one unavoidable conclusion: the status quo is not sustainable. And then, of course, we witnessed what so many of us feared would happen eventually— the loss of human life. Romanch came to New York to experience the world's greatest city. Instead, his family experienced the most unimaginable tragedy. His death made clear what many of us have known for years, what the Central Park Conservancy has been saying, that tourist horse carriages are fundamentally incompatible with modern Midtown Manhattan. I want to make a very important point, that this bill is the

best path forward for the workers. Now is the time to help them transition before the industry's decline leaves them with fewer options. Waiting only makes this transition harder. As we move forward, the carriage drivers must be part of this process. They must be kept informed every step of the way and have a seat at the table and be given access to new employment opportunities with the wages, benefits, healthcare, and job security that they do not currently have. Finally, I want to say that it is so important that we do not demonize each other during this process. That includes the drivers, the stable owners, the union, the animal welfare advocates, and the elected officials. I want to thank my former colleagues in the City Council for supporting this legislation. I know firsthand that this is not an easy issue. When I was a sponsor of this bill, I had full-page ads taken out against me in the New York Post, and they were really nasty. But leadership sometimes comes with a political cost, and I want to thank all of you for your courage. And I know that one day we'll look back at this moment and be proud that New York City chose compassion, safety, and

common sense. I urge you to pass this legislation as soon as possible. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Senator. I was— I apologize, I was supposed to read something before the Senator spoke, so I'll do it now. I want to thank the members of the administration who were here earlier. We are now opening the hearing for public testimony. I want to remind members of the public that this is a government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times. The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Furthermore, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recording to the Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on Introduction 943. If you have a written— oh. If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for

the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of the adjournment of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted. What? Oh, okay. I said— Yeah, no. I'm going to ask Assemblymember Rosenthal to please come up and testify. Thank you. Go ahead.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER ROSENTHAL: Turn this on.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, it's on now.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER ROSENTHAL:Great, great. Speaker Menin, Chair Schulman, Council Member Marte, esteemed members of the Health Committee, good afternoon. I'm Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal. I'm Chair of the Assembly Housing Committee, and I proudly represent the Upper West Side and parts of Hell's Kitchen, as well as parts of Central Park, where tragically Romach Mahajan, an 18-year-old tourist from India, died after being thrown from a horse carriage on June 17th, 2026. I'm also an ardent animal rights champion who has passed many laws protecting the rights and lives of New York's most defenseless creatures. Yet despite our collective progress, we still have much to accomplish when it

comes to protecting the city's carriage horses from injury and abuse. And the way to safeguard these majestic creatures is to finally phase out the industry by passing Romanch's Law. In 2011, to combat the rising scourge of deaths and injuries of horses on our streets, I introduced state legislation to ban the use of horse carriages. My intention was to spur the city to take action, but up until today, despite promises and agreements, traffic collisions and dead horses, no bill has passed. But no one gave up. Charlie, Tickler, Billy, Blackjack, Lady, Deniz, Spotty, Juliet, Smoothie, Clancy, Tommy, Ayesha, Misty, and Ryder, those are the names of some of the horses that have died in New York City as a result of their forced employment. There have been more than 100 documented incidences of other horses being badly injured on the job. Some have been hit by cars, motorcycles, and buses. Others have been badly spooked, endangering the lives of riders, carriage drivers, pedestrians, and of course the horses themselves. We can't wait for more horses or people to die on the streets in order to act. Cities across the globe have far fewer tourist distractions, have shown us we don't have to tolerate animal abuse to

churn a profit. I will wind up by saying the New York City Council and the administration can put an end to this cruelty once and for all. It's amazing what a change in administration and leadership can do. I applaud Council Member Marte, all the co-sponsors, and of course the Speaker for putting forth this bill that will not only ban this archaic practice, it will also help to transition current carriage drivers into new jobs. One last thing: today would not be possible without the unyielding support and dedication to this issue by all the advocates and to the many horses who have lost their lives. Thank you for honoring the life of Romanch Mahajan. We will ensure that his death will not be in vain. It's high time we join other countries and cities in refusing to accept abuse as the cost of doing business. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much, Assemblymember.

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, no clapping, folks, no- you can go like this, but no clapping. Alright. Okay. Okay, now I'm going to call up the next panel, which is Ashley Byrne, Ashley Byrne.

Ashley Byrne here? Edie Falco? Bob Holden? Edita? Birnkrant? Oh, and then this is going to be a hybrid panel, folks. We also have somebody— Dr. Craig Kulikowski [sp?] is going to be joining us remotely. Yeah, sure. Who's going first? Edita? Yeah, go ahead.

ASHLEY BYRNE: Thank you, members. My name is Ashley Byrne, and I am here speaking on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. You cannot regulate the abuse and danger out of the horse-drawn carriage industry. It is cruel and reckless to force a horse, a prey animal, to live and work in the noise, traffic, and chaos of New York City. The carriage operators fight and flout the most mild and common-sense rules with little to no enforcement from the city, as you've heard today. Oversight is almost nonexistent. Lame, sick, emaciated, elderly horses are regularly documented being forced to pull carriages. This hearing is taking place in the middle of what has already proved to be a deadly summer delivered by the horse-drawn carriage industry. The life of 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan was tragically added to the long death toll of horses whose lives have been claimed by this industry. Some are names that we know well. The

footage of Ryder, Lady, and Deniz collapsing in our streets sparked widespread outrage and calls for a ban. Many more have died in anonymity, often sold to slaughter after spending their days in traffic being worked to exhaustion and their nights in cramped, solitary parking garage-like buildings, denied everything natural, enriching, and comforting to them. New Yorkers have been fed up with this cruel, deadly industry for years, and polls have consistently shown that New Yorkers want the carriages banned. We applaud Speaker Julie Menin for listening to New Yorkers and taking courageous action to move this ban forward. Thank you to Council Member Christopher Marte for sponsoring the bill, to Committee Chair Lynn Schulman for holding this hearing, and to the committee members for your strong inquiries into the practices of this industry. And to the family of Romanch Mahajan, we send our deepest condolences and gratitude. It's time to pass Romanch's Law.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Ms. Falco?

EDIE FALCO: Hi, uh, oops. Like that?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

EDIE FALCO: Yeah. Hi, my name is Edie Falco. I am an actress and I'm an animal lover and advocate. For some reason I was asked to be here today to tell people how I feel about this. And I think I'm going to go way out on a limb here and say from the deepest part of my heart, these animals are not ours. These animals are not ours. They are not put on this planet to do our bidding. They're not for us to look at and say, "Oh, that one's going to pull me through the park, and this one I'm going to eat. And this one I'm going to wear, and this one I'm gonna experiment on for drugs." You know, this is the wrong meeting for this perhaps, but insofar as my animal advocacy, these are not our animals. They have the right to a God-given, if that's what you believe, life just as we do. I have a fantasy of us looking back on this in 200 years and saying, "Remember that when we had those big, beautiful, majestic animals pulling us on carriages?" The fact that there's anybody in this room that can look at an animal with the apparatus and the carriage and the people in the traffic and the sounds and the smells and the heat and say, sure, yeah, that's reasonable. The first time I saw that 40 years ago, I thought, what is

this? It's 40 years later. I've looked face to face with politicians in this city since then who have said, "No, we're on it, we're on it. It's our platform. We're going to make it happen." To be here, I'm going to say very quickly– I'm an empath. It's what I do for a living, and I can't always turn it off. And to listen to the Romanch's family and what they are going through knocked the wind out of me. I have an 18-year-old, and I came to this city as an 18-year-old with dreams and a life to start. It's 40 years later, and I've lived that dream 4,000 times over, and that I am here with the honor of potentially naming this law for Romanch, for the future he will not have and the dreams he will not get to realize, is the greatest honor of my lifetime. It's time, everybody. It's time. It's time. You can't pretend that you don't know what you know. That's it. Sorry. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, thank you very much. Bob Holden? Mr. Holden?

ROBERT HOLDEN: Yes, and good afternoon, Chair, and thank you for this hearing. And I want to thank Speaker Menin and Chris Marte for taking up the banner. My name is Bob Holden, and I had the honor of

representing District 30 in Queens from 2018 to 2025. And I'm the original author of the legislation before you today, the bill that began as Ryder's Law and is now rightfully Romanch's Law. I introduced this bill in 2022 after a horse named Ryder, nearly 30 years old, malnourished and suffering a disease, collapsed on 9th Avenue in a heat wave while his driver struck him with the reins. I spent the next four years begging the Council, the former Council that preceded this, for a hearing. Four years trying to get a hearing. Adrienne Adams, the Speaker, refused to allow it, flat out. And I was told that, that it would never get heard. A deal was made. Year after year, she personally blocked this bill from reaching the floor. No hearing, no vote, no voice. 70 percent of New Yorkers who supported it, they had no voice. The Conservancy, Central Park Conservancy supports it, endorsed it. The Mayor endorsed it. She still said no. Now I'm going to say something that's difficult to say, and the family, I know, is here, and my original bill would have banned horse-drawn carriages in New York City on June 1st of this year. Romanch died on June 17th. That should be chilling to the members listening. 16 days we're talking about.

That is the cost of four years of obstruction. An 18-year-old boy on his family's first trip to America celebrating his graduation is gone because this industry was allowed to keep operating 16 days past the date my bill would have shut it down. The hearing I fought for four years is now happening. The bill is in front of you. The public is behind you. Pass Romanch's law now. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Edita?

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Thank you, Committee. My name is Edita Birnkrant, Executive Director of NYCLASS. For more than a decade I've documented and reported the dangers of horse carriages, but today, rather than repeat any of that, I want to amplify a voice that deserves this council's attention. Anita McGill, whose family owned and operated Chateau Stables, once the largest horse stable in New York City for nearly 50 years, reached out to me because she says several carriage owners are now desperate for a way to leave this business before a ban goes into effect. "My name is Anita McGill. I am part of Chateau Stables, my family's business. We owned the largest fleet of horse and carriages at our stable at 608 West 48th Street. In 2018, we sold our stable and

semi-retired to our family farm. I've been asked to submit a statement by some current horse and carriage owners to seek some relief and get help for them to be offered an option to get out of the carriage business. My opinion talking with them is the quaint leisure horse and carriage ride is no longer like it used to be. They are now squeezing past CitiBikes, pedicabs, runners, baby strollers, and millions of extra park-goers. This is a safety issue. I feel there are no more safety solutions that can be applied to lower the risk of more and more accidents happening. Frederick Olmsted designed the park to be seen by horse and carriage. Yes, he did, but not in 2026. Central Park is totally different just in the past 10 years. It's exploded with millions more population and traffic. Business is way down, I hear from some owners. There is nobody applying for a horse and carriage license. Owners struggle to pay the board. What is the benefit? I hope the city allows the horse and carriage owners to get out graciously and compensate them so that they and their horses can live peacefully." Also, she made a point about hitching posts which Council Member Gennaro is obsessed with. Hitching posts to me are only a recipe

for more problems. It encourages drivers to walk away and leave the horses alone. Not every horse accepts being tethered. They can feel tension, panic, and back up and bust up what's behind them. Horses can rub their bridles off on hitching posts, creating a whole different set of problems. So I think, you know, please pass Romanch's Law, Intro 943. No more tragedies. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, before this panel goes anywhere, we have some council members that have questions. Council Member— Oh, I'm sorry, we have— sorry, we have the hybrid. I forgot. Dr. Craig Kulikowski, you have 2 minutes. Is he there? They don't— Dr. Kulikowski, are you online? He is? Do we have— are we having technical issues? Because he says he's online. Alright, we'll come back to him. In the meantime, Council Member Wong has questions, and we have another councilmember also with questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. Thank you, Chair. Councilman Holden, I still call you Councilman. Critics of this bill have argued it would destroy jobs, and when I was getting my water, someone also said— told me the same thing. As the

original author of the workforce provisions in this legislation, what is your response to that argument?

ROBERT HOLDEN: Well, first of all, there's a— there's some lies out there. Most of the drivers, the vast majority are independent contractors. That means they're not getting benefits. I'd like to know, I've asked TWU, how many union members actually are drivers, real drivers, independent contractors? How many are paying union dues? And what benefits do they get? So right now, I would say, in just talking to some of the drivers, they don't get any benefits. If they have city jobs, well-paying city jobs, they'll get health coverage, a pension, and they'll get other things that go along with regular jobs. It's a big scam that's going on. And why does— if the TWU would just reveal how many dues-paying union members they have, we might get somewhere. But we won't get that. I never got that in four years, over four years of actually trying to get some movement on this bill. So there's not great-paying jobs out there. These are day workers or independent contractors.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, um, Council Member Gennaro?

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I'm going to start to- from my right and go left. I wrote down some of the names. First would be to Ashley from PETA. When you found out, or when PETA found out that Deniz had— the horse Deniz had died from eating toxic Japanese yew plants. You being a premier animal rights organization, did you do anything?

ASHELY BYRNE: Yes, we pointed out that Deniz never should have been in Central Park in the first place, and that if his driver was attending to him properly, he wouldn't have been eating the vegetation in the first place.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Did you—

ASHLEY BYRNE: [interposing] And if his driver was following regulations, he wouldn't have eaten the vegetation.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Well, let's kind of expand this a little bit. So we have toxic plants in the park that are toxic to every species that is native to the park, species that migrate through the park, people walking their dogs in the park, stray

cats, whatever. Every single animal is subject to being poisoned or killed by Japanese yew. And as an animal rights organization, did you say anything to the Central Park Conservancy about this was not the kind of plant that should be in a park with such a diverse array of animals? Did you address the Conservancy? Forget about the horses right now because, you know, Deniz is already dead. Andn so- and I, you know, as someone who's been an equestrian for 60 years, I know that horses graze. Have you ever driven by a field of horses where even one was not grazing? That's not how this works. But anyway, moving to other animals. Did you have any concerns about any of the other animals in the park which your agency is supposedly all about. Yes or no?

ASHLEY BYRNE: Actually, what you just pointed out about horses grazing is precisely one of the reasons—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] Could you please answer my question?

ASHLEY BYRNE: they don’t belong in Central Park.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Did you—

ASHLEY BYRNE: [interposing] They're denied everything that-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Did you— PETA— did you—

ASHLEY BYRNE: [interposing] are forced to be in an environment where they—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] Hey, I get to ask the questions and you answer my questions. So my question is, did PETA do anything about the presence of toxic plants in the park?

ASHLEY BYRNE: Are you asking if we started a campaign to ban a plant?

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No clapping. No clapping, guys.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I asked the questions here, and-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Come on.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: when I heard about the plants, I issued a statement, I put in a bill request about toxic plants in New York City parks, and I wrote the— and I wrote the, you know,

Central Park Conservancy. So I guess I'm more of an animal lover than you are. Edie Falco.

ASHLEY BYRNE: That's cute, but—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Edie Falco— no, no, no, I'm done with my question with you.

ASHLEY BYRNE: The fact is the horse should not have been in the park-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I'm done.

ASHLEY BYRNE: to eat the plants in the first place.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Edie Falco.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Council Member Gennaro, your time is up. Council Member Hanif?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. I want to just first say to Edie, I'm a big fan. And I love The Sopranos. It is my favorite show. I would love to hear from you. How do you respond to people who are- who believe that supporting horse welfare and supporting carriage drivers are mutually exclusive? Why do you think it's important to care about both?

EDIE FALCO: As an animal lover, I am here to— on behalf of the animals. I'm an advocate. Things change. Life changes. You know, the tobacco farmers had to find other things to do when people

started to say, you know, this is killing us. We can't smoke as much, you know. I think you learn that when it's time to move on, it's time to move on. And the— I think it is deeply important to make sure that these people who have spent their lives as carriage drivers, potentially the lives of their parents and their families, it's very important to look out for them for sure. And I'm so glad that the Speaker has, you know, made that a big part of what she's doing and other people here. I am here to speak for the horses, you know, because they can't say, like a pedicab driver, when you say to him, you know, do you wanna pedal these people all the way up here in 90-degree heat? He could be like, you know what, no, it's too hot, I'm not doing it. You know, the horse can't say it. And I think for those of us who are moved to do so because you think it is right and humane, someone's got to look out for them. So that is my priority. It's my reason for being here today. I believe the humans will most definitely be taken care of, but I'm here for the horses.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. And thank you for using your voice and platform, years of advocacy.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, next person is Gale Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I want to thank class [sic] for that conversation that you just shared with us. So my question is- because that's not something that we've heard before. So my question is, do you think then at this point, what's next? Do they as owners feel they could contribute to ending this carriage horse industry? That was quite shocking and surprising and gleeful what you just said.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Right. I think there's a lot of fear among some of these people to speak out. But I think they are desperate to get out. They are afraid of another horse spooking and killing someone because it's happening so often. And I think they want to get out of this business even before a ban goes into effect. And she said that the several that she's speaking with, that there are many more, but many are afraid to speak out for fear of retaliation or whatnot. So yes, I think that there is a strong feeling that they want to get out now and they would like to be compensated, which I know is already in

the legislation, but I think that there's a worry that that won't happen.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you very much. They do sit on very expensive real estate, so that will be helpful to them. Thank you.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Right.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. We have Council Member Feliz. Thank you, thank you again, Chair. Thank you all for being here, and also thank you for all the work you do on this issue, using your voice to help to voiceless. So two questions, I know time is very limited, so I'll be fast. Two questions. First, thinking about the transition phase and helping the workers with employment- to your knowledge, approximately how much do these workers earn? And also, is it full-time employment, seasonal? I asked these questions to the administration, they didn’t have any answers. So wondering if you—

EDITA BIRNKRANT: I have— industry spokespeople have said that, I think, $60,000 a year, but it is seasonal work because for many months out of the year there— in the winter, there's no business. It is an independent contractor job. I've spoken with carriage drivers who were injured, badly

injured. If they are injured, they simply get no income. They have no health insurance. They have no worker compensation, no overtime, no sick leave, no worker protections of any kind because they're not classified as employees. Why would TWU be representing wealthy millionaire carriage owners who misclassify their workers and deny them even the most basic worker protections, guaranteed salary, no kind of living wage, no benefits of any kind? That's a question to ask TWU, but industry spoke— and there's been many carriage drivers quoted during heat waves saying, I can't pay my bills. We can't survive. This is not a lucrative job. You can Google these things. They're all coming from the horses' mouths, the horse carriage drivers' mouths. So I have long wondered why a union would be representing this kind of setup of a labor situation when there are real union jobs on the table of guaranteed full-time jobs with salaries, worker protections, benefits, health insurance. You know, 20 years ago, there was a carriage driver who nearly died. He was thrown from the carriage, suffered a skull fracture, and was in a coma for months. And his wife was interviewed saying that he was often scared driving the carriage. So 20 years

ago, we nearly lost the life of a carriage driver in the same way that Romanch died 20 years ago.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Right, right, yeah.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Yeah. And also my second question is, as we know, leaving a horse carriage unattended can create the public safety risks that we continue to see in Central Park.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Literally–

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: I'm just curious, how often have we seen that be the case?

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Literally every day. I have a video which I would love to show to all the council members, especially Council Member Gennaro. This carriage driver is doing exactly what got Romanch killed. He's on a busy street, busier than where Cherry Hill is. There's a cop car behind him. He's in Grand Army Plaza in traffic. He is literally stepping far away from the carriage with a baby in the carriage, a family.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Edita? Edita? Videos here, it's a–

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Oh, I'm sorry. So this, this was taken yesterday doing exactly what got

Romanch killed, but in more- if this horse had spooked and taken off, a baby could be dead, a family, and everyone in traffic. It happens every single day. I have hours and hours of footage of this. And when reported to the city, they do nothing. They're not capable of enforcing these laws. We saw the poor testimony. I think it's just not possible to run after 68 carriages who don't give a damn about the safety and welfare of their own horses or the public. It's not going to happen. So we got to shut it down. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you. Thank you so much for your testimony.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Council Member Feliz. A couple of things. One is I just want to mention that when the Department of Work and Consumer Protection testified today, they said that drivers make $70,000. So I want to point that out. It was in their testimony. I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Restler, and Council Member Marte has questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you all for being here, and thank you, former Council Member Bob Holden, for your leadership on this issue. I know

we've stood together for a really long time, and you know, I'm glad that you're here to play a part in this hearing as well. I wanted just to piggyback on the questioning of Council Member Feliz. Edita, how often do you see unattended horses in Central Park, and how many documented episodes do you have that illustrates what we know is reality in the park?

EDITA BIRNKRANT: I mean, I've been involved— I've been involved in animal advocacy in different facets, the wild horse issue, wildlife, urban wildlife, but also the horse carriages for almost 20 years. It has been happening for 20 years so constantly that at a certain point documenting it and reporting it became futile, but I still do it all the time. The day after TWU held their press conference saying that they had taken extraordinary measures and retrained, I just stopped by the park for a brief period of time, and in that period period, I found about 10 horses just from 6th Avenue being— and 7th Avenue being left unattended. Some of them, no drivers anywhere around. Drivers taking pictures. It's literally happening every day, multiple times a day. And I believe there's going to be testimony from a pedicab driver who's in the

business for 23 years who can attest to that. It is in part of their advertisements is that- like, the ride that Romanch took, they take three pictures. Who's taking the picture? The carriage drivers get out. This is how they make tips, is by taking pictures and leaving the horses unattended. But not only that, they're left unattended on the HAC lines, they're left unattended in areas they're not even supposed to operate, and at any moment those horses can spook and run. But it's important to say that many of the worst spooking crashes and injuries have occurred when the driver is in the driver's seat in control, because when a horse spooks and takes off, it often can't be stopped. It's a huge, powerful animal with a flight drive, and they take off. And that has happened many times. But clearly, just leaving your horses abandoned in the middle of one of the busiest parks in the world is a very reckless thing to do. And they're still taking pictures yesterday. I have the video- I will submit it- of a family with a toddler in the carriage right in Grand Army Plaza with a cop car behind them and a lot of chaos going on. He did this in the open because there's really— I just don't know that there's any

other way that they know how to operate this business, and that's why it needs to be shut down. We can't expect DOH to run after 68 carriages constantly preventing them from killing people. It's not going to happen.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you for your advocacy and leadership on this issue.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Do you want to respond?

ROBERT HOLDEN: Yeah, yeah, if I could just elaborate a little bit. How could you think that a prey animal like a horse, 1,500 to 2,000 pounds, will not get spooked again? Even with the driver, like Edita said, with the driver, you know, at the reins. It can happen. It can happen anytime. In a more crowded and a noisier city, this is going to happen again. And we're— and we're just fooling ourselves to think that we can control that. We can't. So let's wake up, folks. This is- the handwriting's on the wall. This industry has to go by the wayside, and we will retrain the drivers. The city will— they'll get great jobs, period. Who would

be against that? Except the owners who— why the TWU- I never heard of a union representing management. Have you?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you. Ms. Birnkrant, can I ask you a question?

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So if you would be kind enough to give us specific amendments to the Council of what you'd see— like to see changed in the bill, we would like to get that from you.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So if you could submit that, that would be great.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, I want to thank— I want to thank this panel very much with taking the time to be here today. Really, really appreciate it. Thank you. Okay, we're going to call up now Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigel. And we have Erica Sullivan who works for Assemblymember Deborah Glick. Is she here? I don't see her. Oh, okay. Borough President, go ahead.

BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL: Thank you. Good afternoon Chair Schulman, members of the committee,

Council Member Marte, sponsor of Romanch's Law, and thank you, Speaker Julie Menin, for your support of this legislation and holding this hearing and being here personally. It means a lot. I'm Brad Hoylman-Sigal. I have the honor of serving 1.6 million New Yorkers as Manhattan Borough President. You know, Times Square was once lined with blacksmiths and stables and home to the Vanderbilt's American Horse Exchange. In fact, my extended family once ran a small business called Miller's Harnesses. Even though Miller's Harnesses is no longer in business, and there have been dramatic changes in the transport of goods and services and people in Manhattan, as we all know, the horse carriage industry continues to operate on the busiest pathways of Central Park, the world's third most visited tourist attraction. Today we're reckoning not only with an industry many say needs to be more tightly regulated, if not outlawed altogether, but the death of a young man, Romanch Mahajan, who came to New York for what was supposed to be the trip of a lifetime, and who fairly assumed, along with his family, that when they took a city-regulated tourist ride, it would be safe. That was an avoidable tragedy, one no

family should ever have to face. The death of anyone, especially a young person, should be enough to demand change. But for my testimony today, my team and I wanted to take a step back and look at some sober statistics around the issue. So we reviewed public records, including the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene data, for every documented report of carriage horse incidents in and around Central Park dating back to 1982. What we found was evidence of 96 serious carriage horse incidents, including human injuries and 40 horse deaths. Between 1982 and 2026, the annual incident rate has more than quadrupled. In just under half those cases, a horse died. And when a horse escapes its carriage, our data show that a person is hurt over half the time. The trend is only getting worse. Over the last 13 months alone, we counted eight incidents, more than double the pace the industry has averaged since 2019. We collaborated with a professor from the Mathematics Department at Columbia University on a forecast model based on this data set. If the pattern holds, our forecast shows we could see 16 to 30 more carriage incidents by 2030, almost certainly with human injuries and upwards— of 11 more horse deaths. New Yorkers are concerned about

this trend line too. We've seen the recent polling data by Zenith Research that shows 68 percent of respondents supported ending horse-drawn carriages in New York City. In concert with this finding, 311 data shows 175 horse-related animal abuse complaints since 2020, two-thirds of them from inside two streets of the park in the industry's own stables. It's clear the status quo is unacceptable. That's why I joined my colleagues in co-sponsoring Romanch's Law. But any serious case for winding this industry down has to reckon with the hundreds of workers who will be at risk of losing their livelihood. I want to be clear that the drivers doing this job every day are not to blame for these tragedies, and the city has an obligation to collaborate with them on finding a professional landing. Intro 943 directs DCWP to build a workforce transition program. I urge this committee and DCWP to make sure it is funded and staffed before drivers lose their routes. Intro 943 also prohibits selling or transferring any horses for slaughter or into other city carriage businesses. Last September, two dozen equine rescues and sanctuaries offered to place every horse this industry retires. I hope this council— and I know this council will work with that

coalition to ensure a smooth and safe transition. The full horse incident record, a review of our 311 data, and our analysis is available online in our report, "Should New York City Ban Horse Carriages? Here's What 44 Years' Worth of Data Shows." In honor of Romanch, and in tribute to his loving family, who I understand are with us today, I urge the council to pass Romanch's Law. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Ms. Sullivan? If you can keep it brief, that— we would appreciate that.

ERICA SULLIVAN: Absolutely. Good afternoon. My name is Erica Sullivan. I'm here from New York State Assemblymember Deborah Glick's office to read her testimony. Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of the passage of Introduction 943 to ban the operation of horse-drawn carriages in New York City, ensure the drivers a transition to new employment, and retire the horses to sanctuaries for their healing and freedom. Horse-drawn carriages are an outdated industry where animals are exploited for profit as entertainment, comparable to the use of wild animals in circuses, which the city has outlawed. The

incidents involving horse-drawn carriages are predictable results of horses being put to work in our city and represent preventable chaos and tragedy. We learned the news of horses fleeing and colliding with cars, resulting in injury, collapsing and taking their last breaths on our streets, and the tragic death of Romanch Mahajan. To his family and friends, I extend my sincere condolences. Horses should not be subjected to breathing in exhaust fumes, dressed in costume with blinders on, and living in buildings that are ill-suited to comfortably shelter them. Even on our city's most beautiful day, this attraction is antiquated. 15 years ago, we were having the same discussion with calls for replacing horse-drawn cabs with electric vehicles to carry visitors through our parks. It's time for this debate to finally end. Horses will flee when frightened and collapse when overworked, and no amount of tighter reins, hitching posts, studies, regulation, or reform could effectively avoid or alter the innate behavioral responses of these powerful animals. The only way to avoid the next tragedy involving horses is to pass Intro 943 and ban horse-drawn carriages in New York City. Thank you for your time and attention.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much, and thank you, Borough President, for taking the time to come and do this today. Really appreciate it. Alright, next panel is Connor McHugh, John Chi— Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Alright, we have to— I, okay. John Chiarello, Gabriel Cook, Christina Hansen, Angel J., and Sharese Dubois. Alright, we'll make sure. Okay. Who's going first? Yeah. Okay.

JOHN CHIARELLO: Good afternoon, City Council members. Good afternoon, Julie Menin, Ms. Schulman, Chair. I'm John Chiarello, President of TWU Local 100. I represent 44,000 union members across this great city. And I also proudly represent the horse and carriage industry. First, I would like to give my sincerest condolences to the family of Romanch Mahajan killed in an accident last month, tragic and unforeseen. Our hearts go out to him and his family. My members in the horse and carriage industry are mostly immigrant workers and laborers that are in Central Park. What about my members' American dream? Councilman Marte was nice enough to give statistics on the industry. Let's talk about racetracks. That in the last 10 years, 10,000 horses have died in racetracks. I don't see anything

happening there. Let's talk about the food delivery services that run right past this building, that nearly ran me down and maim and kill people every single day. Electric bikes, Amazon boxes that are propelled by electric means that do not have a license on them. Nobody's talking about that. But this small microcosm of an industry that has been iconic to Central Park is now under attack, and it's been under attack for quite some time. There's a 165-year history. I would put them up against any other means of transportation, and I all but guarantee you that they've done worse- the other people that aren't my people. Uber. I— Pedestrians are run down all the time. Are we banning Uber? No, we're not. So where is the justice? The animal rights advocates talk about the horses not being treated fairly. That's another misrepresentation. They get fed and they get five weeks of vacation. I am asking the City Council to table—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Hey, decorum in the room.

JOHN CHIARELLO: That's all right, let— everybody has their moment. I've been very patient, so I'm going to finish this. I'm asking the City

Council to table this and also take up Councilman Gennaro's offer of making a safer place in Central Park. This is— the horse and carriage business has been around before the city was even incorporated. It's part of the history of this city, and it would be a shame for tourism to annihilate them in one swoop of the hand. And as far as union jobs, I don't even know what that looks like, and I don't know what it is, but if you're a horse and carriage driver, I don't think you want to be a host at a racino. I don't think you're looking to do hotel bellhopping or reception. So I would caution the council on what they put in this bill and speak with the union, Local 100. We move this city, and I want to thank everybody for their time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Who's next on the panel? Okay.

CONNOR MCHUGH: Hi, my name is Connor McHugh. Oh, okay, pardon me. Connor McHugh. Thank you for having the hearing. I've been a carriage driver for 40 years, a carriage medallion owner for 36 years and a stable manager for 22 years, all collectively at the same time. I will tell you that being a carriage driver in Central Park is one of the best

jobs you can have in New York City. There are 68 horse-drawn cab medallions in New York City, and collectively we have invested millions of dollars over the years in our business. Taking a horse and carriage ride in Central Park is one of the most iconic things to do in New York City, and people from all over the world know about us and travel to New York to come for a carriage ride in the park. It— a ride in the park is folklore. In the past 20 years, there's been a concerted effort on— to drive us off our land on the West Side and out of our buildings in Manhattan, and this coincides with the rezoning of the area now now referred to as the Hudson Yards, where all of our stables are located. And this intimidation has taken various forms over the years, between reporting us to ICE and the IRS, keyboard warriors trashing us on social media, and animal rights volunteers who have come to Central Park to harass our drivers and the business in general and create an unsafe situation in Central Park. It is no wonder that their actions have caused incidents and accidents over the year. On more than one occasion, some of these people— the people who testified here before you today— have been arrested for attacking

and assaulting carriage drivers and our customers. And I'm sure you're well aware that New York CLASS over the years had to pay thousands of dollars in fines because of campaign finance violations. As we know from history, the best way to steal people's land is to ridicule and demonize and ultimately bankrupt them until they no longer can pay their bills. In Ireland, the British planted yew trees and shrubs on the land that they stole from us in order to poison the peasants' livestock if they wandered into their lands. Central Park Conservancy, I see, has adopted the same policy. While paying themselves tens of millions of dollars in salary, they have planted poisonous yews all over Central Park, and nobody knows who's been poisoned by them, except that thankfully we were able to identify what happened to our horse. God knows how many horses they have poisoned. And just like the Brits, they blame the victim. In addition, the Central Park Conservancy has introduced in the last 10 years or so, approximately 800 motorized pedicabs to Central Park. I know the speaker did a study on this, and you found that 93 percent of the pedicabs operating in Central Park are motorized illegally. And as you know, almost none of

them are actually licensed at all. And they ramshackle through Central Park every day, but you want to blame us for the racket that has been created in Central Park. I beseech you to drop this bill completely and instead consider Jim Gennaro's bill. If you pass this, this is a total act of vandalism and a miscarriage of justice on trumped-up charges that— the worst that New York City will ever perpetrate. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Who's next? I'm sorry. Who— okay.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: Alright, my name is Christina Hansen. I am the shop steward for TWU Local 100 Central Park Carriages and a carriage driver. I have been a commercial carriage driver in Philadelphia and in New York City for 20 years this month, and I've been here in New York for 14 years. It's hard to hit a— it's hard to fit a 5,000-year-old partnership, four centuries of history, and decades of experience into two minutes of testimony, but at least it's longer than a TikTok. It's good to be here in the same room with all of you in person and not online in some comment section. Horses helped build this very building 200 years ago. There's George

Washington and his horse, Old Blueskin. But at the same time that we in this industry have been devastated, have been mourning the Mahajan family. We are now being forced to fight for our own. I have noticed that many people in this room have spent more time creating content for social media on this issue than coming to the stables, petting our horses, and meeting our drivers. And unlike the last panel that purports to speak for us, in the rest of this hearing, you are going to hear from our drivers, our carriage owners, and you can hear from them about how much they love their horses, and who are other people to speak for our horses than the people that know them best? Horse-drawn cabs have been licensed and regulated by the city since 1692. Our rates have been set by the city since 1813, and we've been giving rides in Central Park since the day the park opened. So that is- the Rental Horse Licensing and Protection Law, went into effect in 1981. We are the definition of a lawful, regulated and our safety statistics bear it out. If anything has changed in- Borough President Hoylman's testimony in the last 40 years, it's smartphones. People are disconnected from reality, but at the same time they can post things they see

online all the time. History has shown us that absolutely horrible things have been done in the name of progress, and many beautiful things are destroyed. Opponents of the carriage industry have weaponized push-polls to make everybody say, oh, the majority of New Yorkers want this banned. That has not been borne out by our union's polls of Central Park users. 70 percent of Central Park users found that carriage horses add beauty and charm to the park, and 60 percent opposed a ban when this was done last fall. My real-world experience bears this out. The smiles we see from people in Hell's Kitchen, the delight in children riding horses in the park, that's real-world experience. There were— there— we were closed for six months during the pandemic. We went into the pandemic with 68 carriages and three stables, and we came out with 68 carriages and three stables. Think of all the New York City businesses that we lost, and now you're sitting here and trying to lose another one. There's been a lot of talk about job retraining, workforce development. I am a horse person. I grew up in Lexington, Kentucky, horse capital of the world. I own a horse. His name is Sherman. I expect— he's 12 years old. I expect him to live for another 20 years.

And this bill is telling me that I can't go work with my horse in another place to pull a horse and carriage. And I would wonder then if I could have my horse as a rental riding horse in Central Park. The Borough President just said his family's from Miller's Harness Company. Miller's Horse Company from Manhattan Saddlery started up riding horses in Central Park. What about the mounted unit? Could I get a job with them in the stable or riding as a police officer? Those horses are here in Midtown, in traffic, in the streets. They're owned by the city, but that's a good city job, you know, and that's what I am skilled at. I don't need to be told to go work in a hotel or something like that. I am a horse person, so will the city be giving me a job with one of your police forces?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And who's next? Dr. Cook?

GABRIEL COOK: Yes, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah.

GABRIEL COOK: Good afternoon. First, I am so sorry for the tragic— tragedy that brings us all here today. My name is Gabriel Cook, and I'm a board-certified equine surgeon, and I provide medical

care to many of the New York City carriage horses. Four years ago, members of the industry reached out to me and asked if I'd be willing to offer more consistent medical care. I agreed with the understanding that my examinations would be more critical in nature. Complete physical examinations would always be performed, and horses would be— would be trotted during the examinations to ensure soundness. If found unfit in any way, the horse would be temporarily suspended until healthy. I also provide telehealth consultations when needed and made my tertiary referral hospital available to them 24 hours a day. I made it clear that I would be an advocate for the horse, and they accepted wholeheartedly. I will not agree with the other panel that horses should not work, and we can get into that later if you'd like. Having been doing this for the past four years, let me tell you what I do know. These horses are not abused. They are not neglected. They are not starved. They are not overworked. They are provided with proper stabling, clean stalls, good ventilation, and as much hay, grain, and water as they desire. Stablemen attend to these horses 24 hours a day, a standard beyond what I am used to. Let

me tell you what I also know. Despite the intention of the council's bill to guarantee the welfare of these horses, it is not possible. There are already innumerable horses unsuccessfully seeking homes. I work with sanctuaries. I work with rescues. They are underfunded. They struggle, and sometimes they overburden themselves with horses, and the horses don't get the proper feed there. I am in the trenches. I see these horses. I do this seven days a week for the last 35 days. And I will tell you this. They will— and when they do become displaced, they will end up in slaughterhouses. I have seen it. They will end up in auctions. They will be euthanized because people don't want to starve these horses. This is not okay, folks. And it's not right. And finally, having worked in this industry for the past four years, I am in agreement that the industry has its challenges and almost all of them related to failure in regulation and enforcement. As you so kindly predicted, sir, that we'd be talking about regulation and enforcement. Almost all of my frustration has involved this issue. I've had frustrations resolving this issue. It is extremely disappointing that no New York City agency or the New

York City government has been willing to take control and responsibility. I truly, truly believe that with the proper regulation, enforcement, collaboration— hear the word collaboration— and teamwork, this could be a robust, healthy, and safe industry. To ban it now without making that attempt would be unjust. I thank you all very much for your time, and I would be extremely eager to answer lots of questions.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Who's next? Angel?

ANGEL J: Hi, so my name is Angel, and I've been doing this for a long time. I'll be driving—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Bring the mic a little bit closer to you. Thanks.

ANGEL J: Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, it's all right.

ANGEL J: So, my name is Angel. I've been working with horses almost all my life. I love what I do, and I just want to make sure the guys that- our horses stay in our hand. We have family. Everybody here in this business, we have families to support. I'm one of them. I have two kids. And I really don't

want to see my horses go away. I love what I do. And I wouldn't do anything wrong to one of my horses ever, ever. A lot of these people, they said that we abuse the horses, that we don't take care of the horses, and that's not true. I'm here because I love what I do. I love my horses. My family, they know that I love what I do. And they don't want to see me giving up on what I do. So everybody talks and says that our horses, they're not in good health, that we don't take care of them. And like I said before, it's not true. It's not true. My kids, they know that I spend so many times, almost all the time, taking care of my horses. And even Dr. Cook, he knows that I- when every time I have a question, I call him, I make sure to do the right thing with my horses. And like I said, everybody here's had a family. And to end up with this business today, I don't think it's the right thing to do, guys, to be honest. I love my job, and I wouldn't do anything else.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Sharase?

SHARASE DUBOSE: Good afternoon, Chair Schulman, committee members, staff. My name is Sharase Dubose. I'm the Political Director for TWU

Local 100. We appreciate the opportunity to be able to testify today, but I would be remiss if I did not begin to express our disappointment with this legislative process. Many members of this council have chose to co-sponsor Intro 943 before ever sitting down with the workers whose lives would forever be changed by this legislation. Before speaking with the TWU, before hearing from the families who have devoted generations to this industry, and before this public hearing was even held, many council members had already decided the outcome. This is not what meaningful public participation looks like. Public hearings should exist to inform legislative decisions, not simply ratify decisions that have already been made like a kangaroo court. Our members deserve due process. They deserve to be heard before the City Council votes to eliminate their livelihoods. You say that people don't want this b— this business, but this business has survived two pandemics, the Civil War, Superstorm Sandy. There's so many things that occurred in this city, and this business is still here. The Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits government from taking private property for public

use without just compensation. Nobody can say what's going to happen to the— to them financially, and what will happen to the contributions that they have already made and the investments that they've already made to operate this business that was regulated by this city of New York. Where are these sanctuaries that you speak of? How many horses have been committed to placements? Who is paying for the decades of feed, veterinary care, transportation, and maintenance? Those questions remain unanswered. Our members consider these horses part of their families. They do not want them sold at auctions or placed in uncertain circumstances. Ironically, this council recognized in this year's budget just how expensive animal care can be by funding assistance for low-income pet owners. Central Park belongs to every New Yorker. It does not belong to the exclusively with wealthy donors and advocacy organizations or private conservancies. We offer our condolences as well to the Mahajan family, but last year also a pilot named Sean Johnson Augustine Escobar, his wife and three children died in a helicopter that crashed in the Hudson celebrating one of their children's 9th birthdays. You can never say what could happen. I

pray to God that we all could not have these tragedies and avoid them, but that's the fabric of our lives. We can't avoid these tragedies. It's not— and I'm not holding any industry accountable for any wrongdoing, but like Romanch, their deaths are also very tragic and heartbreaking, but their deaths have not been tied to a political agenda. Transit workers work very hard, and some of them have died on their jobs along with other members in the labor movement. And sometimes we don't even get an offer of condolence from anybody that's sitting in this room. And I pray that that also change. I appreciate your time today to testify. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. We have some questions by the council members. First, Speaker Menin has questions.

SPEAKER MENIN: First of all, I really want to thank this panel. We hear the emotion and passion in your voice for this. John, a couple— thank you for being here. A couple questions for you. Could you— some— there's been some testimony today about salary. Could you sort of really clarify this? What is the average driver salary? What are the benefits that are offered to the drivers as well?

JOHN CHIARELLO: So the average salary is anywhere from $65,000 to $70,000. Now, as far as the benefits, understand, there- there's an independent portion to this thing. They don't work— they're not civil servants, so we're not able to bargain. We're actually— we're bargaining with the City Council. That's what we're doing. So they're an association under our charter, and as far as benefits we could offer them dental and eyeglass. The major medical is, is a whole different issue.

SPEAKER MENIN: Is there a collective bargaining agreement that covers the city's horse carriage drivers currently?

JOHN CHIARELLO: None that I know of other than the charter that allows them into Central Park.

SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. And after the fatal incident, TWU issued a statement calling for an increase in carriage driver training and implementation of more rigorous testing of driver applicants. What is the union's position on the city's existing testing and oversight?

JOHN CHIARELLO: Well, testing oversight is great, but we've also went above and beyond. We have a whole safety department. We've collaborated

with our shop steward Christine in making sure that all the members who you heard testimony from— and most of them are here today, you know, this is their livelihood, and I don't think that they take it for granted. And accidents do happen, as we always say, and I cry like everyone for the family, the Mahajan. It's a horrible, horrible, horrible thing, and there's no question about it.

SPEAKER MENIN: You mentioned at the beginning about other modes of transportation, e-bikes, etc. You know, I do want to say, and I want to respond to that, the council— and pedicabs, which I know Council Member Brewer has also been very focused on as well. Council is deeply committed to reforming the pedicab industry, dealing with the fact that so many operators are unlicensed or overcharging tourists. We're committed to focus on the e-bike legislation. We have a package of bills we're about to be introducing on that. So I do just want to clarify that because we are very focused on those modes of modality as well. And I just end by saying, and I've been saying this from the beginning, we are committed to ensuring your workers' livelihood. The council, we understand that right now the language in

the bill talks about worker training. We know that there needs to be additional language negotiated. And so we look forward to sitting with you and your members and doing just that. Thank you.

JOHN CHIARELLO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you, Speaker Menin. Council Member Gennaro?

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I notice you gave a little extra time to the witnesses. I certainly appreciate that. What I don't appreciate was that it took more than three hours to have a panel that speaks for the industry actually come and speak for the industry. I wanna talk to Sharase. You know, you did mention a kangaroo court, and that's precisely what this hearing is. It was pronounced in the New York Times yesterday that the Speaker had made a decision, and here's what we're going to do with the workers, and here's what we're going to do with the horses, and here's what we're going to do with this. And then she spoke with all the advocates this morning, and when she opened up the hearing today, it was just like, this is what we're going to do, and this is how we're going to take care of this part, and here's how we're

going take care of that part. So in her mind, it's already done. I will just mention that not even half of the members of the council are even- are even on this bill as sponsors. And so when you talk about the process, you are very right. When, you know, Members can sign on to whatever bills they want, but when a Speaker comes out and goes to the New York Times and makes a video on the same day and comes out the next day and talks about all the advocates, opens up the hearing and says that this is how- like, this is happening, we just have to figure out, like, how we get it done. That is— I've been— I'm the longest-serving active council member. This is not how the council is supposed to work, and I, apologize for that. I have a minute and 20 left. I want to, you know, one of my major concerns, Dr. Cook is about the fallacy that there are— I mean, I've been an equestrian for more than 60 years. I've been riding horses longer than anybody in this room. And I know horses, saddle horses for me. you know, you guys with the draft horses and the, you know, cold bloods and all that, but, you know, the whole notion, because I know as a horse guy that, you know, if you want- that the sanctuaries are really for horses that have been

abused, or have been, you know, neglected and whatever. They're very, very underfunded, and the animals in your industry wouldn't even go there because they need whatever meager slots they have for the horses that have really been abused. So this whole notion that there are sanctuaries and entities that will pay between $15,000 and $25,000 a year per horse per year, this is fantasy. I'd like you to comment on that.

GABRIEL COOK: The number might even be higher than that. And there's—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I mean, in terms of what it costs.

GABRIEL COOK: of what it costs, the numbers are even higher than that. And I think everyone has goodwill here, and I think people do wanna find new jobs for the drivers, and they want to find beautiful homes and pastures for the horses. It is so multifactorial and complex. There are a lot of these horses— I work on fairly nice— I work on very nice Olympic-quality horses in Fairfield and Westchester County. Some of these horses, when they get turned out, don't even like being out in fields. They like the security of a barn. So just to think

you're gonna put these horses out in the field and they're all going to be happy is also a fallacy. It is one movement away for that— for a horse, and then it will be lost. And they are— there are horses now that cannot find homes. So the answer is it's not going to happen. So just, just realize that you are providing a death sentence to these horses. It's not just these hundreds of horses that are in New York City–

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: You use the word death sentence, did you not?

GABRIEL COOK: I think this is a death sentence.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Okay, thank you.

I think this is a death sentence for— not all of them, some will get placed, but for a lot, it is a death sentence for a lot of these horses. And I think you need to think further than that. It's not just the number of horses that we have in the city now. It's the next 150 horses that are in Amish country that are going to be repurposed as carriage horses, because I'll tell you, in Amish country, if they don't get repurposed, they're being sold at auction, and they're getting euthanized or sent to

slaughterhouses out of the country. So if you put it all together, it's more than just the present horses. So for— so the other— the other panel, and I appreciate their passion for what they do, and we are never going to agree that horses shouldn't work, dogs shouldn't work. I watch horses play polo. They're playing the game. The horses are watching the ball. So I do believe there's a joy in the bond between people and animals. There's a joy that animals get from working. Bird dogs with their, with their- that are hunting. I see that. My role in all that is to provide medical care for them. So that when I feel that they're not fit to do that, we can address that and we can find a solution to that. But if this ends, forget about these horses. Just forget— it's, it's— forget about the horses. They're gone.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Doctor. My time is up, but I, you know, I look forward to someday possibly doing another successful reform bill like I did in 2010.

GABRIEL COOK: Please, which made a big difference.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. we have other—

SHARASE DUBOSE: Madam Chair, if I could answer Council Member Gennaro's question really-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] quickly. Okay,

SHARAESE BUBOSE: about the kangaroo court. So it was very disappointing that members signed on to the bill without meeting or talking to the workers, especially people in leadership positions, because I feel like you all have a— the- this is what you're supposed to do when you're in a leadership role. And I've been getting calls the whole time I've been here from council members saying that they're being pressured to sign on to the bill. And I can't help but wonder, where would we be if the people that came before us, the trailblazers that came before us, just got stopped in, you know, the line of opposition and threats? Like, none of us will be where we are today if those people had fallen prey to the opposition that came before them when they fought hard. So I'm hoping that you at least give us more time to— and you have a dialogue, because there

are things that we all agree on, and we should start there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you, Sharase.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: THank you. Council Member Marte.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Chair. I just want to state for the record that before we introduced this bill, my office reached out to the union, TWU, to set up a meeting. And I also in that email said I'm willing to visit the stables and meet the horse owners, and we never got an appointment set up. And so, you know, we tried doing that olive branch to have the discussion before the introduction of the bill, but it was never accepted on the other side. Just wanted to say that because I feel like some of the allegations could be thrown at us inappropriately. I have a question for the union. For horse carriage drivers who do not own the business or medallion and are hired to drive for someone else, are they classified as W-2 employees or 1099 independent contractors? And if they are employees, who are their employer?

CHRISTINA HANSEN: All right, I'll answer this as our shop steward and the representative of our members. We have both W-2 and 1099 employees and independent contractors. We are some of the last truly independent contractors, because, you know, the individual carriage driver makes an individual deal with the carriage owner over what percentage of the trip card the carriage driver keeps before they hand the remainder of the take for the day to the owner. So there are drivers who will not work with certain owners because they don't like the percentage. There are drivers who will not work with a carriage because they don't like the horse. There are carriage drivers who— I mean, we set when we go on vacation. We set when- you know, we are true independent contractors. There are some W-2 employees that work for carriage owners that own multiple carriages, so they're more of a fleet, you know, more than just the single owner-operator or a single owner. And then we do have a lot of owner-operators in the business.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I have a follow-up question. Who pays the dues to TW Local 100 in connection with the carriage trade? Is it the higher

carriage driver, medallion owners, or the owner-operators?

CHRISTINA HANSEN: It's all of them. The drivers and the owners all pay union dues. The drivers— if you don't own a medallion, you don't pay as high a due structure every month. But we are all here together because you guys are management. You know, you guys are the ones that set the terms of our employments. You set the terms of when we get to go to work under what conditions. You set how much we can charge. So you are management. And our union here is here to represent us in our negotiations with you and the New York City Administrative Code. That's our contract.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Okay, I have two quick questions. How many due-paying carriage drivers does the union currently have? And you mentioned earlier that the average salary is $65,000. Is that through a guaranteed salary, or is it an hourly wage negotiated through a contract?

CHRISTINA HANESEN: Well, again, like I just told you, we negotiate with the carriage owners. You know, do I get 40 percent of the ride and keep the tips? We always keep the tips. The drivers always

get the tips, whoever's doing the— driver, the owner, or the driver. Is it 50 percent? Does the driver get to keep the first ride of the day? These are little small businesses, and you know, so it's not a wage job. You know, today, if we weren't here, you know, we would have been suspended because of the heat. So it's not a salary. This is not an hourly wage job. This is a way of life with horses in small businesses, and in this case, the workers own the means of production. So, I own a horse. I work for somebody who owns a carriage. I run his small family business. He has horses. He owns the medallion. There are stable owners here. They own the stables. But they're also workers. You know, so we own the horses, we own the carriages, we own the medallions, we own the stables. And that's who we are.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

SHARASE DUBOSE: Madam Chair, can I answer?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Sure.

SHARASE DUBOSE: Council Member Marte– Council Member Marte, TWU, we've reached out to every council member to visit the stable. Some of them did

get a chance to. And though that offer still stands if you're ready to come by.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I'll follow up on my email.

SHARASE DUBOSE: Thank you.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: Also, I would like to note, I think there was a discussion about there being a delay in the introduction of the bill so that you could meet with us, but also our union is also engaged in contract negotiations with the MTA, and our other members are working without a contract now. So there was a request to delay, but that bill was introduced on schedule to coincide with other legislative in Philadelphia.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

GABRIEL COOK: May I say one thing?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Go ahead.

GABRIEL COOK: May I— I'm sorry, may I say one thing?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Sorry, yes.

GABRIEL COOK: Thank you. Regarding the invitations, there have been a couple of council members that have visited. Councilman Epstein did visit, and we met and spent, I think, probably close

to an hour together. You seemed really intrigued, really interested. You were focused. I explained to you what I look for in a horse to make sure that they are health— do you remember this, sir? That whether they are healthy, whether they are alert- when a horse is standing in the back of the stall not facing you, they are stressed. When they are looking at you with their ears forward, when they are breathing normally, how we take heart rates, you listen to everything. I showed you that there was manure and shavings on the stall during the time of day when we clean stalls. I said when this— once you leave, this will all be swept. The stalls were clean. There was fresh water. There was hay in every stall. You listened. I think we agreed that despite— and you made it very clear your stance, and I appreciate that, and we can agree to disagree. But at the same time, I asked you to at least appreciate or understand what I was trying to get across to you, and you said you did. And then you crucified me the next day with your approach. You showed a picture of a healthy horse in the stall, that it's in jail. I was very naive walking into that, because I do believe that information is information, and you

failed me on that one. I think you failed the industry. You did not represent us properly. I'd be interested in your thoughts.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You're going to go next anyway.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: I just wanted to make sure that it wasn't part of a condition that we were going to introduce the bill if you didn't meet with us. We reached out, I think, more than a month before our intended introduction, and it wasn't in line with what other cities have done. As you mentioned, Philadelphia has banned horse carriages from their city, and that just was a coincidence, and we're willing to, you know, follow their lead now.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, I don't want to have— there's no— I don't want back and forth here because we'll be here all day. So you want to just take it outside side of here, that's fine. Council Member Epstein, you're next.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Thank you, Chair Schulman. And I— yeah, I did visit and I raised concerns there. And you say I crucified you because I disagreed with you. You know, we have a right to disagree about issues. You know, I, I'd want to— you

know, again, like I said, I made an offer to visit and I did and made a decision that I would think is an important bill. I want to thank Council Member Marte for sponsoring it. And I just want to reiterate with the speakers that we've talked a lot about e-bikes, and we had a hearing on the Last Mile Bill about the Amazon trucks on the street. We already did a lot of things you're referencing to talk about these issues. So I think the council, in the short month that the— six months that this Speaker's been Speaker, we've taken a lot of these issues on. This is a hearing about getting feedback from people, and I don't— I mean, it's important you know, that we hear what your perspective is. We're allowed to have perspectives based on the information we have, and you know, I think the characterization— I feel deeply troubling the way you've characterized this as we're not willing to visit, we're crucifying you, we're not talking to the union. I met with Sam Newsom myself, and I talked to him about this issue. So I think, you know, I really take issue with this, the way you all are talking about us. I want to talk about the people who are working in the industry. I'm just saying, so

there's no CBA in effect, right? There's no— they have no CBA, right?

JOHN CHIARELLO: Who are you talking to?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Anyone, whoever the— you or the person who's your delegate.

JOHN CHIARELLO: So as I stated earlier, there is no CBA.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Right.

JOHN CHIARELLO: That's why we're here speaking with you, because, you know.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: No, the CBA— and there's— you said there's no medical insurance, right?

JOHN CHIARELLO: When you say medical insurance provided by Local 100?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Yes.

JOHN CHIARELLO: No, there's no medical insurance other than we have the ability to offer them dental and optical, because that's what's under our purview.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: And do you— do they pay the dental and optical or does it come through their dues?

JOHN CHIARELLO: So I don't have that information in front of me and I don't know how many people are in the dental and optical plan, and I quite honestly don't know why it would concern you but-

JOHN CHIARELLO: I just want to— I want to know the benefits that people have for being a member of the union. They're paying dues. So the benefits of being a member of a union is what I'm doing right now and advocating for them.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Great.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: That's what unions are.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Okay. I appreciate the same question.

JOHN CHIARELLO: If the crowd doesn't like it, I'm sorry, but this is what we do.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Hey, listen, listen.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So, my father—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I don't want to call them— They can do that if they want to.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: No, actually, it is a respectful way. My father-

JOHN CHIARELLO: I was, I was just clapping.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Yeah, my father was a president of the union. I was a shop steward when I was in the union. I respect the unions. I'm a chair of a committee that works on—

JOHN CHIARELLO: Were you a part of?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I was a legal- a local legal aid lawyer and legal services lawyer, Local 2320 UAW.

JOHN CHIARELLO: Okay. Did you have benefits?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I did have benefits, and I worked full-time.

JOHN CHIARELLO: Did you pay for them?

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I paid through my dues.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Listen, I— wait, I want to stop this right now. Yeah. The panelists are not to ask questions of the council members. I am telling you now.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So, listen. Full disclosure.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If you do, you'll be asked to leave.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So let me just finish this. Can we just finish this so I can ask questions, actually?

JOHN CHIARELLO: Yes, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So I want to be clear. How many of these members are— do you have in total?

JOHN CHIARELLO: How many members do I have in total? I represent 150.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: 150. How many of those are full-time– work full-time?

JOHN CHIARELLO: I do not have that information in front of me.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I'm just asking a question.

JOHN CHIARELLO: If I represented one of them I would be here today.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: So I really view your approach to be deeply troubling and adversarial in a way.

JOHN CHIARELLO: You have your opinion. I have mine.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I'm just asking you a question, you know, you can just say whatever.

JOHN CHIARELLO: But I appreciate it.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: I'm allowed to speak. You can answer the question any way you want. I'm happy to talk to you after the fact, but I'm just explaining that this, you know, oppositional adversarial approach is maybe not the ideal situation in a hearing. So 150 how many members, you don't know how many are full or part-time, and what are the dues that the people who are the members pay versus the owners of the stores?

JOHN CHIARELLO: So again-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] How much time is Council Member Epstein going to get?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, he has- he's finishing up a question.

JOHN CHIARELLO: So again, as I stated earlier, I don't have the treasury report in front of me. I don't see the relevance of how many people are paying or what they're paying or what they're doing. So you may call it adversarial. I don't see the point in anything you're saying at all.

COUNCIL MEMBER EPSTEIN: Chair, I really appreciate the time. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you. Council Member Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah, I think it's a fair question that- how many members are dues-paying carriage drivers.

JOHN CHIARELLO: So I'll answer it exactly as I answered before. I do not have the treasurer's report in front of me. We have 150 members. Most of them are here today. If you'd like them to stand up, we could do that. I do not see what the correlation is to this bill. I don't see what they're paying, what their health benefit is. We are looking to preserve their jobs. That's what unions do. So—

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: [interposing] But the— there is workforce training on this bill.

JOHN CHIARELLO: I don't— I haven't seen any of it, so I can't speak on that.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, go ahead, move on.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: But there is workforce training for these horse-drawn carriage drivers.

JOHN CHIARELLO: So, as I stated earlier, these men and women are in the horse carriage industry. I don't know what type of industry is in work— the workplace development. I haven't been a part of it, but I don't think you're going to have anything close. A hotel host or casino worker is not gonna be a job that they adapt to. So, unless you have something that I don't know about, feel free, because I don't know what it is. There's been no discussion with Local 100 about what that particular job is. And workforce development is a lovely word, but I don't know what it is.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah, my predecessor Robert Holden, when he introduced the bill, he asked for hearings. He'd been asking for these hearings—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Council Member Wong, ask the question.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. The question is I—

JOHN CHIARELLO: Bob Holden likes to put TW in his mouth for some reason, and I don't know what his interests are, but he's, you know, the past council. But if you have a question, I'll answer it.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah. There was never a hearing about this until today, is that right?

JOHN CHIARELLO: I remember in September I came to a hearing.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Well, all right, let's— move on.

JOHN CHIARELLO: So, relevance.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Ask your questions, council member.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay, well, I've been involved with the City Council for several years, and this is the first hearing that I know of in this room regarding this bill. So- and I ask myself, how come there was never a hearing on this? Either the previous Speaker never wanted a hearing, or there are people out there that just don't even want to discuss this.

JOHN CHIARELLO: I would ask Bob Holden.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: What?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Councilmember, we're not arguing— listen, ask them a question that relates to the union. Do not ask them about the legislation.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright?

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: I have no- I have no further questions. Thank you.

JOHN CHIARELLO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Council Member Hanif?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. I'd love to address these questions to the workers. Could you describe what process you follow when a horse is sick, or your horse is sick, injured, showing signs of dehydration? And then who decides whether the horse continues work or stop?

CHRISTINA HANSEN: So, I said I've been a commercial carriage driver for 20 years.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What— just describe the process. I don’t have a lot of time.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: So the process is I'm with my horse every day, okay? So I know what they are normally like. If there's anything wrong, I stop what I'm doing and I call Dr. Cook.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, essentially it's up to the driver?

CHRISTINA HANSEN: I mean, of course it is. We know our horse best. Obviously, if somebody said something to me, one of my coworkers, the stableman who noticed something different overnight, you know, if it was somebody on the street who said, hey, what's going on with this?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But aside from the driver knowing their horse, there isn't a set standardized process. But I want to—

CHRISTINA HANSEN: [interposing] Well, I mean, that's how you-

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] I want to continue asking. Could you also share-

CHRISTINA HANSEN: [interposing] I also wanted to answer your question about dehydration, okay? Can I please?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Could you respond to my next question, please?

CHRISTINA HANSEN: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: What policies are in place to ensure a horse is removed from service when there are concerns about its health? And I know Dr. Cook was mentioned here, if you want to chime in.

GABRIEL COOK: Yes. So horses are creatures of habit. They do things all the time, meaning if they normally pass five piles of manure overnight, there's usually five piles of manure every morning. If they're depressed, you can see it. Their heads are low, their ears are back. They can look- they can look not okay. And that's where my telehealth—

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's a signal you're saying.

GABRIEL COOK: Pardon me?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That's a signal you're saying.

GABRIEL COOK: Those are definitely all signals.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: For them to not work.

GABRIEL COOK: For life-threatening problems with colic or abdominal pain being the main one, they are very vocal. They are pawing at the ground. They're violent. They're getting in the— they're lying down, standing up, walking in circles. It's obvious. So in those moments, I'm usually

receiving a telephone call. We have a protocol in place because I am not there at all every day.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Which is?

GABRIEL COOK: We have— I— there are medicines that I have that I have directed them to give in that event. My rule, and this is— has been implemented, and the vast majority of people have followed it, that if they do not respond to that medicine, the horse is to be trailered to my hospital. Because it's silly for me to drive all the way down, then say we have a problem, and then have the horse— so the horses come to my hospital, and we evaluate.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Have there been times when a horse was sick, was depressed, having physical, physiological issues, and continued to work?

GABRIEL COOK: So, not to my knowledge, but I think— but I— But for 100— for how many horses do we have? For 100- whatever that is, it has probably happened, but it can't continue. Meaning that they may have started to work like that, maybe, not to my knowledge, but if they did, they couldn't sustain a day and be that sick. So ultimately it

comes to our knowledge. Now I will say this, let's take- let's take a bad apple moment. Let's say for a second, and this hasn't happened in the last year or two, but early on, I've— again, I've been there four years. In the event that I recognize there's a problem, and it— this has barely happened. If the person says, Dr. Cook, you don't know what you're doing. I know my horse. The horse is fine. I'm going to work. And I disagree with that, my only authority, and I have used it a few times, is to call the Department of Health. And I can say to the Department of Health, I believe this is a problem. It's up to the Department of Health at that point, and in those events they have suspended the horse until we can evaluate the horse. I hope that answers your question.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, that's it.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Could I just say one comment?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: One comment.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But your responses still demonstrate that there isn't a standardized process, and having to call you and rely on the owner or call—

GABRIEL COOK: [interposing] So what would be the—

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Department of Health or doesn't-

GABRIEL COOK: What would be a standardized process if my 10-year-old son had an earache or had a bellyache or had appendicitis? The standardized process is you have to call for help, recognize there's a problem, and then call for help.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Well, schools have our systems.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I'll move on.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Let's not do the back and forth here. Okay, Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I do believe— I've been to the stables years ago, and I do believe that the people who are with their horse do care about their horses. Let me be clear on that. The issue for me is this, I believe, is going to stop, this industry. What does— you know, I'm just being realistic here. So my question to the union or anybody else is, earlier we heard from one of the speakers that there is some interest from the

owners of getting out of the business. That was surprising to me. So my question to you is, what circumstances, even though I know you are not interested in getting out of the business, what circumstances would you feel could be of assistance to your members if in fact this happens? I know it's a hard question, but that is my question.

CONNOR MCHUGH: A couple of occasions you have referenced there's big real estate here, and this is something that really rubs me and my other owners— myself and 50— 14 other people own the stable on 52nd Street. All of us are carriage medallion owners. And the other two stables are owned by people who own carriage medallions. And we bought our land because we wanted it and we needed it, and we didn't buy it to sell it. And that is rubbing a lot of people the wrong way nowadays, especially since the whole rezoning took place. And our mission is not to give up our land ever. And that's— I don't know how many times I've heard about big real estate. We're not interested in big real estate. We are interested in providing carriage rides in Central Park, and we're not interested in being fobbed off with some

stories, because the day you sell your land is the day you are finished.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I hear that, but there was a family apparently that is interested that we heard from. What's that story?

CONNOR MCHUGH: The family that's interested sold their stable eight, 10 years ago.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So it was 10 years ago that they sold it?

CONNOR MCHUGH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Council Member Wilson?

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: Thank you. I have a question about, you know, procedures while in the park. We heard from testimony earlier, and I guess this is for the drivers— we heard testimony earlier that it is very common for drivers to leave the carriage for— I think it was said for photographs— that, that's advertised, that there's sections in the park where they're often left. I'm just curious your response to that, and if that is— if it is routine in perhaps a way that, you know, to step away in a

practical way of managing the carriages and the business.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: So, I've worked as a commercial carriage driver for 20 years, and there's different rules and regulations in different cities. So here in New York, the law is that the horse must be attended or tethered at all times. So we– when we can we tie our horses to the lampposts and infrastructure, you know. Attended, you know, we have people that are right there. When this accident took place, my understanding from the people that are investigating it still— it is still an ongoing investigation into this accident as to what spooked the horse. My understanding is that the driver, as he was getting on the carriage, had the lines in his hand. When I worked in Philadelphia, the law was not attended or tethered, it was that you could not ever tether and that you had to maintain control of your horse's head, which was actually defined. So, you know, we've been a very, very safe industry. You can look at our guys doing this business back for decades and decades and decades when they're out on Central Park South. And basically one of the things that the Health Department did not mention in their discussion

of our training processes is that we have an apprenticeship. So we learn from other carriage drivers, like, how it's done. And that is what– you know, this is how our business has been, you know, safe and handed down from generations to generations to generations. Given that we don't know what spooked the horse, and given that there is, like, a completely new thing in Central Park with all these electric vehicles whining and screaming and going on at high rates of speed, you know, we have had to then change what we do because the park is different. And so, you know, I have been out there every single day literally reminding people to hold their horses and to change the way that they are used to attending their horses and being nearby. Edita was up here testifying earlier about unattended horses. She has come by taking pictures, and a lot of times she's taking pictures of our horses and the driver steps out of frame because A, he's— she's trying to take a picture of the horse, not of us, and B, people don't want to be in her social media.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: How often is a horse spooked?

CHRISTINA HANSEN: Very, very rarely. You know, horses are creatures of habit. They don't spook because they're prey animals. So, you know, a horse's main concern in life is not to be eaten by a mountain lion. And, you know, you can't spook at everything that moves. I mean, spooking is a defense mechanism- run away. So it happens very rarely because our horses get used to what they experience in the city, and the taxis and the buses and the construction equipment, all that might as well be rocks and trees and shrubs. It's just a part of their environment so they can be on the lookout.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: I guess what I'm struggling with is, like, we don't know what spooks them.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: Well, we-

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: [interposing] And no matter- no matter what, you know, what is the step we can take to stop that?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Councilmember, you have to wrap it up.

CHRISTINA HANSEN: So-

COUNCIL MEMBER WILSON: [interposing] That's kind of what I'm- you know, we have a sentient animal that we don't-

CHRISTINA HANSEN: [interposing] We do, and because they're creatures of habit, as Dr. Cook said, and we are with them all the time, we know them. Like, my horse Sherman doesn't like off-leash dogs, particularly medium-sized, light-colored ones. Like, he notices them. He was obviously chased before I bought him when he was on some Amish farm up in the Finger Lakes. He doesn't like little wheelie things. You know, some horses don't like garbage trucks and some walk right past them. It's not that we don't know, but in this particular instance, in this particular accident, we have no idea. But that's what's unusual about it, because as horse people, we can't, you know- you know, it— this one is a stumper for us. So that's why it's still under investigation, and, you know, so, I mean, we are horse people all the time. Ask the mounted cops what spooks their horses. You know, they have— they know their horses just as well as we know ours.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you. I want to thank this panel, really appreciate it.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Madam Chair, Madam Chair, I think I have something to add to Carl Wilson's question, and I think we'll—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Now listen, you, you had your time, and so-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: No, I just think it would be—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I'm just telling you- I'm just telling you, this panel's dismissed.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I'm just trying to answer his ques— alright, I'll answer it-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] You can answer it with him. He's next- right next to you. Thank you all very much. For the next panel, we're gonna do a hybrid. We're gonna— there's a doctor who was supposed to be on earlier. We had some technical issues, so we're going to see if he's still available. Dr. Kraig— Dr. Kraig Kulikowski.

KRAIG KULIKOWSKI: Yes, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes. Oh, amazing. Alright, so why don't— why don't you go ahead and testify, and then we'll call the other parts of the panel after, okay?

KRAIG KULIKOWSKI: Okay, great.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Great. Thank you.

KRAIG KULIKOWSKI: I would like to thank the City Council for considering the welfare and safety of New York City's carriage horses. My name is Dr. Kraig Kulikowski. I'm a New Yorker, an equine veterinarian with almost 30 years of experience, and I have been a horseman for more than 40 years. Before I was a veterinarian, I competed internationally as an equestrian in several countries and on multiple continents. I believe that horses, like humans, can work for a living. But when humans employ horses for entertainment or profit, we assume a serious responsibility to protect their health and welfare. In many equine industries, including racing and competitive sport, working horses undergo consistent, thorough, and independent veterinary examinations. These evaluations include include observing the horse at the trot to identify lameness, along with blood testing for painkillers, sedatives, stimulants, and other medications that could mask an underlying disease or lameness. When I was commissioned by the Department of Health to conduct veterinary examinations of 16 carriage horses last year, the owners did not comply with two critical components of

typical examinations: blood testing and the complete lameness evaluation. In fact, two owners did not even show up to present their horses for examination. In spite of the refusal to comply fully, the truncated exams that I did conduct revealed some troubling concerns for me, including widespread old scars on horses' backs from ill-fitting tack and gear, insufficient dental care, and lameness that could be visible even at the walk. While these clinical findings gave me concerns, it was the lack of natural access to pasture that was my biggest concern. A horse that has consistent access to natural pasture is not only going to be a healthier horse, but most likely less apt to frantically grab for unnatural toxic forage in Central Park, which may have contributed to at least one recent horse death in the city. Not having access to consistent pasture also means these horses spend the majority of their days indoors inside horse stalls. Please bear in mind that—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Can you please summarize? You can always submit testimony. We have another 10 hours of testimony. I

just want people to know based on who signed up, so we have to– we have to keep it short.

KRAIG KULIKOWSKI: Yep, I'll be done in just a second.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

KRAIG KULIKOWSKI: Please bear in mind that a typical 12-foot by 12-foot horse stall for a 1,000-pound horse would be similar to a 200-pound human living in a five-foot foot by six-foot closet for the majority of the day. It is not hard to imagine how this type of daily confinement might lead to unpredictable and extremely dangerous actions by a 1,000-pound animal when it finally gets outside of its confinement. The concern is not only that one can evaluate the horse's welfare without full cooperation from owners, but how do we provide adequate relief from prolonged confinement and the dangers associated with cooped up and pent up horses? Thank you for your consideration.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Thank you so much. Alright, now we're going to do the in-person panel. Roger Mosier, I think it is. I'm sorry. David Saltonnstall. Sorry, I probably screwed– butchered that a little. Dr. Natalie Juris. Folks

here? Yes? No? Laura Spielman, Curtis Sliwa, and Danielle Chin. Okay, I just want to reiterate to everyone, you have two minutes, because I'm going to start cutting people off and cutting the mics off, because we have a lot of testimony. You could submit testimony. It all gets looked at- to testimony@council.nyc.gov, and it all— all of it is going to be looked at and taken into account. So if— when it— when the buzzer goes off, just summarize, and then we'll go on. Okay, who's going first? Okay, go ahead.

DAVID SALTONSTALL: My name is David Saltonstall, and I'm Vice President for Government Relations and Policy at the Central Park Conservancy, the nonprofit that manages the park on behalf of the city. And I'm joined by Roger Mosier, the Conservancy's Chief of Park Operations. The Conservancy supports Romanch's law, and we urge the Council to pass it without delay. We do not take this position lightly. Over the past 13 months, Central Park has seen eight separate horse-related incidents— runaway carriages, collisions, injured drivers, and a horse that collapsed and died in front of stunned parkgoers. Last month, that pattern ended in tragedy.

18-year-old Romanch Mahajan, visiting with his family from India, was killed when a horse bolted near Cherry Hill. It was a devastating loss, and our hearts go out to his family who have spoken so eloquently here today. Public safety is the Conservancy's paramount concern. Horse-drawn carriages are simply incompatible with a modern crowded park used by millions of visitors a year. Again, this has become painfully clear over the last 13 months, during which there have been eight frightening incidents injuring and sadly causing the death of Romanch. The park is not built for the volume of people we welcome every day to share safely with half-ton animals whose natural instinct is to bolt when spooked. No amount of regulation and no single piece of hardware can correct for an animal's basic instincts. The public agrees. A poll the Conservancy commissioned two weeks ago found that 68 percent of New Yorkers support ending city licensing of horse-drawn carriages in the park, support that holds across every borough, every demographic, and every political affiliation. Keeping New Yorkers safe does not, and must not, come at the expense of those affected. We strongly support the provision of real

jobs and workforce development services for the drivers and stable workers who will be displaced, as well as humane homes for the horses. We would not be the first to do so. London—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Wrap it up—

DAVID SALTONSTALL: Paris, Salt Lake City, Philadelphia already have shown how to end this practice responsibly, and it's time for New York City to join the rest of the world.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Who's next? Okay.

NATALIE JURIS: Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Natalie Juris, and I'm an equine veterinarian. My role is to evaluate equine health and soundness, diagnose disease and injury, and provide recommendations that prioritize both equine welfare and public safety. I appreciate the opportunity to offer a veterinary perspective on this issue. One of the most fundamental principles of equine medicine is that horses are prey animals. Even healthy, highly trained horses retain an innate flight response, a biological survival mechanism that cannot be eliminated through training, experience, or routine veterinary care. As veterinarians, we can determine

whether a horse is medically fit for work at the time of an examination, but we cannot predict or guarantee that a horse will respond to an unexpected stimulus in a complex and rapidly changing environment. As veterinarians, we also recognize that animal welfare extends beyond the absence of disease or lameness. Welfare includes an animal's physical health, behavioral needs, and its ability to cope with the environment in which it lives and works in. A veterinary examination is a snapshot in time. It tells us whether a horse appears clinically fit on the day it is evaluated, but it cannot predict every future medical condition or behavioral response. In my professional opinion, New York City's dense traffic, continuous noise, construction, emergency vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and other unpredictable environmental stimuli create an inherently challenging and stressful situation for horses. Appropriate veterinary care, thoughtful training, and responsible management are all essential for protecting horse welfare, but they cannot eliminate the biological realities of the equine species or the inherent risks associated with asking prey animals to work in one of the world's

most complex urban environments. Veterinary medicine can help manage these risks, but it cannot eliminate them. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next, want to go Curtis?

CURTIS SLIWA: Thank you very much. Curtis Sliwa, animal welfare activist. Ran for mayor on the first-ever animal welfare line. Animals are people, and it is the responsibility of you elected officials to protect the rights of all animals. This family that came from India to celebrate the graduation of their 18-year-old son, if they had gone to Bombay, now called Mumbai, they would no longer have been able to take a horse-drawn carriage that predated back to Queen Victoria because the Bombay High Court ruled it to be a barbaric act. In city after city around the world, first world, third world cities, we should be ashamed of ourselves that they have led in banning this barbaric behavior and most times replacing them with electric carriages so that the horse drivers, the carriage drivers, can continue to have an income. We're not even considering that here. We're saying, oh, we need to keep the tradition. Let me tell you about the tradition at the Bronx Zoo.

They always had elephants. Remember Happy the elephant? Wasn't all that happy. Happy died, and the Bronx Zoo decided to send Patty, the remaining elephant, to an elephant sanctuary and will have elephants no more, even though they will lose money, because they recognize finally, after many of us animal welfare activists pounded their door, that enough is enough. We know why this continues to be a problem here. It's the result of the former president of TWU Local 100, the bully John Samuelson, who has threatened to sue anyone who stands in his way. The State Senator who spoke here, former Mayor Eric Adams– did you know of any issue that ever brought mayoral candidates together as in this past election?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Curtis, wrap– Curtis, wrap up.

CURTIS SLIWA: Eric Adams, Andrew Cuomo, Zohran Mamdami, Curtis Sliwa, your Speaker. So if you're going to take the money from TWU Local 100, the blood money, you are not humanitarians. You have—

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Stop! People will be escorted out. Stop! If people are going to act

out, we're going to have people removed. I'm telling you now.

DANIELLE CHIN: It's a very tough act to follow.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Danielle, go ahead. You have two minutes.

DANIELLE CHIN: Council Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and to the Mahajan family, I'm so sorry for your loss. I am also so sorry for all of those who claim to mourn your loss, but do not even take the time to pronounce your name correctly. My name is Danielle. I'm a native New Yorker and a longtime Hell's Kitchen and Upper West Side resident. When previously living on 57th and 10th, I watched as horses make the trek to Central Park, have them be spooked by cars honking, bikes cutting them off, and overall just not in a comfortable state. When now living near the Museum of Natural History, every day I walk my two dogs in the park daily, multiple times of day. In the last 13 months, there have been eight serious incidents, and I have been firsthand witness to two of them. On September 1st, the horse Samson was spooked by loud sounds, and myself and my dogs were part of the

pedestrians that needed to jump out of the way to get— to not get trampled. Had my instinct not been quick enough, I would have been trampled. My heart is dropping just thinking about that experience. And I soon watched as Samson the horse then smashed into a stop sign. On June 9th, I was walking with my dogs and saw the horse Deniz collapse. And while there is something awful about witnessing an animal dying, there is nothing more horrible than watching two of my animals react to another animal dying in front of them. I am here today because of my interview with various media outlets, including CBS, ABC, on September 1st, and in my interview on June 9th, I quoted that it was only a matter of time until that stop sign was a human or a child. I invite you to look up that footage and see that footage of me saying that with fear in my eyes of what might happen. And on June 16th, I was leaving the park when friends had texted me about the incident and the critical condition of Romanch. I am also here because as a dog owner, if my animal is hurt, my instinct is to react. And in both of those incidents, I know I'm short on time, but I think it's important to express that my instinct as an animal owner and someone who

genuinely cares for animals is to react to them in danger. While I am not speaking to all horse carriage drivers, I am speaking to those two in front of me that I saw. I saw them have complete apathy for the situation, and then as soon as the news cameras came on, have staged performance of care.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, wrap— if you could wrap up.

DANIELLE CHIN: While those in— I will wrap up. While those in opposition might say it was one-off in decades of Romanch's tragedy, and the industry just needs to be regulated, my perspective is that you cannot regulate instinct. It was instinct for Romanch to protect his mother. It was instinct for horses to be spooked to be bolted.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You really—

DANIELLE CHIN: And if this legislation is not passed, it is only a matter of time that another human will lose its life.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you.

DANIELLE CHIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Go ahead.

LAURA SPIELMAN: Firstly, to the Mahajan family, I'm so very sorry for your loss. My name is

Laura Spielman. I'm a founder of the Coalition for Responsible Carriage Horse Retirement, and I'm here to ask you to vote yes on Romanch's Law. I'm here as a New Yorker. I was born and raised here. Both sides of my family have lived here since the 1800s. My great-grandfather served as mounted PD in the park in the '20s. Mounted police serve a vital public function. Horses— horse-drawn carriages do not. I'm a certified equine specialist for two international organizations working with humans and horses. I serve on both the Humane Society and ASPCA's large animal response teams. I built and currently run an equine program for the Department of Defense to work with the Navy, the Marines, and wounded warriors. I work with the VA, the prison system, law enforcement, children with developmental disabilities, and the general public. In the last five years, I've worked with over 200 people and 20 or so horses in my program, and I hold a perfect safety record because I put safety first. That means the safety of humans and the horses. I know that the retirement plan is a central concern here, and it can be done. I've done it before. I've worked on a large-scale rescue effort involving over 160 horses, everyone evaluated,

treated, and placed. I know from direct experience that a coordinated retirement of this very size can be done. And here's the science why they should be retired. A horse sees nearly 340 degrees around its body, but it has blind spots directly in front and behind, so traffic reads as an unseen threat. Its eyes adjust to light far slower than ours, so a shift from sun to shadow or a camera flash causes real disorientation, not disobedience. Their hearing can trigger a full flight response from a siren or a backfire in under a second, faster than any driver can react. And small dogs and little wheeled things are allowed in the park, and they always will be. This is not a training failure. More training will not fix it. It's biology doing what millions of years of evolution designed it to do in an environment that will never stop asking it to do the opposite. This is why accidents will not stop. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I have a couple questions for the Conservancy. How much money annually does the Conservancy spend on repairs and maintenance directly related to wear and tear caused by horse carriages?

ROGER MOSIER: Hi, thanks for the question. Roger Moser, Chief of Park Operations for the Conservancy. There's not an annual figure. It really depends on the projects that we might pursue from time to time. We find that the surfaces that the horses walk on are extremely deteriorated. For example, Cherry Hill has a loop around the fountain there, and we need to replace that asphalt due to horse damage. And that project is probably $500,000.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. How much money does the Conservancy spend on sanitation related to horse waste?

ROGER MOSIER: We don't— we don't spend money on that. We don't attempt to clean up after the horses. We do have a little bit of inefficiency related to working around the horses on our own trash removal, but we don't— we don't clean up after the horse.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Has the Conservancy seen an increase in a number— in the number of people visiting the park?

ROGER MOSIER: Yes.

DAVID SALTONSTALL: Thank you for the question. You know, it's very hard to know. Our

general estimate is that we get 42 million visitors a year. I think we saw a dramatic increase in general after cars were banned from the park in 2019. And also during the pandemic, many people came to the park because it was the only place to go. And I think they have continued those patterns since that time. So we really have seen a dramatic increase in the last five or six years.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you think the banning of horse carriages would affect the number of visitors?

DAVID SALTONSTALL: I do not. I know that there are a certain percentage of tourists who do avail themselves of horse carriages, but I don't think those 42 million people are coming to the park just to take a horse carriage ride.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, those are my questions. I'm going to ask Council Member Gennaro, he has some questions for you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you, Madam Chair. This has been David Saltonstall and the person to David's left. What's your name, sir?

ROGER MOSIER: Roger Mosier.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Okay, and so what's your title?

ROGER MOSIER: Chief of Park Operations for the Conservancy.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Chief of Park Operations. So, it was you that authorized the planting of the Japanese yews all over the park? Is that you?

ROGER MOSIER: The yews- the yews are ubiquitous ornamental shrub in North America-

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] But it was planted-

ROGER MOSIER: [inaudible] Northeast. Yes, it was planted.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Right, but they're— but they are toxic to every animal that is native to the park, or any animal that goes through the park, or migrates through it, or somebody walking their dog. You understand this, right? And I also—

ROGER MOSIER: [interposing] There are a number of plants in any park that—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] Yeah, but you went out of your way— you went out of

your way to plant these for aesthetics, knowing that animals could die?

ROGER MOSIER: The yew is essentially original to the park. We have planning plans from the 1800s that show that it was present. It's been regularly planted over— throughout the 20th century, and at a time when horses were much more ubiquitous in the park, and everyone has lived together for that period of time. And as far as toxicity—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] But you have no idea how many animals have been killed by them? I'm like- you don't know anything. You don't know.

ROGER MOSIER: The—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] All right, enough for you, enough for you, I'm done. I'm going to go to David now. And so, you talked about, you know, animal habits and, you know, horse habits and features and, you know, how they react. Do you know anything about horses?

DAVID SALTONSTALL: I am not a veterinarian. That's not why I'm here. I think you've heard abundant testimony from experts today that—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: But you talked about bolting. You know, you talked about bolting. And so, do you know what kind of horses the industry uses? Like, do you know the difference between, like, a hotblood and a coldblood? Do you know the difference?

DAVID SALTONSTALL: As I have said, I am not a veterinarian. I have seen—

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Well, let me tell you something, okay? It's just like the industry uses what we call draft horses or coldbloods, and these horses are bred to pull a plow all day long, and the amount of work that they have to do in order to pull a carriage is nothing compared to what they have to do if they were plowing a field. But the industry uses these horses because they are much less likely to spook, because that is their temperament. A saddle horse is a hotblood, they'll spook for anything. In between, like a combination, like would be a warm blood, which is also— could be a saddle horse and could pull a little wagon. Warm blood would be fine, you know, for the work that they have to do, but they prefer to use the cold blood because it is a much more stable temperament. And so for you to be

commenting on something that you know nothing about, not to mention the fact that, you know, you've got hundreds and hundreds of unlicensed illegal pedicabs, and people have died in pedicabs, but now you're coming down on the horse carriage. I think it's disgraceful, both of you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, that's it, thank you.

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Stop, no clapping. We've told— we've said this before. Alright, we're done with the panel, thank you. We appreciate it. Next panel, Alexis Lawson, Pete Donahue, Alexander Kemp, G. David Koch, Mindy Pless, and Joshua Sausville. Who's— not going to delay. Alright, before we— before this panel starts, I want to stress to everyone there needs to be decorum here, because I'm telling you, and I've said it once, I'm going to have people removed and I will do it. So just, you know- it's a very fraught emotional issue. We're trying to hear everybody out, but people have to have decorum here, all right? So if you want to stay in the room and listen to everything that's going on, please do that. Thank you. Who's going first here? Okay.

ALEXANDER KEMP: Good afternoon, my name is Alexander Kemp. I am the Administrative Vice President for TWU Local 100. I appreciate you guys taking the time to hear the concerns of the local and the union. My condolences go out to the Mahajan family. I just want to state for the record to the Mahajan family that I am a father. I have an 11-year-old daughter. I have a 17-year-old son. And one of my biggest fears in life is ever finding out that my son might not be coming home or my daughter. So for the sake of my condolences and a heartfelt condolences to the family. I am very, very sorry that this has become your reality and that this tragic event, you will spend the rest of your life reliving. I also want to say for the record that an equal tragedy is that this is being used to weaponize removing the property of business owners who have gave everything they have to try to live and act out the American dream. And because of a tragedy, people who are bloodthirsty for this industry have exploited it and absolutely used disgusting experience to make this their framework to eliminate an industry that has been represented for over 160 years. The truth is, is that this is one of the safest mechanisms of

tourism on the planet. The truth is, is that although and unfortunately we have lost a life, we do not take a consequence and throw the baby out with the bathwater. We look for ways to make it safer so that it never happens again. We can cite the Triangle fires and how it modified a whole industry. We can speak to the fact that when planes crash, we look for ways to make it safer. We, in transportation, in buses, in trains, we have 400 to 500 people, members, employees of the Transit Authority getting assaulted every year. I just heard a stat from 1980 up until now has been 98 instances where the truth is everyday transit workers are getting annihilated, and I don't see any caucus about the safety of the people that you guys are tasked with protecting. So, I would just demand that prior to you making a decision on this industry, you look at all of the responsibilities that you have to hold up your end of the bargain, and then collectively we can figure out what the future looks like. But nobody should be making decisions over one experience that is a tragedy that I believe we can ultimately learn from and make the industry safer. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Who's next? Please keep it to two minutes. Press the button.

UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah, am I on? I cleared with the staffer. I'm going to read a statement from International President John Samerson, and then I'm gonna give my testimony. That was approved by the council staff, just so you know. This is from the testimony of Councilman- TW International President John Samerson. This hearing is based on politics, not on the pursuit of animal welfare or public safety. Let's start with the prime sponsor, Councilman Marte. It's a shame he left here. At a hearing on Ryder's law last year, Marte said this about horses giving carriage rides? If it was an individual, if it was a human pushing a horse carriage, we would call that inhumane. If it was any other living animal, whether it's a dog or a cat pushing a carriage, we would call that inhumane. Why do we have to put horses at a different level? This is one of the most unintelligent comments ever uttered by a city council member. A 1,600-pound horse is not comparable, Councilman, to a chihuahua, a cocker spaniel, or a Siamese horse. But that is, in fact, the mindset of

the animal rights fundamentalists that this council speaker and council are following. Speaker Menin knows this is not an issue of safety in the park. If safety in the park was a real concern, she would hold a hearing on a bill which 20 council members signed on to when it was introduced that would prohibit e-bikes and motorized scooters in Central Park. Nearly 70 people, including pedestrians, were injured in Central Park in accidents involving bicyclists, e-bike riders, and e-scooters in the last five years. One died. This is absolutely a political issue. Speaker Menin and the council members here want to end the noise from the animal rights fundamentalists and their real estate backers. The constant phone calls, the emails, the social media posts, and the threats posed to council members, death threats to council members who opposed the bill. Ironically, they are wrong. They think that most New Yorkers don't want– want to get rid of the horse carriages. There are polls that show strong support for protecting workers, these immigrant workforces, and the horses.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You need to wrap it up.

UNIDENTIFIED:I'll wrap it up.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Please, because you can submit that. So we'll see the whole thing.

UNIDENTIFIED:Yeah, I will wrap up. I'm on the last two sentences. This bill strips blue-collar workers of their jobs and future income. It offers nothing in return, just a promise of workforce development and the words from the Speaker about potential future jobs, with no mention of compensation to medallion owners who paid in some cases hundreds of thousands of dollars for the right to this industry. NAFTA has come to Central Park. At the best, this bill is half-baked, exposing workers and ironically horses to harm. This is my testimony.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Who's next?

UNIDENTIFIED:No, I am next because—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Oh, you're next. I'm sorry, sorry.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you, thank you. Just seven months ago, this same committee, the Health Committee, rejected this exact same bill, then called Ryder's Law. You rejected the claims that the carriage horses are being mistreated. You rejected

claims that the horses aren't receiving proper care. Can I wait till I get attention? Okay. You rejected claims that the horses aren't receiving proper care. You rejected claims that the horses don't have suitable housing. You rejected claims that it is cruel somehow for a 1,600-pound draft horse to propel a carriage horse with giant wheels. You have voted against advancing this very same bill. So what changed? For the first time in 167 years of carriage rides being a popular feature of Central Park, a passenger fatality occurred. One fatality in 167 years. Carriage rides are the most safe mode of travel in New York City. The fatal accident involving Romanch was an absolute tragedy, no question. Was it more tragic than the death of bicyclist Salvador Nico Garcia, who was killed in a bicycle accident in the park last year? Was it more tragic than the death of bicyclist Charles Cheesborough, who was killed in a bicycle accident in 2019? Is it more tragic than the death of 28 people killed in accidents involving two-wheeled motor vehicles in New York City in the first six months of this year? No. Are you considering banning walking, biking, scooters, taxicabs, buses, or the subway? Of course not.

Because that defies all logic and common sense. So does banning carriage horses. The city can address any safety concerns it has by doing what it's supposed to do— govern, regulate. The lawyer for the Romanch family earlier said, "It's not the workers, it's not the union, it's the city that did zero enforcement." One of the animal rights activists said, "The city has done zero enforcement." And the only thing that this council can come up with doing is banning? That is not government— that, not the government that anybody in this city wants. The city can address safety concerns by holding a hearing on Jim Gennaro's bill. In all fairness to the immigrant drivers, carriage owners, and the horses themselves, the city should shelve this ban. Govern. Don't cancel. That's what voters want, not a knee-jerk reaction to an unprecedented tragedy, and there are polls to back that up. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Who's next? You'll go? Okay, go ahead.

JOSHUA SAUSVILLE: I'm Joshua Sausville, horse carriage driver. If the public has been actively deceived, we as the industry involved and our legislators have responsibility and a duty to

expose that deception. We are here because NYCLASS are animal liberation extremists whose eventual goal is the extinction of not just all working, but all domestic animals. Their movement defines captivity as abuse, so no change we make could ever be enough because domestic animals are an abomination to them. We are here because Steve Nislick is a billionaire. You might say, well, that proves his heart's true, because he— what does he need the money for? But billionaires don't care about money. If it was about needing money, they'd probably stop at $100 million and retire. You got to have a certain personality to go all the way to the billion. How can you not get to $100 million and say, okay, now I can finally write that play I never had time for? But they keep going, because it's not about money. Because if you're a billionaire, dollars aren't money. Dollars are points, points in a game. And a game is only enjoyable when you're on the field playing it, crushing your opponent. The problem is your opponent is us, and it's a game we never signed up for. And your winning point is our lives. Your winning point is our children. Nizilik [sp?] thinks he can control these people, but they'll come for his horse too. If

not now, sooner or later. This generation or the next- the mounted unit, the park rangers, the service dogs, the bodega cats. They could be finding horses that need their help, but they focus all their attention on the 68 best-kept and most visible horses in the country, because the visibility is the point. A symbolic victory in their long march toward extinction. These horses get the perfect ratio of exercise, rest, and human attention. They're getting the best life of any horse in America. Everybody loves doing what they're born for. Birds love flying, horses love pulling, I love running my mouth. There was a dog escaped in the news, they found him herding sheep for three days. Never seen a sheep in his life. Alright, you may see a poodle on a couch watching TV and a hunting dog covered in rain and dripping with mud and think, you know, which one's living the good life, but a poodle is a hunting dog and I promise you the happy dog is the muddy one.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Who's next?

MINDY PLESS: I will.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

MINDY PLESS: My name is Mindy Pless, a native New Yorker, but I now live on a farm in Virginia. If I may share a success story of the carriages. I'm not one of the carriage drivers. My career is in animal health, but I've been a lifelong horsewoman. I was a horse-crazy kid. My parents didn't own horses, but my grandmother indulged me. She was a buyer at one of the department stores in Manhattan. She said, you need to come to Central Park with me. I need to show you something that you'll never believe. We went on a carriage ride and I was besotted. I just loved it. It was fantastic. I read about the history of the park and the carriages and the original designers of the park. It was meant for three specific carriage paths, horse trails, and pedestrians. When I'm looking at that recent video, although horrific that, that boy died, and I- let him rest in peace. I'm looking at that video, I'm going, what the heck happened to the carriage pass? You have every mode of transportation on there. As a horsewoman, I would never allow my child, because she's inherited my love for horses, be on a horse with other modes of transportation. You have bikes, you have e-bikes, you have rollerbladers, you have

kids, you have everything. Those paths were made specifically for the carriage horses. And I'm sorry, but when I hear that word antiquity– I'm still riding, and I'm still riding horses. Just because it's not the 1800s and we don't use horses for transportation doesn't mean people like me that have a passion for riding and being on a horse– are you gonna come after me next, seizing my horses? Because you say, "Oh, get off, you're hurting that horse." This is my fear with PETA involved. You know their agenda is to end any equine discipline. I am here to tell you no, you cannot allow the precedent to be set here. And I ask you to reconsider this and listen to the carriage drivers and come up with solutions, and let the horses have those carriage paths back. Thank you for your attention.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. You want to go?

DAVID COOK: Hi, my name is Dave Cook. I have been a carriage driver since August of '82. And yes, the correct characterization is long in the tooth. I have been— this is third, possibly fourth of my appearances before this august board and the issues are almost always the same. The real estate

that the carriages hold is extraordinarily valuable, and the amount of effort to obtain that real estate knows no bounds. And ethically, morally, precisely what's going on today, as in 40 years ago, is a walk down, 38th Street starting at 10th Avenue. You walk west towards the Javits Center, you're gonna come upon the Manhattan Hotel, 10, 12 stories. It looks like 1970s architecture to me, boarded up, ready for demolition. Directly across the street, what was probably originally built as livery 100-some-odd years ago, the last 100 years has been doing automotive repair, boarded up, ready for demolition. You walk down the street another 100 yards, another building that was probably originally built for livery has been doing automotive repair, boarded up, set for demolition. You look to the left and there's our stables, 38th Street. You walk a few more steps and you'll see the other stables, identical architecture, directly behind ours at 37th Street. But you continue your gaze to the left, and there is the hood ornament of Hudson Yards, the vessel, two blocks right south of there. There is no more precise definition of what is going on with the carriages. I— one of my great loves of living in New York City is

the level of critical thinking here is high. You don't take the testimony of- what are they called, NICLAS? They're fully funded by the real estate industry. That is not testimony, that is propaganda.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you. Alexis. Is it— oh, I'm— what, the panel's not done yet?

UNIDENTIFIED: Oh, okay, I'm just letting him know that-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, alright. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen left of the council. My name is Alexis Lawson. I am a Queens native who is from South Jamaica, and I'm asking you to oppose Intro 943. Being a young girl from the South Side, I never had the opportunity to see the animals I was so obsessed with until the day I was allowed to pedal waiting carriage tours, and it set my path in stone. I used to parrot animal abuse when I was a little girl. You know, I loved animals, and I believe what I saw online. Then I learned that animal welfare should never be about if an animal has job or not, but rather about how that animal's physical and mental needs are being met. I transitioned into carriage driving in 2021, leaving an office job for my

passion, and it was my very first carriage horse Midnight who would be my saving grace as I lost my mom at the beginning of my career. She pulled me from my depression when nothing could, being my therapist and best friend. As such, I could not imagine being ripped away from working aside my heart in horse form. Just the thought of not being able to work aside my horse is a soul-crushing, and no one sees the dedication and love we share. Instead, they look at her job and callously claim I don't love her. Animal welfare is incredibly important, and I feel we need to remind people that animal welfare and animal rights are two incredibly different topics. At this time, I would also like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the family of Romanch. The tragic passing of this young man was and still is felt deeply by our entire industry, which is why we are asking to move forward instead with Intro 937, because to take advantage of a family's loss for political gain is abhorrent. And in light of that, we are requesting stronger driver training and safety in his honor. He came here to take a carriage ride, as millions have done for over 100 years. Carriage horses are woven into the fabric of New York City's

identity. How dare you tell them they do not belong? How can you claim to love horses but then want to destroy their careers, take food from their mouths, from their families and the owners who love them. I strongly urge the council to oppose 943, and instead I ask you all to focus and support Intro 937, which is working on reforming the industry as a whole. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Councilmember Gennaro has a question for this panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I was, you know, really going to speak to, you know, Mr. Kemp and Mr. Donahue, but the last witness, I don't know your name yet, very, very compelling testimony. I wish to be associated with your good remarks, and I thank you for being a dedicated horsewoman who has found her niche in life and wants nothing more than to chart her own future in this great industry. Now I'm going to take it down- you know, we gotta get in the weeds here with, you know, Mr. Kemp and Mr. Donahue. As we saw in the Times, you know, yesterday, like the day before the hearing- the day before the hearing, Speaker comes

out and says, I know what we're going to do. We're going to do this with the workers, we're going to do this with the horse, we're going to do this with the stables. I got it all figured out. Like, this is done. And so what this hearing is, unfortunately, is— I mean, is a pageant, right? So the Speaker's already decided, like, unilaterally, like, that this is happening. And I'll- you know, and he's got the real estate money, all this other stuff, and I don't know what's going on. I just don't like the policy, and I don't like, you know, like the way all this is playing out. And so if this is, if this is a power game now, you know, this has to be up to, you know, TWU to use all of its muscle to reach out to immigrant rights organizations- I don't see them here, you know? It must be that the carriage drivers are not, you know, are not their kinds of immigrants and that is a real shame, and—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Jim, do you have a question?

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Yeah, and so I just want to ask TWU what mechanisms you're going to bring to bear to call for at least a hearing on my bill so that we can have an alternative to shutting

the whole thing down. And because everything that's been discussed today as it turns to what's needed to make it better, I've already done in 2010. This would be, you know, 2.0 of the reforms and has a lot to do with hitching posts. They can spend all kinds of money. So what can TWU bring to bear in terms of your own resources and, you know, your connections to the, you know, immigrant rights groups? To both Mr. Kemp and Mr. Donahue.

UNIDENTIFIED: So I'll go first, and I think the best weapon to bring to this fight is the truth. I think the facts are overwhelming that this industry has not represented one that should be removed. I think when we talk about the components that are established when they say that you cannot predict what a horse is going to do if it's spooked. Well, a person riding the F train can't predict whether somebody's gonna push them in front of a train. A person walking down the street can't predict whether somebody's gonna rob them. A person who walks out of their house cannot guarantee they're gonna leave or get back the same way they left. If we're basing an industry on the unknown, well, then no industry would be able to survive. I think the

foundation of this argument is rooted in people being bullied who have an argument that they feel they can leverage, and that is a dead 18-year-old, that they are going to try to bully the union because in years past the evidence and the facts have not been on their side, and they feel like this is a golden bullet that they can shoot at the head of the union and the members of the union when all intents and purposes, the industry actually does not represent what is being projected. And I just want to say, for, for what Curtis Sliwa stated, if he's going to make a statement about Local 100, I think it's important for the record to establish this is a person who said he was kidnapped and lied about it on the record. And so his credibility is very limited as it comes when he reports on what Local 100 actually is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, that's it. Thank you. I want to thank this panel. Appreciate you-

UNIDENTIFIED: I believe— I was asked a question, am I not allowed to answer it?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, you were? I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Yeah, because I directed to both Kemp and Donahue, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I didn’t hear you. I’m sorry. Yeah,

UNIDENTIFIED: I appreciate it. I think, I think there's an education process that has to happen, and I think there are still some reasonable council members who are not going to be cowered by the threats in the social media and see the importance of standing up for working immigrants and not just throw them under the bus with some vague language of possible job opportunities. I think we need to get out there and get the immigrant organizations who represent these groups, but also talk more about the bill that Councilman Gennaro introduced. I mean, several people testified basically today, including the lawyer for the Romanch family, that the city hasn't done anything. And so there's a lot of room if the city has concerns There's a lot of things, common sense things, that can be done if the city has concerns that are short of throwing people under the bus, so to speak. And Jim's- Councilman Gennaro's bill does that. And we're still hoping and optimistic that New York City

government isn't completely dysfunctional, that there are council members who have some common sense, and that they can realize that, you know, there is a middle ground here and that New York is the greatest city in the world. And New York City, if it puts its— if it can throw a parade for 4 million people in three days to celebrate– God bless the Knicks– if it can have every agency descend on a building that was possibly crumbling, that maybe it could actually pay some attention and celebrate this industry and support support these drivers and do something other than just driving them into unemployment.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you. Alright, thank you to this panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you for your time. Appreciate it. Alright, next panel is Brian Shapiro, Wayne— Priscille, Bill Ketzer, who's this? Mian Osumi, Kathleen Schatzman, and Dr. Joanna Grossman. Please keep your— I want to remind people, please keep your testimony to two minutes. Once the bell rings, just wrap it up and then submit your testimony to us, please. It's really important, otherwise we're going to be here till midnight and we

can't do that. We're not going to be able to accommodate everybody that wants to testify. So who's going first? Okay, go ahead.

BRIAN SHAPIRO: Hello, thank you. Good morning, Chair Schulman, honorable council members. My name is Brian Shapiro, Director of Humane World for Animals, formerly the Humane Society of the United States. We're here supporting Intro 943. This legislation would address many of the safety shortcomings that the horse carriage industry has continued for decades. The industry's answer is to put more rules in place, all funded by taxpayers. The representatives suddenly acknowledged that existing rules were never consistently followed and authorities are now needed to enforce them. Compliance should not look like a regulator standing over a horse carriage with an open ticket book and pen in hand. The industry has traditionally controlled its own operations. It didn't need to wait for another law or death or accident. Could have done so after the 2007 or 2009 audits, and it could have done so in the past 160 years. City agencies have tried regulations, yet serious problems remain. In fact, our recent records requests exposed serious

problems in the oversight that go unnoticed by the city. DOHMH only maintains records on horses, while DCWP maintains records on drivers, carriages, businesses. There's no evidence that the agencies effectively share and link records together to say what horse is pulling what carriage, for which driver, which owner, how long are the horses working. There needs to be a hard look at this. Humane World for Animals and other rescue organizations stand ready and have always stood ready to help with this situation so no animal goes to horse slaughter. I think it's fantastical and outrageous to say that these animals are done for. I am not an equine surgeon. I am someone who has 26 years' experience in this, and I stand— my organization stands by Catskill Animal Sanctuary, Equine Advocates. We are not fly-by-night operations. We are professionals who are here to assist and help these horses. Thank you for the opportunity to present, and thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Who's next?

JOANNA GROSSMAN: Hi, I can go.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: One of you should go. Go ahead.

JOANNA GROSSMAN: Sure. Good morning, or good afternoon, I should say. My name is Dr. Joanna Grossman, and I'm the Equine Program Director for the Animal Welfare Institute. We are grateful to Speaker Menin, Council Member Marte, Chair Schulman, and the committee for calling this hearing on Intro 943, Romanch's Law. AWI, one of the nation's oldest animal protection groups, heads up the Horses Coalition, which is a network of over 500 equine rescues and sanctuaries. We fully support this legislation to phase out horse-drawn carriages in the city. This reform is long overdue, and we trust that the council will do right by ending these unnecessary rides. The question is not whether horses can pull these carriages, but whether the circumstances pose too many risks, and the answer unequivocally is yes. Horse-drawn carriages do not need to continue in such a densely populated setting with conditions that run counter to equine welfare, not to mention countless factors that can cause these horses to spook and bolt. Romanch's death is an unimaginable tragedy that no family should have to face. It should weigh

heavily on all of us as we consider how to prevent more accidents. I don't think there was a dry eye in the room hearing what that family has endured. As the Central Park Conservancy put it, this is the tragedy we feared when we first called for horse carriages to be banned from Central Park due to the risks they pose. In June, immediately after a 16-year-old horse named Deniz collapsed and died, struggling to breathe in front of onlookers, Philadelphia became the latest city to prohibit horse-drawn carriages. New York must be a leader in this space before the next inevitable accident occurs. There have been far too many troubling incidents in recent years. Continuing the status quo is not tenable for the sake of New Yorkers, visitors to the city, and the horses themselves. The risks and problems are well understood. The exhaust, pollution, noise, lights, traffic, congestion, construction, asphalt, temperature extremes, long hours, lack of access to pastures and turnout, these are just some of the welfare concerns that exist, and the list could easily go on. How many times do we have to see a horse collapse or spook before taking action? Hopefully, no longer. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Who's next?

WAYNE PACELLE: I'm Wayne Pacelle.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, Wayne.

WAYNE PACELLE: I'm President of Animal Wellness Action. You know, in the 19th century, there were whale oil lamps around Central Park. Are we going to persist in the— with the understanding that there were innovative energy sources that were coming online with whaling? Are we going to say we're going to take the jobs from the whalers and therefore we're going to continue to kill whales because we want those lamps, even though we have superior alternative methods to deliver light when it's dark at night. I led a ballot measure in Oklahoma to outlaw cockfighting in 2002, not that long ago. It was legal. There were 2.5 million fighting birds in the state. There were 10,000 cockfighters. You, Madam Chair, and other members have been gracious in talking about providing economic support for people who have a vestigial practice that doesn't generate much money. It's just a very small number of people. The city is saying they're going to help them. There was no support for the people to get money, all the

cockfighters in that state of Oklahoma. The same thing happened in Louisiana. The same thing happened in the 19th century with dogfighting here in New York. This is a very balanced approach that you've taken. You're identifying a practice that is demonstrably inhumane to the horses, that led to the death of a boy that if this council had acted a short time ago would be alive. We have all sorts of other transportation opportunities. We have all sorts of tourism opportunities. Why are we holding on to this practice seeing that Chicago and Philadelphia and cities around the country have addressed this issue? We hear arguments from the proponents of this that this is going to lead to the end of all animal use. Where are such proposals? Where have we heard such nonsense before? Real estate people? I have no idea what they're talking about with real estate issues. It's a bunch of nonsense. You all are on the right track. I encourage you to have such a balanced approach.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

KATHLEEN SCHATZMANN: Good afternoon. My name is Kathleen Schatzmann, Strategic Legislative Affairs Manager with the Animal Legal Defense Fund.

And I want to start by thanking you, Council Member Marte, for introducing this bill, and to all of the 21 council members that are signed on in support. We too are supportive and committed to this issue, and the Animal Legal Defense Fund is contributing to the cost of transport for the horses, should would you vote to pass Intro 943, Romanch's Law? I mentioned that because there has been discussion and talk about the cost and financial aspect of a transition. We've also— we're all here as animal protection organizations. However, make no mistake, this is a public safety issue. In 2014, the Animal Legal Defense Fund's successful state Freedom of Information Act lawsuit revealed that New York City's carriage drivers had committed more than a dozen hit-and-runs over the previous five years, and that children, cyclists, pedalists, pedestrians, carriage drivers, passengers, and NYPD officers had all been physically injured by accidents involved in New York City's horse carriages. In one incident— and I think this just needs us to go into detail a bit. One child was rushed to the hospital after falling out of a carriage and run over by a wheel. In another incident, a carriage driver was found by police lying

in the street not moving after being thrown to the ground. Another carriage driver was hospitalized in a coma after his horse became startled and collided with a station wagon. This latest unimaginable tragedy exemplifies the urgent need to bring an end to the horse carriage industry in New York City. A prohibition on horse-drawn carriages is the only meaningful way to definitively protect the public and the horses in New York City. And I- we urge you all to, to pass Intro 943. But I do want to make one last comment. New York City is the greatest city in the world, and it will remain so without horse carriage rides.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Who's- Mia? Okay, go ahead.

MIAN OSUMI: Hi, Good afternoon. My name is Mian Osumi, and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Voters for Animal Rights. We represent a community of over 100,000 New York City voters for whom animal protection is a top priority at the ballot box. First, I want to thank Speaker Menin for not only scheduling this hearing but being an advocate of this bill. Council Member Schulman, thank you for your leadership as Chair of the Health

Committee, Council Member Marte, for prime sponsoring Romanch's Law, previously Ryder's Law. Thank you as well to the council's Animal Caucus, led by Council Member Epstein, for standing behind this. Across multiple polls, New York City voters have consistently supported a horse carriage ban by over a two-thirds majority, and voters are united because the pattern of suffering is undeniable. As previously mentioned, in the 13 months before Romanch Mahajan's tragic death on June 17th- and thank you to his family for their immense courage testifying today— Central Park saw seven- saw eight separate horse-related incidents, but the casualties of this industry go back decades. The first named carriage horse who died on the streets of New York City was a horse named Maggio in 1982. Since then, dozens of horses have been killed by this industry. By sheer exhaustion, traffic collisions, untreated sickness, getting electrocuted, malnourishment, poisonous plants. The causes of death tell the story of the many ways in which horses simply do not belong in the middle of our bustling modern city. This industry doesn't just fail horses. It fails the people who work in it, which is why Voters for Animal Rights

eagerly supports Mayor Mamdani's Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to transition these carriage drivers into safer, higher-paying jobs so these workers can not only survive but thrive. The horses deserve better, and the carriage drivers also deserve better than gig work with no sick pay, retirement, or health benefits. Each time– how many more horses and humans have to die by this industry before this council decides the cost is too high?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. And, Bill, right?

BILL KETZER: Yes, thank you. Good afternoon, Madam Chair, members of the Council. I'm Bill Ketzer. I'm Senior Director of Government Relations for the ASPCA, and I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of Intro 943. The ASPCA has worked to protect horses since our founding in 1866, and our support for this legislation is rooted in that 160-year history. We've endorsed many efforts to regulate carriage horse welfare over the years. While those reforms have improved certain aspects of the industry, they cannot address the fundamental and persistent challenges associated with horses pulling carriages through one of the busiest

and loudest and most densely populated urban environments on the planet. It is inherently dangerous and inherently inhumane. Our position is not based on this summer's horrific events alone. It reflects years of experience and recognition that the risks associated with horse-drawn carriage operations are not avoidable. Carriage horses must navigate congested streets, construction zones, emergency vehicles, constant traffic, and thousands of pedestrians every day. These intelligent and sensitive animals are large and they are powerful, and even the best-trained horse can react unpredictably when frightened or startled. The recent death of carriage horse Deniz, followed days later by the tragic death of 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan in Central Park, remind us that the consequences extend beyond equine welfare. These were not isolated incidents. In the last 13 months alone, as others have said, a horse has collapsed and died, horses have run into moving traffic, collisions overturned carriages, tourists have been forced to leap from runaway carriages, and multiple drivers have been injured. The growing consensus is that the risks associated with this activity cannot be eliminated

through additional regulation, and New York City should adopt a lasting solution, not more studies or another decade of incremental reforms. We need a credible transition that protects horses, supports workers, reflects the values of a modern city. We respectfully urge you to pass Intro 943. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. I have a couple questions actually for you. One is ASPCA agents are authorized to inspect stables. How many violations has the ASPCA identified during stable inspections over the past five years?

BILL KETZER: We no longer do humane law enforcement.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, you don't.

BILL KETZER: We do— we have an MOU with NYPD since 2014.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I didn't know that. Okay. All right. Thank you. That was- the other questions followed that one, so no, so don't worry about it.

BILL KETZER: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you very much to the— oh no, Jim, I'm sorry. Council Member Gennaro has questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Yeah, I want to tell this panel, everyone talks about how congested Manhattan is. The population of Manhattan is 1.6 million people. In 1950, it was 2 million, and the cars used to be a lot stinkier— leaded gas. So, there goes that argument. And regarding the ASPCA, now I understand it's just like a whole lobbying thing, but once upon a time, you were out there, and you were where the- you know, you were like in the park. You were in the stables all the time, and I think your people just got, like, bored of not finding anything. And so, you know, and so you've— and also, as an animal rights organization, you know, I'll say this again. I mean, have you done anything about like the Japanese yew? Are you concerned about that? It's toxic to all animals, but yet I'm sure you guys haven't made a peep about that. And so- and anyway, I don't have a high opinion of the ASPCA. What you've given us here is not factual.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Do you have a question, Council Member?

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: It's simply your opinion. And so I guess my question is, where do you get off? Where do you get off? Just coming here and

not— this is— your testimony is like your personal opinion, which I guess you're allowed, but you're representing an organization. If you were here by yourself, I'd say fine, you know, voice any opinion you want. But you come here and you just give us your own personal opinion. I don't know if that's ASPCA policy. You spout things that, you know, without any kind of backup. And this is why people are sick of the ASPCA.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Council Member, they're allowed–

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: [interposing] That's my question.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: to testify to what they want on this issue. You can't question that. If you have a question specific to what they do as an organization, that's fine. Otherwise, I'm not going to allow it. I'm just telling you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Alright, I made my point. I'm good.

BILL KETZER: I'd like to answer about leaded gasoline.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: No, no, no, I'm not asking you a question.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I don’t want a back and forth.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I'm not asking you a question.

BILL KETZER: You raised the issue.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I'm not asking you a question.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, that– time is out. That's it. So thank you to this panel. Really appreciate your testimony. We're going to take a 15-minute break, everyone. Alright?

[break]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Folks, could we just please all find our seats? Please find our seats. Please take conversations outside the chambers. We will be resuming momentarily. Please find your seats. Quiet on the floor, please find your seats. Quiet on the floor, please find your seats. If you wish— if you wish to speak today and you haven't filled out an appearance card, please see one of the Sergeant-at-Arms and fill out an appearance card, even if you preregistered to speak online. Please keep all food and beverages away. There is no eating

or drinking in the chambers. Please find your seats. Quiet on the floor, quiet on the floor, please.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We're beginning again. The next panel is Ahmet Brilli [sp?], I think it is. Tarik, Kildarek [sp?]? Kildarek? Cornelius Byrne, John Quadrozzi, Jr., and Natasha Kabanova. And who's— Nasratine Kariak- I'm not— probably not pronouncing it right, but I can't read the writing. He needs a translator? Okay, we'll take care of that. So we're just waiting for a translator, so give us a second. Can the translator— can you tell us your name?

TRANSLATOR: S-A-Y-M-A-Z.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And what's his name?

TRANSLATOR: Ahmet Billici.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, this one. Yep. Okay. So why don't you— why don't you go first since you need the translator? You have— tell him he has two minutes.

AHMET BILLICI: My name is Ahmet Billicci, Turk-American [inaudible]

TRANSLATOR: I'm Ahmet Billici. I'm a Turkish-American. I'm an immigrant here.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: I'm a horse carriage driver and I'm an owner.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: And I've been a carriage driver since 2003 in Central Park.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: And this is not just a livelihood for us, it's a way of life, not just for me, for also for my family too.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: And mind you, actually, I made this as my carrier- career for the last 23 years. I've put on all of my savings into this business.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: You know, I believe that this is a heritage, this is a symbol of Central Park. You know, I can talk for myself and for the other, you know, carriage drivers that we've been doing all of our best for the safety and all the concerns of the—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Okay, you're gonna get an extra two minutes because of the

translation, so just put another— put another two minutes on. Go ahead.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: I came to this country to live the American dream. I spent it, you know, almost a quarter century building and living with this business, put my families and my future into this business. Now they're— everybody's gathered here and talking about actually putting me on the street, leaving me with no work.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: They're only talking about, like, a job replacement and all that, good things, but they're not talking about my entire life savings. I have kids, they're all going to college. What do they want me to do, like, pack up and leave?

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: I mean, so they may think that the horses— with the horses we spend only between nine to five, but it is not the fact. Some people also mentioned here that we've been actually living and breathing with them sometimes 24 hours a day.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: So we don't just— we're not with the horses only when we're working. On our off days or the times or the hours that we're not working, we're still with the horses. We give them a bath, we're feeding them. Making sure that actually they're taken care of. We see them as a part of our family.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, he needs to— he needs to summarize and wrap it up.

AMET BILLICI: [speaking non-English]

TRANSLATOR: Of course, horses have been all of— part of our lives for thousands of years, and even here in this room I can see that it is also on a picture, on a painting right here on the wall. And I believe the part of this city also built with horses. And you know, sadly that they want to get rid of them. We want the horses to be part of our lives in the city.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Alright. Thank you. Who's next? Okay. Is the mic— is the mic on?

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, and pull the— pull it toward— towards your mouth so that we can hear you. Go ahead.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Okay, thank you. Um, my name is Cornelius Byrne, and when the park was first built, there were hitching places all over the place, and they were very essential, very needed, and they provided safety and security. Today I've heard them kind of minimized here today as if they were a thing of the— that wouldn't work anyway if they were installed. But for safety and security reasons, we need these, and we have begged and pleaded for them and never got them. And they're so essential, and you got to listen to the people that are in the business about what they want. We needed these hitching posts. The fatal accident that happened in Central Park would never have happened, and this fella would be alive, if we were allowed to have hitching posts where we bring those carriages for pictures, and where we stand waiting for rides. A few horses jumped off the line and ran through the park last summer, and it was recorded. But as I say again, if a hitching post tied those horses in, that would not have happened. Now, the horse at the fountain that

ran away, he ran away so viciously. Nobody has ever experienced that- that speed. He acted as if he was electrocuted. And you maybe get varying thoughts on what caused this, but I did a little research, and at Cherry Hill, there is a massive infrastructure of underground wiring that is an important part of the power grid for the whole of Central Park and for the surrounding areas. And a recent irrigation project was done there. The footings were put in wrong and the wrong materials were used. And the wires probably were disturbed because they dug those foundations wrong. And as I say, there's a spaghetti of wires down there below the ground. And not a lot of people would realize that. This area is now wet and muddy and sandy throughout. Wet sand is highly conductive to electricity.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You need to summarize your testimony.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Okay. And a horse standing there with four shoes could easily be hit with stray voltage in the sand. This could be the very probable cause of what happened to that horse. And I need to add one thing, that the same landscape management team that planted the poisonous flowers

that killed the horse, Deniz, were the same people who did the irrigation project in Central Park. And if you just to look at it, you would understand that if it's not dangerous, it's at least illegal. It could never pass a code.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Now, well, one thing else.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, you need to summarize. I'm telling you, everybody has two minutes.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: I'm going to summarize right now. We've been here for a long time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I understand that, but we also have other people that are not gonna wait till midnight, so I'm telling you to summarize it or else we're going to the next person.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Very good. There's livelihoods involved here for these people, and they're very determined to keep them. And there's the lives of the horses too. Let's keep them alive.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Because you're gonna ruin both if you pass this legislation.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Who's next?

CORNELIUS BYRNE: You're welcome.

I'll be next. Hello, dear Council Members. My name is Tarik. The thing what I'm doing right now is some kind of a family business. You probably heard the name Deniz the Horse died in the park because of he ate poisoned plant, unfortunately. And his owner, Nurettin Kervik [sp?], right over here, is my uncle. Like I said, it's some kind of a family business, and I started to work here thanks to them, him and his brother, Umut Kırbik [sp?]. Before that I was earning my life with the company that I created with two of my friends by developing computer games. And before that, I graduated from a good college with a 3.5 GPA. And however, this process that started to help my uncles and started spending time with the horses, it helped me to discover my actual passion. And that's how, you know, I always defined myself as an animal lover, and that's how I became able to work with the horses. That was something priceless for me, you know. So much so that I left my company— that left that company that I created and started to work here. So, I mean, okay,

the AI stuff are coming. It may take many people job, but it will be never replace my horse, my beautiful horse Leila. And I'm not afraid of that too. I mean, I can make money somehow from software stuff. The actual thing what I fear is, the possibility of shutting down the horse carriage business because unlike the many of these folks behind me, the animal activists, I'm not calling my— I will never call myself an animal abuser, you know, because, like I told you before, I love animal. Deniz was also my horse. I worked with him for two years and I learned everything from him. So, you know, I lost him. That was so hard. He was only one of the eight horses that I work with. I cannot imagine how it will be hard for me to lose all of them. I just don't want any alternative job or any way to earn money. I just want to keep going my life in that way with my horses. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

NATALIA KABANOVA: Hello. My name is Natalia Kabanova. I'm carriage driver more than 10 years working in Central Park, and my daughter, she wants me to read this letter. She left to Arizona this morning and she want me to say from her. "I used

to work in the Central Park carriage industry and my mom still does, and I can say these people truly have your back and they care. The truth is they are some of the best people I know. They are quintessence of true New Yorkers, hard workers, always looking for a way to lend a hand. They love their community and they love their horses. I understand the world is changing and is the city- the city does, but this is such a special group of people and community that is still exist in our world of artificial intelligence and advanced technologies. Maybe the focus should be on how we preserve horses and livelihoods such as this rather than making more room for more boxes of concrete. Maybe the social justice activists should be focused on the greed that is bringing businesses like this down rather than harassing hardworking people, caring people. Perhaps a more reasonable solution is water station, tie posts, perhaps as a green lawns. There are no- they are not bad guys. Countless vets defend them. The horses are shiny and soft shape. Unfortunately, the reality of horse work is accident happen, but it can tell you this for sure. I can tell you this for sure. They are a lot more common in every often part of the horse world,

jumping, barrel racing, and any other kind of things. Accidents also happen when you ride a bike and don't see a car coming or go swimming and happen to run into the shark. It doesn't mean we stop living or doing things. Things we love, but we can always educate and readjust how do we do things. And so I am asking you to help us with the how and stand up for the little guys and carriage drivers. And we love horses." Natalia.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it. Next.

JOHN QUADROZZI: Hi, uh, my name is John.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Put your mic on.

Hi, name is John Quadrozzi. I'm here in opposition of the ban that's being proposed. While there has bee an uprising as of late and periodically in the past for a ban, is mostly brought about by exaggeration and acceleration by animal rights organizations that have been visibly pushing this agenda, who many have publicly expressed their desire to remove animals from people's lives and habitat, something that would be one-sided point of view and tragic on a major scale in New York City. The carriage horses, which are a niche activity and easily misunderstood by

non-horse experienced people, non-horse care related individuals, where things like horse blinders that protect horses from distractions and spooking, or pulling a carriage on level ground like New York City is less laborious than riding a horse. These are easily misunderstood. Like in any activity, there are accidents and bad actors for which government puts in rules and enforcement as is reasonably needed without imposing unnecessarily on functionality and enjoyment. Here too, there must be a balancing of acts of rules enforcement to keep horses, carriage operators, and the public's right of enjoyment intact and safe. This includes things like have been mentioned already, establishing rules for reasonable care, that toxic plants to specific animals are not put where these animals are known to frequent. Reasonable requests for hitching posts and watering troughs are provided so that horses that are typically idle and stopped can be accommodated. And oddly, this is even something, as mentioned, is not new to New York City, but somehow has gone missing. Historically, there were always water troughs and hitching posts.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Please summarize the rest of what you have to say.

JOHN QUADROZZI: Infrastructure for horse and welfare and signage for public awareness is a key responsibility of government. To quote something that I have often seen, this is a historical, cultural, and beautiful activity that we must protect and preserve. No group, no matter the majority, nor minority, should infringe upon this. I shudder to think that if every time an emotionally mob-driven mentality prevailed, what function of government would be to their duty in preserving interests of all. Here, the effects of one area—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] You gotta— no, you got to summarize. Your time is up. So you got a couple of sentences and then you could submit the rest of it.

JOHN QUADROZZI: Here what seems to be simple enough, that for those that don't like it, they don't have to ride, but for those that do, they should be allowed to. All horses are domesticated and thrive best by continuous human care and their horse-related activities as their exercise in keeping them both healthy, strong, and preserving their

mental and physical well-being. And if I could just note something about pasture, just some information—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You gotta wrap it up. Tell us what your point is, seriously.

JOHN QUADROZZI: So, what's mostly, you know, misunderstanding about pasture is that although it is important, um, it is not all about their health. It is not the whole picture of horse health, nor is it a com— nor is it without common risk that exposure to invasive plants even in pasture happens.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: That's it. I'm sorry, you had it-

JOHN QUADROZZI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Go ahead, next.

NIRESTIN KIRBIYK: My name is Nirestin Kirbiyk. I'm Turkish. I'm in United States 26 years. In 1999, I came to United States. Horse carriage driver and owner. Last 10 years as owner. Deniz was my horse that died with the poisoning. Yet, I'm still getting threatened from social media. Even people knew it. Getting message- they said, we know where you work, not hard to find your address as they saying that. I'm just keeping— I never answer nobody, any message. I'm pushing myself to work. Very hard

situation for me. And even they knew what's happened. I'm always— I'm in this businesses over 20 years. I know a sick horse, giving a sign. It's just, you know, looking back and ears back and trying to lie down. Deniz was very healthy horse before dying, two minutes before, until two minutes before. Horse die in two minutes, very quick. It just shake the body. I thought he's going— trying to pee, something happen. I would have a customer, two customer. I said please get out, something going wrong. I see that he just lie down and very quick die. So it's still threatening us really badly from crazy animal activities. Not just that, even this city, for example, the horse driver exam was four times a year always, before COVID. Now they start to do once a year. Now it's like two, whatever they want. They treating us like they don't like us. And the one is the exam, only 25 chairs that you can get a horse driver exam. The one in 2024 is only six of them passed a test, as two of them passed the riding one, and only one passed practical exam. That she was an Ecuadorian veterinary doctor.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You have to You have to wrap it up.

NIRESTIN KIRBIYK: [inaudible] quickly- easier than become a PhD, NYU or Columbia University, become a horse driver license getting in the city. There is no option that the Turkish— because American kids, they don't want the kind of job as they have more chance to do it. This is immigrant job. Please help us. We have to have a, you know, good driver. We can help them.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you. Council Member Gennaro?

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Yes, I'll try to make it quick. The owner of Deniz, I just want to point out that you told me, and I think it's important for people to know, even though the city is obligated to have all of their information that goes out for testing and whatever in multiple languages, for the horse carriage driver test is only in English.

NIRESTIN KIRBIYK: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: And so I think, you know, you didn't have an opportunity to make that point. I wanted people to know that. And a note to staff who's here, I want that— I want that looked into. And Neil, and so, I- you know, we go back to

1990 when we first met in Nawak Dear's [sp?] office, and I just want to thank you for being a pillar of the horse carriage industry and—

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Sure, you bet. And to strongly make the point that I've been making all along, it just- you know, we've been lucky. We, you know, have been lucky to get by without hitching posts for a long time. They're critically necessary. They, you know, used to be out there and thank you for making that point. I'm going to drive home that point, you know, when I have an opportunity to talk to my colleagues about this bill. And, you know, you go back long enough that you remember them. Um, and so I'm going make that point. Good to see you again.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: And it's- you know, I'll do whatever I can for the industry, and I appreciate you.

CORNELIUS BYRNE: I appreciate you. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: You bet.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Thank— I wanna thank this panel. Thank you for coming to testify.

UNIDENTIFIED: Okay, the next panel, James Inniss, Jeff Cohen, Valerie Olson McCarthy- sorry if I mess up any names- Keith Pesky, Kyle Pesky, Janet White and Kathryn Freed. Please come up to the dais if you're here. James Inniss, one more time. Jeff Cohen, Valerie Altsin McCarthy. Kyle Paskey [sp?], Janet White and Kathryn Freed. I'm gonna call a few more folks over.

UNIDENTIFIED: Hello.

UNIDENTIFIED: Celine Parsney, par— Parnis, Parnis, sorry. Marilyn Brawlik, Marryann Barulich, Elinor Molbegolt. Maggie Nesfield. Michael Petrelli, maybe? Come over. Okay, okay. And Ms Freed, you may begin. You may begin and welcome back to the chamber.

KATHRYN FREED: Okay, is that on? Yes. Okay. Hi, thank you. My name is Kathryn Freed. I live in Lower Manhattan. I'm actually a former City Council Member from Council District 1, same as Chris Marte. And I wanted to thank Speaker Menin for calendaring this, and just missed her- Chair

Schulman, and of course Christopher Marte, the sponsor of the bill, and the rest of the council members and everyone here today. I'm speaking in favor of the bill. I felt I had to come today because I sponsored the original horse carriage bill, and that's almost 35 years ago. And everything I've heard so far here today is very similar to the problems we had then. At that time, there was a push also to ban horses from the— horse carriages, period, from the city. And at that time, however, it was legal for horse carriages to go throughout the city. So we had horse carriages in the Theater District, you know, the tourist district, Upper West Side, even sometimes in the Lower East Side. And a lot of the arguments we heard today were the same arguments. As I said, it's been 35 years. What we did is we limited horse carriages to the park, and we really thought that we would give the industry— the industry said we will clean up our act. We will take care of the horses. We won't have the problem with carriage accidents and horses running and people being injured or drivers being injured. And here we are 35 years later, and the same problem. I think 35 years is long enough for the industry to get it right if it's going to get it

right. And the problem is it hasn't. And just what's happened in the last several weeks With Deniz dying, with Romanch Mahajan, sorry, dying because a horse— the driver did not take proper, you know, care of the horse so that the horse would not run. The nature of horses hasn't changed in 30 years or 3,000 years. They spook. They run. They're not good in a cosmopolitan city like New York that has all kinds of noises and things that will always scare them. So- and quite frankly, you also heard when Christopher Marte was speaking initially that the industry has not allowed the veterinarians in. We know the stalls are too small. We know they don't have enough pasture. But the fact that they don't let the vets in to check the horses and make sure they're okay- not all those horses out there in the street are okay. And I am a horse person. I was riding horses when I was eight years old. I've ridden in Central Park or Prospect Park. I've ridden, actually, in Africa and South America and Central America. I mean, I used to take people out on trail rides in Pennsylvania where I grew up. So I know about horses. I love horses. We tried; 35 years is enough. If the industry can't get it together or isn't interested enough to get it

together in that amount of time, they're not going to get it together in another 100 years. And it's not going to be just hitching posts. It's just that in a cosmopolitan city like New York, it's— it just doesn't work. It's not good for the horses. It's not good for the city. And quite frankly, they're here all for the tourism industry. What does it look like when that— when people are traumatized and crying because they see a horse die in the street? For that matter, the family that— with the tears from the family for Romanch when he died. This is not a good look.

UNIDENTIFIED: Can you please wrap up, Council Member? Thank you.

KATHRYN FREED: Sure. So I would urge you, you know, again, 35 years is enough. I would urge you to pass this bill. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. And if you all could identify yourselves just so that we can and mark it off.

ELINOR MOLBEGOTT: Thank you. Okay. I'm Elinor Molbegott. I'm legal counsel for the Humane Society of New York right here on East 59th Street. And I'm here to testify in favor of Intro 943. I'll

even go back almost 50 years. I drafted the rental horse licensing and protection law working with then-Council Member Stern and Tony Olivieri, Morton Pavman. So these are like way back when. At that time I was with the ASPCA. We got the law passed, we thought great, things will get better. There was concern about lame horses, overworking horses, accidents, horses working in traffic, and horses working in severe weather conditions. Even after the law passed, four horses dropped dead, literally, in New York City during the summer heat. So concern for the horses, not so much in terms of the industry. And even now, when I was listening to the testimony, I was listening to the Health Department say how many animals— how many horses they suspended, because of the heat. I was thinking, why did they even have to suspend the horses. Why were they out there at all? You know, we all know what the weather report is. Why would they even be out there and having to wait to be suspended? And just one last thing, sorry, because I— we all know about the accidents, and I don't want to be too repetitive, and the other cities that have passed laws, but another conversation I had with Council Member Stern, who became Parks Commissioner

Stern after we had worked together on the city legislation,— there were efforts to have the horses go to the park. And he said to me, no. He said, you're going— as much as he was an advocate for the horses, he said, this is just going to bring all of the terrible problems we have in the city streets to the park with the pedestrians, with the bicyclists, with the cars, with everything, and he was right. Like, how many more accidents must there be before we do something now? The reform has not worked.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

ELINOR MOLBEGOTT: The regulations have not worked. So it's time, and we thank you very much.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

KYLE PASSEKG: I'm Kyle— oh, wait. Good afternoon, I'm Kyle Passekg, and I am here representing the horses. This is for them as their spokesperson. Hey, man, take a look at what you've done. Beat us, ride us so you could have fun. Whip us, race us, make us run. We're your beasts of burden, every single one. It's our nature to oblige. We don't resist. Is that why you persist? We were once free. Once we were creatures of beauty. Now look at me. Your greed and vanity is killing me. Please

let me be. Please save me and set me free. How proud you are when we're something new, but when we get old and tired, we're through. Our awful fate we never knew on somebody's plate, on a menu, dog food or glue. We're lassoed, we're tattooed, we're broken and saddled, reined in. We're shoed, and then you do with us whatever you want to do. Beat us, eat us, brand us, strand us. We give you thrills, and then we're killed, and you jump us and dump us. You wear us. Seems you couldn't care less. So few are kind. So many are mean. Wonder what it feels like to be a human being. Please save the horses. Please save me. You're killing me. Let me be.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

MICHAEL PETRELLI: Good afternoon, Speaker Menin, Chairperson Schulman, and the Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Michael Petrelli. I'm an experienced horse trainer and the founder of Equine Advocacy Alliance. I've spent decades working with horses, and I know firsthand the care, respect, and understanding they require. My testimony today is based on years of experience with horses and countless hours documenting the realities of the

carriage horse industry in New York City. As a horseman, I can tell you that horses are prey animals. They can be gentle and well-trained, but they also are instinctive. When frightened, they react. No law, regulation, inspection, or training program can eliminate thousands of years of instinct. That is why horses do not belong in one of the busiest and most congested cities in the world. I have witnessed horses working in heavy traffic, extreme weather, blaring sirens, overwhelming crowds. I've documented horses that have collapsed, horses involved in carriages. Most recently, just yesterday, two more horses left unattended by its driver, one taking pictures, no different than what happened to Romanch, and another one who was holding a lead rope and the car— sitting in the carriage in front of him in the back seat, just kicking back and relaxing. I've witnessed horses running loose through Central Park and city streets. I mean, what— every one of those incidents placed both the horses and the public in danger. Now we have witnessed the unthinkable. 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan came to New York City from India to celebrate his graduation with his family. Instead of returning home with happy

memories, he lost his life on a horse-drawn carriage ride in Central Park. My heart goes out to him and I can't put it into words. His death is a heartbreaking reminder that this is no longer just an animal welfare issue. It is also a public safety issue. These are things I learned over three years documenting these horses, coming to the park as a horseman expecting to be treated and welcomed as one. These people are not horsemen. We have reached the point where the risks outweigh the tradition. We owe it to the horses, to New Yorkers, and to every visitor who comes to the city expecting to return home safely. As an experienced horseman, I know what horses need. New York is certainly not it. It's quite the opposite. As an advocate, I documented what these horses endure on the streets of New York City. I respectfully ask that you pass Romanch's Law and end the horse-drawn carriage industry in New York City. The time has come to put the welfare of these horses and the safety of the public first.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Sir, can you repeat your name just so that we can mark you down?

MICHAEL PETRELLI: Michael Petrelli.

UNIDENTIFIED: Okay, thanks.

JANET WHITE: Hi, my name is Janet White. I am the Founder and Director of Carriage Horse Freedom, which is an animal advocacy organization in Philadelphia. I'm here to strongly support the passage of Romanch's Law. It's understandably— or rather, it's unmistakably clear, especially in light of the recent tragedies, that the horse-drawn carriage, they just pose unacceptable risks to public safety and to animal welfare. Our— the sponsor of the bill, the ban horse carriage bill in Philadelphia, named Mark Squilla, he sent a statement to New York City Council Members and Mayor Mamdani. And I'd just like to share that with you briefly. What he said was, Philadelphia's tried incremental welfare reforms over the years, but it became clear that neither public safety nor animal welfare could be fully protected without ending the practice altogether. Although we never experienced tragedies of this scale New York City has, we acted because the risks were unmistakable, and a full ban was the only way to prevent future harm to both people and horses. We encourage you to pass Romanch's Law, and I also encourage you— I think the majority of New Yorkers,

the majority of reasonable, responsible people urge you to pass Ramonch's Law without delay. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you all for coming, and the panel is dismissed. Thank you. The next panel is Ahmed Zubair, Jill Adamski, Jeffrey- very beautiful handwriting, but I can't read it- Gonzuelo [sp?], Olga Humphrey, and Carolina Roberts. I'll read them again. Carolina Roberts, Olga Humphrey, Jeffrey Gonzuelo, Jill Adamski, and Ahmed Zubair. Leo Adja. Leo? And again, when you start, just identify yourself so we can check it off. Thank you. You may begin when you're ready. You can begin. Oh, turn the button to begin. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Check if my name is there, Joseph, please? Joseph.

Okay. First I want to offer my deepest sympathy to the Mahajan family. When I was in college, I wanted to free the carriage horses. I became a journalist and was obsessed with truth, facts, and context. I learned to research everything. My view of the carriage horses changed. When I first heard about NYCLASS, I researched. I wonder why they posted a picture of an emaciated horse claiming it was a New York City carriage horse when it was a

starving horse in India. I was appalled by their hatred of the "fat tourists" who the poor horses, "had to struggle to pull around." Even NYCLASS' veterinarian consultant was a small animal vet. Their entire history— their entire— why was anyone listening to them? Their entire history continues to be littered with manipulating context and flat-out lying. I have been greatly disappointed that many council members are not doing independent research on this issue. They are using NYCLASS talking points instead. They have called the conditions the horses work under abusive. But here's the truth: the horses work under protective laws the council established. The rules about temperatures, hours, stall sizes, and more. The horses are also monitored by the police and mounted patrol. Ryder's Law— Ryder did not die on the streets of New York as Linda Rosenthal said. He was humanely euthanized at his new home outside of the city when he was found to have cancer. Ryder's owner was found not guilty of cruelty by a New York jury. Why was it called Ryder's Law for so long? Because the truth was not convenient for NYCLASS. Now the false claims are that the carriage horses are a public safety hazard. Carriage rides started 100—

over 150 years ago. The recent death was the first of its kind. So if my math is right, That means that century after century, the carriage horses have had a better safety record than the vehicles that they share the park roads with. I am in the park all the time. I'd rather step in front of a carriage horse than an e-bike anytime.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: A ban will create a horrible domino effect. If you want to give a rare sanctuary spot to a carriage horse–

UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Please wrap up.

UNIDENTIFIED: that already has a good home instead of a horse who is going to slaughter, you don't really care about horses at all, and that's the truth.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Thank you. Can the last person on the panel identify yourself just so that we have the right list? No clapping, please. Oh, I'm sorry, not here. You, what's your name? Carolina. Okay, we're gonna start on this end and then continue on the panel. Please start. Yes, can you turn on the microphone? Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: It appears I'm speaking to a nearly empty room at this point after I waited all day. The Speaker and other Council Members that signed onto this bill apparently just have a fix in, because they don't care to hear from many of us that had to speak and sign onto the bill before we spoke. But I will read my testimony. What happened to Romanch was a terrible tragedy that broke so many, but it wasn't my fault, and it wasn't anyone here's fault. It was a horrible accident, and though the first of its kind in history, already resulted in changes to further improve the safety of this industry. An accident, like all the e-bike and car car accidents every day. To take the job, livelihood, and beloved animals from everyone in an entire industry doesn't give anyone justice. It causes even greater heartbreak. No one should be a voice for horses other than those of us who know them best. I won't have time to debunk every claim made by the people against this industry, but as someone who reads beyond the headlines and actually understands horses, I can tell you with confidence there no systemic recurring issues within this industry and no abuse beyond the harassment carriage drivers receive

from people who have dehumanized them because they misunderstand horses and have ideologies that shouldn't dictate legislation. I see the faces of people who have taunted and obsessively stalked me for years in this room, but because I have so much pride in what I do and it means so much to me, I find the strength to put up with it to do what I love. I left the office world to pursue this career, because happiness is more important than money. And I am a horse person. My two horses are very bonded to me, and over the 9.5 years I have driven in this industry, I have taken great care of them and abided by the city's administrative code. I have no plans to separate from my horses, but this bill gives me no financial aid for their long-term care while simultaneously stopping me from providing them with the work they enjoy that keeps them healthy. I don't want a different job. I chose this one, and it's my passion in life where I belong. I've always called New York City my home, and it's what my horses call home-

UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: and I find it very offensive that anyone would suggest we're no longer welcome here. I ask the council—

UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Please wrap up.

UNIDENTIFIED: to do the right thing and avoid the guilt of ruining families' and horses' lives and oppose this awful bill. As every previous administration has done every time it's reintroduced.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: And I expect to be back here for a hearing on Intro 937, which is the—

UNIDENTIFIED: The time is up. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: to protecting this iconic industry while ensuring its safety without—

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: anyone else having to lose what means—

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Thank you. We have to keep it to two minutes because we have hundreds of people- alright. We have hundreds of people still signed up. So we have to give everyone ample time. You may begin. Identify yourself. Thank you.

LETTY GOMEZIOLLO: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Letty Gomeziollo [sp?]. I graduated as a veterinarian in Ecuador, and for the past two years, I proudly worked as a horse carriage driver here in New York City. Today, I'm not here to speak about my human family. I'm here to speak for my equine family. I heard that one proposal is to send our horses to sanctuaries. But every day I see sanctuaries asking for donations just to feed the animals they already have. Is that really the better future for our horses? Our horses receive excellent care. They are examined by veterinarians twice a year, vaccinated, dewormed, receive regular dental and hoof care. It’s premium quality hay and grain and enjoy fresh carrots every day. They don't depend on charity. They live with dignity because we work together, bringing joy to thousands of visitors while they're earning our honest living. We know and love our horses. If I mention Sophia, Handsome Jack, Bella, Caesar, or Blackie, every carriage driver knows exactly who they are, their personality, what they are afraid of, what— if they prefer carrots or apples. We know them and we love them. I'm not saying

our industry is perfect. There is always room for improvement and we are willing to improve. I also believe there is a better solution. It is a personal thought. A stable with pastures inside Central Park, I could eliminate unnecessary travel through city streets, allow the public to see how well our horses are cared for. I'm looking about— I'm talking about locals and visitors. Preserve our jobs. And we already paid rent in our stables. We can keep paying rent and support the park. So please don't let New York lose this historic tradition. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you so much.

CAROLINA ROBERTS: Good afternoon, Chair and members of the council. My name is Carolina Roberts, also known as Rocky in the animal rights community. I'm an actress and I'm an animal rights advocate, and I traveled here from Mexico City, because I believe these horses deserve a voice and should not suffer for human entertainment. For years, I have documented New York City's carriage horses while speaking up for many other animals who cannot speak for themselves, like the bulls in Mexico who are victims of the bullfighting. New York has always led by example. Humane alternatives already exist. We

don't need horse-drawn carriages to welcome visitors. I also recognize that the men and women who work in this industry deserve respect. This is not about punishing workers. It's about creating a safer, more humane future for both horses and people through a transition of modern alternatives. I have spent countless hours in Central Park observing these horses, photographing them and filming them, speaking with tourists and witnessing this industry firsthand. I have stood beside New York City's carriage horses. I have seen them standing for hours on hard pavement surrounded by traffic, noise, heat, and crowds, breathing exhaust fumes while pulling heavy carriages. These horses never chose this life. Romanch Mahajan should still be alive. His tragic death reminds us that this industry not only endangers horses, but puts human lives at risk. I have also experienced harassment while peacefully advocating for these horses. My friends and I have been physically confronted by a violent carriage man who left his horse unattended simply for expressing concern for their welfare. Today, you have the opportunity to protect these horses and help move New York toward a safer, more compassionate future. I

respectfully ask you to pass Romanch's Law and bring an end to horse-drawn carriages in New York City. And please send these horses to a sanctuary where they belong. Muchísimas gracias.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you so much to this panel. You're dismissed. The next panel is Helen David, Mary Irby, Allison Bowling, Jim Keen, Mel Soloski— Soloski [sp?], sorry. Susan Wang— Wagner. Susan Wagner. Jamie Baldanza- can you also fill out a slip, please? Okay, he can join the panel when he gets here. I'm sorry, can you fill out another one? Okay, thank you. You may begin and identify yourself for the record, whoever wants to begin.

HELEN DAVID: My name is Helen. Where is it? Alright, yeah. So I'm Helen David and I'm a tour guide in Central Park. So I'm a pedicab driver for 23 years in New York City. So I started in 2004, June, and when I initially started, I used to park my pedicab in a stable on 52nd Street. So I've seen countless of things that I wasn't supposed to see as a pedicab driver in a horse stable- in a horse stable. This is back in '06, '07, and now working in Central Park alongside some of these pedicab— I mean, some of these horse and carriage drivers behind me, I

just want to make it clear to the council that some of those guys were pedicab drivers, so if they need to be transitioned to another job, they can always go back to the pedicab, because that's where we started off, as pedicab drivers, you know, and it's safer in Central Park. And also another thing I want to make clear, the day Deniz horse died, that horse was out for a long time, for more than what it's supposed to be, because five o'clock is when they're supposed to change the shift for the horses to go back to the stable, but the incident happened way after Deniz was supposed to be at his stable. So I work alongside the horse and carriage driver, so I see it every single day. I'm in Central Park sometimes 6:30 in the morning, and I'm there up until eight o'clock, so I see in and out of what is going on in Central Park with the horse and carriage. I'm not here to bash anybody. I'm here to speak up the truth, and I don't want anybody to go out and try to blame the Central Park Conservancy that the horse, you know, ate a poisonous plant when it was actually exhaustion, because I was there the day Deniz died. I know what time that horse came in, and then when the horse has passed away, I was home, because that horse was

supposed to have left the park before I did. So therefore, I'm just here to let you guys know that we are out here. The pedicab industry is represented, and If we are to save the city and our tourists in New York City, we have to do the right thing by the city, by the people that live in New York City, and then the horse and carriage industry.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Thank you so much. You may continue. Go ahead. You, sir.

JIM KEEN: Good afternoon, Chair and members of the council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Intro 943. My name is Dr. Jim Keem. I'm a veterinarian from South Dakota with 38 years of experience as a large animal vet. I'm Director of Veterinary Science for the Center for the Humane Economy. I practiced, conducted USDA research, taught at three veterinary schools. Four years ago, I came to New York City to evaluate the carriage industry firsthand. I visited the stables, observed the horses at work in Central Park and on the highways. I spoke with both drivers and opponents. My conclusion was clear then and even clearer today: carriage horses should be phased out in Manhattan. As others have said, horses are prey animals whose

instinctive response to perceived danger is to flee. That instinct cannot be trained away or regulated away. In one of the world's busiest urban environments with constant traffic, sirens, construction, crowds, heat, hard pavement, runaways, and serious accidents are not anomalies. They are predictable. Horses evolved to graze, roam on soft ground, and live socially in herds, not to pull heavy carriages throughout congested streets and spend their nights confined alone in small stalls without turnout. In December 2025, independent equine vet Dr. Kraig Kulikowski, who testified recent— earlier today, examined more than 12 licensed carriage horses. As you mentioned, they had multiple recurring musculoskeletal injuries— excuse me— tendon and ligament disease, harness sores, and dental disease. He concluded that several horses could not be certified fit for work because the owners refused standard trotting exams for lameness and blood work needed to detect possible pain-masking meds. Finally, this is also a public safety issue. The tragic death of Romanch, together with the numerous carriage horse accidents over the years that have been mentioned today, demonstrate the risk of placing a frightened

1,000 and 2,000-pound prey animal in the middle of Manhattan traffic. For the welfare of these horses and the safety of the public, I respectfully urge you to pass Romanch's Law.

SUSAN WAGNER: Thank you for holding this hearing. I'm Susan Wagner, President of Equine Advocates, the nonprofit equine protection organization I founded 30 years ago. We operate from a 173-acre horse sanctuary in Chatham, New York, home to 82 horses, ponies, donkeys, and mules, which included three former New York City carriage horses, all of whom were left broken down and crippled as a direct result of the cruel and inhumane work they were forced to do and unnatural lives they were forced to lead pulling carriages in New York City. The most famous of the three was the late Bobby Too Freedom, who would have died in a Canadian slaughterhouse if he hadn't been rescued. Bobby's story proved New York City carriage horses are sent to slaughter. Bobby was shipped from a PA slaughter auction to Rhinebeck Equine, where his discharge report stated that he was overloaded with worms, was head nodding lame, and underweight. Later at Cornell, he was diagnosed with chronic navicular bone disease

and fractures from old injuries in both his front legs. Jack, who has been with us since 2016, was diagnosed with navicular disease, evidence of an old bone fracture, and bilateral forelimb osteoarthritis. Sheena, who passed in 2023, was anemic, suffered from left limb lameness and hoof ligament disease. A study by the Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages from information from the Health Department documented that an average of 71 New York City carriage horses disappeared off the rolls every year over a 7.5-year period for a total of 529 horses. Where did they go? We believe- presumed slaughter, presumed dead. The Mamdani administration says it is progressive, a positive word indicating improvement and moving forward. In keeping with that progressive platform, I urge the new mayor and the current city council allow New York City to finally join the number of growing cities globally and in the United States to ban horse-drawn carriages. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

MEL SOBELEWSKI: My name is Mel Sobelewski. I am a large animal emergency responder with a decade of experience rescuing horses who've been trapped in fires. I am also a founding member of

the Coalition for Responsible Carriage Horse Retirement. I urge you to support Intro 943 and pass Romanch's Law. In my work, the goal is the same: identify the hazard, understand the failure points, and act before people or animals are hurt. I am not here evaluating one isolated incident. I am examining a pattern. No reform can make this industry safe because the inherent risk is not a gap in regulation. It is a horse's involuntary flight response. A horse's body is designed for sudden explosive acceleration. It is the very reason horsepower became the standard metric for engines. When a horse perceives a threat, the fear response fires, and before the horse's brain has time to process what is happening. This is a reflex. Good training can build a horse's tolerance, but even the best trainers cannot erase survival instincts. The union's proposed solution is to install hitching posts throughout Central Park. Hitching posts will not remove a horse's flight instinct. They add new layers of risk, creating dangerous conditions on public property that would be approved, installed, and owned by the city. If a horse is hardtied with no chance of breaking away, the restraint itself becomes the danger. This

is a known, predictable, and documented behavior. A panicked horse that cannot flee will continue to escalate its fear response, increasing the risk of catastrophic injury to anyone within the vicinity. If a horse is tied with a quick-release knot and can break away, it brings us to where we are today, mourning the unnecessary loss of Romanch Mahajan. Additionally, I would just like to add that horses are the only grazing animal in Central Park, which is why Japanese yew is an issue for them and not for other animals, because a horse is an herbivore. A squirrel, a dog are carnivores. So while this plant may be toxic to species in general, how much they consume and what part of the plant needs to be taken into consideration. And the toxicology report on Deniz—

UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Thank you. Sorry, thank you. Thank you. You got it. Thank you.

ALLISON BOWLING: My name is Allison Bowling. I am the Co-founder and Executive Director of Red Feather Equine Sanctuary and one of the founding members of the Coalition for Responsible Carriage Horse Retirement. I'm here today to ask you for your support of Romanch's Law, Intro 943. There's

been a lot of conjecture, so I'm going to just cut right to it, and that is what will happen with the horses. You have heard repeated claims today that if Romanch's Law passes, carriage horses will be abandoned, they'll be sent to auction, and they'll be slaughtered. Those are very serious claims, and we agree that they should be taken seriously. In fact, concern for these horses' future is exactly why our coalition was formed. The reality is that horses can be sent to auction or slaughter under the status quo. Incidentally, we received a report from a partner rescue that a horse allegedly being described by the auctioneer as a New York City carriage horse, was sold through the notorious New Holland, Pennsylvania auction just last week. New Holland is, of course, a feeder sale into the Amish and slaughter pipeline. We have organized to help ensure that that does not happen here. As you've heard in the testimonies of our colleagues, our coalition is made up of now more than 30 nationally recognized equine rescue and sanctuary organizations with cumulatively hundreds of years of experience protecting vulnerable horses. Preventing horses from entering the slaughter pipeline is not a new responsibility for us. That is

our mission. That is why we exist. And this is not just simply a promise to "find homes." And importantly, I want to state that we're not here to forcibly take away anyone's horses. We are offering a coordinated retirement strategy. We have assembled a team to evaluate each horse individually, to coordinate placements, to maintain transparency, and to work collaboratively with all stakeholders throughout the entire transition. We have attorneys prepared to develop lifelong placement agreements with oversight and follow-up protocols designed to help protect every horse long after it leaves New York City. We stand before you today and publicly commit to working with every carriage owner who wants a safe retirement for their horses.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

ALLISON BOWLING: We have created that opportunity and we are prepared to do the work.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you so much.

JAMIE BALDANZA: Hello. Hi, my name is Jamie Baldanza. I'm a documentarian focused on wild horses and equine welfare, founder of a New Jersey horse sanctuary, and co-founder of the Coalition for Responsible Care at Horse Retirement, and a former

New Yorker. I urge the council to pass Romanch's Law. The hardest lesson horses have ever taught me is that just because you love them doesn't mean you understand them. When I was 18, I moved to New York and rode often at Claremont Stables near Central Park and a stable in Brooklyn. Riding the same streets as the carriage horses, I understood why so many people saw them as part of the city's magic. I loved that magic, too. Then I started to see the other side: the small stalls, little freedom to move, limited social contact, and lives shaped around the demands of the city instead of the needs of a horse. But what stayed with me the most happened at the park entrance. One day, the horse I was riding spooked at an umbrella. He bolted and I was thrown. Lying there with serious injuries, my first thought was not about myself. It was about if Bingo reached traffic, he or someone else could get seriously injured or die. Despite people pleading with me not to move, I got up and ran after him. That moment changed the course of my life, and it led me to spend years rescuing horses and studying their behavior firsthand. And as I evolved as a horsewoman and gained better understanding of their behavior, I should have recognized the signs.

Bingo was already uneasy. It was a classic example of trigger stacking. His stress has been building long before the umbrella. By then, he had already absorbed the sirens, crowds, traffic, and constant stimulation of New York City until he reached his threshold. And for Member Gennaro, who's no longer here, and as a self-proclaimed equestrian for 60 years, I am shocked he doesn't know basic equine behavior. He certainly has had the time to learn. Please pass Romanch's Law. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. We have the gentleman in the end here.

MARTY IRBY: Yes, thank you very much. Good afternoon, Chair and members of the council. My name is Marty Irby. I'm an eight-time world champion equestrian, a lifelong horseman, and past president of two different equine breed registries, an advocate who has spent many years working to protect American equines through state and federal policy. I've devoted much of my life to this work and ask that you help us see the end of horse-drawn carriages in New York. Horses are prey animals. They are flight animals. Biology and biomechanics are often overlooked on this issue. When they become

frightened, they don't stop and reason through danger. They run. That instinct has allowed horses and other equines to survive for tens of thousands of years. Their natural instincts cannot be trained away. It can only be managed. Yet every day these horses are expected to navigate one of the busiest, loudest, most unpredictable urban environments in the world, surrounded by taxis, buses, construction, emergency sirens, crowds, bicycles, and constant traffic. Even the calmest horse can be startled by something beyond anyone's control. And when that happens, the consequences can be devastating for the horse, the driver, the passengers, and the public. This isn't about questioning the dedication of carriage drivers. Many care deeply for their horses. We've heard that and we've seen that. This is about recognizing that New York City has changed, and both our dedication and understanding of animal welfare during this modern-day era is quite different than it was several hundred years ago. Many other major cities have eliminated the use of horse-drawn carriages and replaced them with more modern transportation and entertainment, like electric carriages. Humans have forced those that were born to

run free across open fields to spend their lives standing in traffic. That is not progress. It is a compromise that we no longer have to make. Freedom applies to more than just humans. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the horses, and they should be respected because America was built on their backs. I just want to add the picture of President Washington up there today and his horse. We don't utilize horses in our military, and we don't utilize them in war today. Why should we use them in a major city in this country? Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you so much. Uh, Council Member Hanif has a question for the panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, Chair. For the- for the folks affiliated with sanctuaries, I wanted to- I wanted to hear if you could respond to the concern that was shared here that sanctuaries don't have the capacity or that sanctuaries are not doing what we think will be the new lifestyle of horses?

ALLISON BOWLING: Well, that's a loaded question, but it's a good question, and I acknowledge that sanctuary does have finite capacity, and that's certainly a concern.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So if you could maybe share how many folks work at the sanctuary and walk me through what a day—

ALLISON BOWLING: Well, our coalition represents almost three dozen different sanctuaries across the country. So, you know, I could speak for my organization singularly, but you know, when we're talking about capacity, we're thinking about dozens of different organizations nationwide.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then I— yeah, I'd love to hear just what's happening at the sanctuary you're affiliated with.

ALLISON BOWLING: So I'm again, co-founder of Red Feather Equine Sanctuary, and our core belief is that horses are not inherently defined by the work that they can do, but that means for us that when they come through our doors, that we treat them as we would treat a horse who could do that work, which means that they do actually get enrichment training. We have a trainer that comes to our facility once a week and does groundwork with the horses. We trailer them to her facility once a week so that they can maintain, you know, freshness on their trailering skills. We participate in equine-assisted learning

and equine-assisted therapy activities with the horses. So they're not just being, you know, thrown in a field and underutilized. We just have learned to respect them for what their, you know, physical limits are, and we have a different relationship with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. I appreciate the testimony from this panel. Thank you. Okay, next panel. Waller— oh, Walker, I'm sorry, my mistake. Walker, Blank— Blankenship, something like that, sorry. Clara Bright, Tommy Hughes. Abdurahim Sanginoff. I think the last name— Valero or Valone, or some— that is the last name. Giovanni, I think. Natalie Honig. They not here? I was— hmm, okay. That's it. I don't know who's who. Alright, go ahead. You can start.

CLARA BRIGHT: Good afternoon, Chair and honorable members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Identify yourself first.

CLARA BRIGHT: Oh, Clara Bright. Thank you. My name is Clara Bright, and I respectfully

submit this testimony in opposition to intro 943 and in support of Intro 937. I respectfully oppose Intro 943 and support Intro 937, because the solution is not elimination, it's improvement. A nation that forgets its past has no future, widely attributed to Winston Churchill. Since 1858, horse-drawn carriages have been part of Central Park's history. As the Central Park Conservancy explains, Friedrich Law, Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed the park's carriage drive specifically for scenic travel by horse-drawn carriage. These horses are part of its original design and living heritage. If there are concern— if there are concerns, let us solve them, not eliminate a tradition that has served New York City for nearly 107 years. If welfare is the goal, continue strengthening oversight, improve infrastructure, install additional hitching posts, and pursue the development of modern stables in Central Park North. Some argue these horses would be better off in sanctuaries. However, relocation does not automatically guarantee a better life. These horses have been bred and trained over generations to work alongside humans and receive individualized daily care, specialized nutrition, and professional

farrier, and every four to five weeks they do need new shoes and new trimming. It's called ProVegur [sic]. Not every sanctuary has the resources to provide the same level of individualized daily care that many working carriage horses currently receive. Motor vehicle crashes occur every day. When these incidents occur, we investigate them. Improve safety—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We need you to summarize.

CLARA BRIGHT: Yes, I have just two more paragraphs.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, not two more paragraphs. Okay. Nope.

CLARA BRIGHT: Why is the standard different here? Why does horses and why this industry improvement comes through better standards, not bans. The welfare of these horses deserves evidence-based decisions based on facts, not fictional narratives. I'll leave you with one final question: is banning truly protecting animal welfare, or is improving their care the better path?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you.

CLARA BRIGHT: Thank you for allowing me to speak.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And you can submit what you have. So, who's next? You go ahead.

FRANK RICCOBONO: My name's Frank Riccobono. Good afternoon, Chair, members of the City Council. So yeah, my name is Francesco Riccobono. My family has proudly been a part of the New York City horse-drawn carriage industry since 1979. 47 years ago, my father came to America—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Wait, sir, were you— was your name called to come up?

FRANK RICCOBONO: I don't know. Uh, I submitted my tickets.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, your name was not called yet.

FRANK RICCOBONO: I was one of the first people to put a ticket in.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So this panel- we're going by panels. So you'll have to wait. I'm sorry. Tommy Hughes.

FRANK RICCOBONO: Well, Tommy's not here. He left.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Are you speaking on his behalf?

FRANK RICCOBONO: I can. I submitted my ticket. I was one of the first-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I understand- I understand that. But we're doing— we're working in panels now. So we didn't call your name yet. So we can't have you testify right this second, because there's a method that we're using here, so— what? No. So who's— go ahead.

ABDURAHIM SANGINOV: Good afternoon, members of the council. My name is Abdurahim Sanginov, and today I'm representing my uncle named John Sanginov, who has been a proud horse carriage owner in New York City for the last six years. So two years ago, I received a letter from the Rutgers University that I got accepted, but there was an obstacle in my way. My family couldn't provide the funds for my education, and my dream was looking like it flying away. And at the moment of darkness, my uncle said that he would do anything to put me in the school and help me achieve my dream. And there was a question before, how about American dream? I have American dream. I want to go to college and study, and my uncle is helping me to do that. Currently he has two beautiful horses, Bella and Champion. Every

day he is telling me that tens of hundreds of people stop by his horse to take picture. New Yorkers love horse carriages. A lot of children come to Central Park to take picture with his horses, to look at them, to pet them, and to play with them. This is the picture of the Champion, beautiful white horse that he loves and cares about. He telling me a story. He told me to share the story with you. There is a lady, the resident of the New York City.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You don't have that much time left, so you're going to have to either wrap it up, but go ahead. If the story is long, I can't do it.

ABDURAHIM SANGINOV: Yes. So the story about the lady, the resident of the New York City. Every day, she knows the schedule of the Bella, of the another horse of my uncle. She bro— she brings her children to Central Park and her children play with Bella. You told about the people who don't want the horses in Central Park, but how about the voices of the people who want them in Central Park? There are tons of hundreds of people who want to see the horses in Central Park. They are loved and take care about. All of these horse owners that you see, all of

them love their horses. Their horses are beautiful creatures. All of them are like a family members to them. And today, I ask you to oppose that bill that would break a lot of families and would put a lot of people in troubles. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. I'm sorry, we'll go back to you. Yeah.

FRANCESCO RICCOBONO: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, go for it. You'll start over.

FRANCESCO RICCOBONO: Thank you. Okay, good afternoon, Chair, members of City Council. My name is Francesco Riccobono. My family has proudly been a part of New York City's horse-drawn carriage industry since 1979. Today I own three carriages, I care and own for 13 horses, and I also am one of the founders of our 501C6 nonprofit organization, for the NYC Horse Carriage Alliance, which is devoted to enhancing safety and horse welfare. Okay, 47 years ago, my father came to America from Sicily with nothing but a dream. He found that dream in New York City's horse-drawn carriage industry. Growing up, I didn't watch my father work. I watched him dedicate his life to caring for his horses with love,

patience, and pride. Those horses shaped my childhood and inspired my future. They are not equipment or machines. They are my family. Before I continue, I want to offer my heartfelt condolences to the family of Romanch. His tragic passing was heartbreaking, and the entire industry continues to mourn alongside his loved ones. Our thoughts and prayers remain with them. That tragedy has only strengthened our commitment to improving safety. We are actively working with the TWU, the NYC Horse Carriage Alliance, and members of the Council to implement stronger driving, training certification programs, enhance horse welfare standards, and so on. Because protecting both people and horses has always been our highest priority. That is why I respectfully ask you to oppose Intro 0943. This bill does not solve a problem. It destroys an industry that has been a part of New York City's identity for 168 years. It threatens the futures of hardworking families, stable workers, farriers, drivers, countless others whose livelihoods depend on this profession. It also jeopardizes the futures of the horses we have devoted our lives to caring for. I personally spend approximately $40,000 a year per horse because their

health and well-being comes first. I am a newlywed father. I have two beautiful girls at home. The industry is how I support my family, just as it supported mine as a child. Like so many others, I had I dedicated my life, my savings, and my future to this profession because I truly believe in this industry. And I'll just wrap up one more sentence. Changes are needed. Let's work together to make them. Please don't erase generations of honest, hardworking New Yorkers who have devoted their lives to the industry. Real progress comes from collaboration, compassion, and thoughtful solutions, not from dismantling an entire community.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. No clapping in the chambers. Tommy Hughes?

FRANCESCO RICCOBONO: Not here.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, he's not here?

JOSEPH CONIGLIARO: I guess I could speak for Tommy Hughes. I take his time. And so, my name is Joseph Cornigliaro.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: What? Joseph? Yeah, just find me there. I asked you before. Did you sign up?

JOSEPH CONIGLIARO: You should have— you should have talked to me before you even come to bring a bill up, because I am the original owner. My father was the owner of two stables. I'm surprised that you guys won't even consult us. I'm a lawyer, I'm a politician, I'm a radio announcer, TV announcer, a host, and you don't contact me and you're just doing this today? It's not about the horses, it's about the property. When I started this business 52 years ago, there was prostitutes, pimps, and drugs on, on 38th Street. Jacob Javits did not even exist. They came afterwards. Now everybody is a slave over here. These people are working for the New York class. Steve Nislick. That's the people that they're working for, and you guys are part of the conspiracy if you allow this moron to take you for a ride. He's paying politicians. He's paying everybody else, okay? He is cited for violation of the election law, and therefore he should be reprimanded, not rewarded. That's what's going on right now. You guys are rewarding this guy. You're working for him.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Sir, we have to maintain decorum, so lower your voice.

JOSEPH CONIGLIARO: Hey, you gotta understand that- you know-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] I'm just-

JOSEPH CONIGLIARO: As a lawyer, as a politician, as a radio announcer, I do like to speak. And you did not consult me at all. Two— we have two stables, okay? And that's why I think, you know, wait a sec.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No. No. Because I asked you to maintain decorum and you wouldn't, so.

JOSEPH CONIGLIARO: [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: That's fine. Who's Valone? Or is that you? Sorry, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED: You guys should be ashamed. You should be ashamed for working for this. [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Stop, stop. [gavel] Guys, enough. Sir, go ahead. Sir, go ahead.

GIOVANNI VALLONE: Good afternoon. My name is Giovanni Vallone [sp?]. I'm the second generation of a family of a car— of carriage owners and drivers. My father started 65 years ago, and I continue his business with the happiness and with the

principles. I was raised to respect my horse and respect the customers and see all my customers happy getting out from the carriage. I know about horses a lot because it's 37 years I'm here in this business, and I'm the last- the last member of the family with my cousin actually that's 30 years in this business. And we also always respect everything. We try to respect all the rules and follow all the rules, respect all the people. And also another thing I want to say, three years ago I was a promoter of a parade over by— for the Columbus Day with seven Sicilian carts and seven New York horses that did a really great job. And we were— a lot of cities, big cities in the United States was jealous than what we did in New York because it was a big thing. Seven horses from New York horses and seven Sicilian carts that come all the way from Bagheria, that if you check is the base where they always do the Sicilian carts. I don't know if you never heard about it. I also want to ask you to please save our business or try to help us. You know, after 65 years for a family, it's a little bit kind of hard.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Natalie?

NATALIE RICCOBONO: Good afternoon, Chair, and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Natalie Riccobono, and I am the spouse of a horse and carriage owner. I want to offer first my deepest condolences to the Mahajan family as we too are grieving this tragic incident. And as a mother of two daughters, I am feeling the pain as we sit here today, and I'm so sorry. In all the years of knowing my husband and my father-in-law, I've witnessed two hardworking and dedicated men striving to provide for our family, their colleagues alike. My husband has always put his horses before anything else, and works on his days off to check on his horses. And I continue to witness my husband's passion in this business like no other. He started a not-for-profit association to improve communication with drivers and owners alike, holding meetings every Monday, which include conversations of horse safety, training, and improving opportunities. E-bikes, school buses, subway trains, etcetera, etcetera, all have accidents. So should we ban them all or only allow pedestrians to walk on city streets? We have been blessed with the opportunity to live the American dream because of this industry. I beg you, please do

not put my family on the streets. My husband's profession, along with his drivers, with all the horses he has dedicated his whole life to— let's look for other opportunities that will benefit all sides and for the future for all involved. Thank you for hearing me out.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I just want to address something very quickly that the previous gentleman talked about in terms of consulting. That's what today is about. It's a hearing. We're consulting with the public. We're consulting with all sides. We started at 10 o'clock this morning. We expect to go very late into this evening so we can hear what everybody has to say. So that's how how we're doing the consulting on this. So I just want to- I just want to make that point. Alright, thank you, guys. Thank you, everybody. Okay. Alright, next panel. April Lang, I think it is. Gabriel Schaefer? Gabrick Schaefer? Grace Choi, Tara Lauren, Paola Gavino, and Gabriel Stubert. Is everybody here that I called or not? Doesn't look like it. No, it doesn't look like it. Okay. Allie Jones, Catalina Toro, Sully Voorhees. No? Okay.

Alright, why don't you guys start, and just say your name and then, you know, your testimony. Microphone.

GABRIELLE STUBBERT: I'm the founder and Executive Director of Tamerlaine Sanctuary and Preserve. We are the only farm sanctuary in the state of New Jersey that is accredited by the Global Federation of Farm Sanctuaries. I was surprised to hear testimony today from somebody else on one of the panels that they were almost killed by a horse in Central Park. I also had that experience. I grew up riding horses in California. I rode a Western saddle. I came to New York. I took dressage, and also at Claremont Stables, I rented a horse. I went into the park. The horse was spooked by a photographer, and that horse took off running. I was terrified that I was going to die or that I was going to kill somebody else on this horse. I managed to jump off the horse in front of the horse to stop the horse from running, and the horse reared up, could have hit me on the head. I grabbed the reins and I was able to walk that horse back. But that's just two people at Claremont Stables in this room. How many other people did that happen to? Horses are not meant to be in the city. The thing that I'm concerned about here is that the

retirement of the carriage horses only matters if it's truly permanent. My fear is that these horses will be retired into places that are not true sanctuaries. So I'm glad that there are people on this panel who are here to oversee that. A horse should not leave a carriage and disappear into a system where it can be sold, transferred, auctioned, or eventually end up in the slaughter pipeline. Retirement should mean lifelong protection. And just because a horse is trained to work does not mean that the horse wants to work. I grew up riding stable horses, and all they did was try to get you off of their back. They did not enjoy the experience of being ridden. These— if these horses are retired, they deserve placement in legitimate accredited sanctuaries that exist solely for the welfare of the animals, not facilities where ownership can change or where horses may once again be commodities. There are dozens of GFA—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] You just need to wrap it up.

GABRIELLE STUBBERT: Accredited sanctuaries across the country, and I myself have been involved in rescues of thousands of animals

where sanctuaries across the country have absorbed them. So there are homes for these horses, there are good sanctuaries for them to go to.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next? I just say— state your name first, please.

PAOLA GAVINO: My name is Paola Gavino, and I'm also here as a board member of Tamerlaine Sanctuary, where we take care of rescue animals, including horses. But I'm also here as an Hispanic immigrant. So I'm going to speak Spanish a little bit. I will translate because my testimony is somehow connected to the experience as an immigrant. [speaking Spanish] So, como inmigrante latina, entiendo perfectamente lo que es venir a este país buscando nuevas oportunidades. Trabajar duro para tener una vida mejor. Pero precisamente porque entiendo eso, creo que todos los trabajadores inmigrantes que vienen de todos los países merecen algo mejor. Trabajos seguros, dignos, con un futuro estable. Muchos de estos trabajadores de carruajes no tienen protecciones básicas, no tienen un salario garantizado, beneficios, seguro de desempleo, licencia por enfermedad o compensación si se lesiona. Son clasificados solo como contratistas, no como

empleados protegidos. Esta transición propuesta ofrece exactamente eso, trabajos protegidos. No tenemos que escoger entre proteger a los animales o a los trabajadores inmigrantes. Tenemos y debemos que proteger a todos. Les pido que lo apoyen. So, como- as a Latin immigrant, I don't know how— I know exactly how it's like coming to this country and look for better opportunities, working hard to build a better life. But precisely because of that, I believe all immigrant workers deserve better, safe jobs, stable futures. Many of these carriage horses don't have that. So they don't have no guaranteed salary, benefits, employment insurance, healthcare, workers' compensation if they get injured. They are classified as independent contractors rather than protected employees. This transition proposed here offers them the jobs with real protection. So at the sanctuary- okay, I'm going to wrap it up. Horses are not machines. They deserve to be retired. And we have to choose between immigrant workers or protecting the animals. We should protect them both. So please pass Romanch's Law. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Okay, so now I'm going to recall some of the

names I called before if they're not here. Gabrielle Stubbert.

GABRIELLE STUBBERT: I'm Gabrielle Stubbert.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, Gabriel— I'm sorry. Grace Choi. Grace Choi here? Tara Lauren Clenney? Nope. Marie Collessimo. Kirk Miller. April Lang. I'm sorry, what? Oh, okay. Hold on. Cindy Finch. I'm sorry, what was your name again? I'm sorry. Oh, April. Okay, go ahead, April. I'm sorry.

ARPIL LANG: Hi there. My name is April Lang, and I'm a resident of New York City and an animal advocate. So this is just the facts. Horses were a necessary mode of transportation prior to the 20th century. They no longer are. Prior to the 20th century, horses were not breathing in the exhaust from cars, dodging traffic, nor in danger of colliding with automobiles. Horses do this "work" because they are forced to, as has always been the case, not out of choice. In spite of what we think we know about horses, there is not one person who can say with absolute certainty that the horses are content pulling a 900 to 1,500-pound carriage, which is then loaded with passengers, whether that be on a

temperate day or through the heat, cold, snow, and rain. Note, regulations are not often followed, monitored, or or enforced. Due to a more highly evolved sense of smell, sight, and hearing, horses can and do get triggered by sights, sounds, and smells, which are imperceptible to humans, but which signal danger to them. This means they can and do bolt unexpectedly, putting themselves, the driver, and any passengers or pedestrians in harm's way. While carriage drivers need and deserve to work, like everyone, one, neither they nor anyone else can count on permanent job security. Industries change, and as so— as do consumer preferences. All of us need to adapt to that reality. If any visitors to New York end up missing the carriage rides, they'll get over it, because our great city has a plethora of things to see, activities to engage in, and opportunities to make lasting memories. The horses, however, will not get over the wear and tear the bodies of this industry engenders. And those humans injured or killed when horses bolt or collide with cars or pedestrians will not soon get over their losses. Not all traditions deserve to continue. Traditions are created by people and can be changed by people. And

when a tradition harms an animal or a person, it must be ended. The horse-drawn carriage industry in New York is one tradition that needs to be put out to pasture. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Okay, so thank you to this panel, really appreciate it. Now I'm going to call up John D. Leonardo and Sam Moon, I think it is. Are they here? Oh, okay. Okay, go ahead. Just state your name for the record.

SAM MOON: Sam Moon.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, go ahead.

SAM MOON: To the chair, members of the City Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sam Moon and I am the Executive Director of Catskill Hill Animal Sanctuary, located just two miles north— or two hours, excuse me, north of New York City. And on behalf of our organization, I am here to express our strong support for Intro 943. Every day we care for rescued horses and other farmed animals who have found safety, peace, and lifelong refuge at our sanctuary. That

experience has given us a deep understanding of what horses need to thrive: Space to move freely, predictable surroundings, and an environment where they can express their natural behaviors without the constant stress of traffic, noise, and congestion. New York streets simply cannot provide those conditions. Horses are intelligent and sensitive animals, and even the calmest, best-trained horses, as you have heard today, can be startled by sirens, construction, and crowds. When this happens, the risk has extended beyond the horse to carriage operators, passengers, cyclists and pedestrians. As a sanctuary, we believe our responsibility is to provide animals with environments that provide their welfare rather than ask them to adapt to conditions that compromise it. We can acknowledge the role horses have played in our history while embracing a future that does not require them to work in one of the busiest environments in the world. For the welfare of our horses and the safety of our public, we respectfully urge the council to pass Intro 943. Thank you for your consideration.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. John?

JOHN DILEONARDO: Good afternoon. Can you hear me? Alright, great. Good afternoon. My name is John DiLeonardo. I am an anthrozoologist and the Executive Director of Humane Long Island, serving every borough and performing much of New York City's farmed and Exotic animal rescue. Romanch's law exists because the status quo has already claimed too many victims. We lost Ryder. We lost Deniz. We lost 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan. The question before the council is whether those tragedies will finally lead to meaningful change. Today, you've heard from many proponents of the carriage horse industry. And possibly still you may hear from fellow Long Islander Dr. Camilo Sierra urging you to trust that this industry can regulate itself. Before you do, I ask that you consider who is asking you for that trust. The carriage horse industry has repeatedly refused to allow its horses to be examined by independent veterinarians. Instead, it asks this council to rely on veterinarians like Dr. Sierra, who also serves as the NYPD's veterinarian. Dr. Sierra has been disciplined repeatedly by New York State regulators. The New York State Gaming Commission sanctioned him at least seven times and suspended him from the horse

track twice in matters involving falsified health certificates, fraud, corruption, and administering medication to a racehorse he never examined. In 2020, the New York State Board for Veterinary Medicine also found him guilty of professional misconduct for failing to properly document the examination and treatment of a horse, resulting in a two-year suspended stay of his veterinary license. When an industry refuses independent veterinary examinations while asking policymakers to rely on a veterinarian with that disciplinary history, transparency is absent and public confidence is impossible. Romanch's Law provides a responsible path forward. It phases out horse-drawn carriages, protects carriage horses by prohibiting their sale for slaughter or transfer to another carriage operation, and establish the workforce development program to help affected workers transition to new employment. I respectfully urge you to pass Romanch's law. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you both very much. Appreciate it. Okay, next panel. Nicole Greevy, Daniel Chapless- I'm not sure. Okay. Alberto Erzi, I-R or V, Erzi [sp?]. And Leonor Quadrozzi. Nope. I'll read the list one more time. Nicole Greevey,

Danielle Marie Chappuis, Alberto Verzi, and Leonor Quadrozzi. Okay. So, just state your name for the record and– and go ahead.

NICOLE RIVARD: Nicole Rivard from Friends of Animals. We were founded in New York in 1957.

NICOLE GREEVY: I will state my name for the record. Are we good? Hi, I'm Nicole Greevy–

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Greevy, sorry.

NICOLE GREEVY: like Groovy, but with E's instead of O's. I'm a New Yorker. I'm a horse lover. I'm a former horse owner, and I have watched the real estate interests try to kill the carriage industry for decades now. At first they were honest about the reason. They want the land that the stables are on for development. As that wasn't popular with average New Yorkers, they changed tactics, pouring a lot of money into pushing the idea that NYC carriage work is inhumane. It's not true. Equine experts who have inspected the horses in stables have said over and over that they are well cared for, protected by city regulations. Carriage work is not cruel, and it is a lifeline for Amish farm horses and ex-racetrack trotters. There are horses in those Westside stables

now who might have spent their last hours in terror, bound for a slaughterhouse, if not for the carriage industry taking them. As someone who has rescued a horse myself when its stable in Queens abruptly closed, I know from experience how hard and how expensive it is to provide a home for unwanted horses. The carriage industry gives these unwanted horses a chance to live a long life. This is the truth. On top of that, it offers union jobs, it's work for immigrants, and it is a beautiful and irreplaceable part of the park. If this were truly about noise and pollution and crowds and horses as prey animals who spook at everything, if this were truly about that, the anti-carriage activists would also be protesting in front of the NYPD stables and bullying the mounted police, because those horses work much harder and in dirtier, much busier areas than the carriage horses do. But they don't, because the truth is both police horses and carriage horses can live and work and thrive in a city. But only the carriage horses stand between the real estate people making more money than they even need now anyway. But this bill was never about what's best for horses. It's about rich people taking something that isn't

theirs. It's a message to the elite of the city, they can take whatever they want, just spend enough money and spread enough propaganda.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Can you please summarize? Thank you.

NICOLE GREEVY: My summary is that I'm asking you to pass Intro 937 instead. The real estate people have got a few decades now lying about the carriages. Please give the drivers a little time to show the truth of what they do before you take away their livelihoods and the lives of the horses they love and care for. I thank you so much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next person, just identify yourself and then give your testimony.

LEONOR QUADROZZI: Leonor Quadrozzi.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

LEONOR QUADROZZI: So I am a student of equine studies program, soon to graduate. I have been working with horses for over 10 years and riding for almost 20. I am in opposition of this bill. This is biomechanically an easier job for a horse to perform than that of being ridden, and this is one of the most regulated industries for horses anywhere in the

world. In fact, telling some of my professors and classmates, the amount of regulations that horses are made to follow here is one that actually shocks a lot of people because they don't believe that there are so many rules here that horses have to follow. And we— I strongly believe that the bill presented today is the first step in severing a human-animal bond that has existed for thousands of years. These are domesticated horses. They are not ones that can easily just go into a pipeline of not working anymore, and this will lead to the discontinuation of these certain breeds such as drafts and standardbreds that were created to do this type of work, although it is much easier of the work they were originally created to do back when they— when the industry began. This is a very painfully vague bill, and we don't have any guarantee that once these horses leave the city that they will be able to continue, the proper care that they have been over the watchful eye of in New York City. And you know, while a lot of the people sitting here today mean well, once they are out of their eyes, there is no way that we will be able to tell what's going on with these horses. And I have been in a part of an independent study for my

degree program, talking exactly about the social license to operate urban stables and had to task— had the task of laying out exactly how to ensure good welfare for horses that exist in inside the city. And it is possible— and not only possible, but the surrounding community can be a part of this as well, where not only do we have respect for the horses in the park where we don't have e-bikes and other things running all around them causing spooking accidents that have increased. I ask that this is not the bill that is supported, rather the one— the other one that has been introduced by Councilman Gennaro, so that we do not go further away from the natural world than we already have, and that we remember that we do share this world with other species and not just ourselves. New York City does not have to only be for people, but can coexist with horses as well as the other animals that exist here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Thank you both. So a couple housekeeping things. One is that if people- we have a ton more people to testify, so several hours' worth of testimony. If you want to submit testimony, you can. You have up to 72 hours after the end of this hearing

to do so, and you could do it at testimony.nyc— testimony@council— sorry— .nyc.gov, G-O-V. We look at every single— we've actually had people submit testimony already earlier this week, knowing that there was a hearing today. Every single piece of testimony is going to be looked at and reviewed and put into a report. So I just want to let folks know that's an option. Oh, also, if there is anybody here that still wants to testify and has not filled out one of these cards, please see one of the sergeants and do so. Okay. So now I'm going to call Joel Bartlett, Drew McCormick, Emily Erotas, Deborah Thomas, Nicholine Von Finck. Well, let's see. Let's see. Okay, go ahead. Just state your name for the record, please.

DREW MCCORMICK: Hello, my name is Drew McCormick. Okay. May I proceed?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yeah, please. Thank you.

DREW MCCORMICK: Hello, my name is Drew McCormick. I represent Animal Defenders International and our New York City supporters to urge you to please pass Bill 0943 to phase out horse-drawn carriages. This bill was renamed Romanch after he was

killed while trying to save his mother who was stuck in a carriage pulled by a horse who had become spooked. We all are– all very incredibly sorry for this family's loss. We hope that this bill can prevent such tragic losses from ever happening again. Subjecting horses to the intense working conditions of pulling carriages in the city has proven to be a serious public safety issue. Mistreating animals causes unacceptable pain, fear, and distress to the animals, which also increases the risk of them panicking and trying to escape, which poses a risk to the public as well as to the animals themselves. These horses are forced to work even if they are exhausted, fearful, and when their bodies need rest. That is why this bill was previously named Ryder's Law, to honor one of the many horses who collapsed and died from exhaustion from pulling carriages in the city. The horses work in extreme heat, breathe exhaust fumes, and navigate traffic that terrifies them and me, risking injuries to both horses and people. Recent accidents have proven the danger is real. This is not a tradition worth preserving. It is cruelty to animals and a public risk that we can end today. This bill previously died in this committee

due to concerns about eliminating jobs for the drivers. Although the drivers deserve to make a living, this should not be at the expense of the horses or at the risk of the public. Furthermore, this bill does not immediately ban horse-drawn carriages. And therefore provides more time for drivers to find alternative employment. For example, the electronic carriage business could replace horses. We heard comments earlier how these people could work in the government and in agencies. Therefore, we urge you to pass this bill and ban horse-drawn carriages in the city. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next? Identify yourself and then test— and then give your testimony. Sorry.

NICOLINE VON FINCK: Good afternoon. My name is Nicoline Von Finck, and I'm a resident of New York City. I was born on a horse farm in Northern Virginia, and I've been riding since age four. I strongly support Intro 943, Romanch's Law, to end horse-drawn carriages in New York City. I've seen happy, healthy carriage horses growing up in Northern Virginia, and the horses that I've seen in Central Park are not that. Several years ago, I saw with my

own eyes a carriage collapse onto a horse's hind legs. The horse screamed like a child, and several men chaotically tried to free him, one man pulling at the reins while another pushed him down. They were unable to lift the carriage because he was harnessed to it and caught in it. This is what happens when you put a half-ton prey animal in city traffic with no way to escape. Two years ago, I was walking into Central Park and one of the horses caught my attention. I pet his neck. He didn't react at all. His ears, a horse's primary way of engaging with the world, hung completely slack to either side. In 28 years around healthy horses, I had never seen that before. It is a trauma response, total dissociation from sustained physical and emotional distress. Many people have testified today that they care deeply for their horses. So why is Central Park so full of emaciated, exhausted, slack-eared horses with cracked, sore hooves? New York is not asked— is not being asked to do something untested. This is one of the most modern cities in the world. We should be leading, not trailing. Again, I urge the Committee on Health to vote yes and move Intro 943 into a full council vote. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next. State your name and then test— and then give your testimony. Sorry.

DEBORAH THOMAS: I am Deborah Thomas, speaking in support of Intro 943. I am one of the many animal-loving, humane New York City animal advocates who've been fighting for a carriage horse ban in this city for the past 20 years, because I feel that having 19th century horse-drawn carriages in 21st century New York City traffic is both inhumane to the horses and very dangerous to all of us. Sadly, both were shown to be true when the horse Deniz ate a poisonous plant and died in Central Park, and 18-year-old tourist Romanch Mahajan was killed, and my heart go— and prayers go out to his family. As stated earlier, New York City and Central Park have become busier and noisier in the 21st century. Although horse carriages in the city were once a quaint and enjoyable tradition, present-day activities and sounds going on in New York City can easily spook a horse and cause them to bolt and run at the drop of a hat, making it extremely dangerous and irresponsible to continue this industry any longer. No amount of hitching posts in the park or

carriage horse driver training sessions will ever stop this from happening. I also feel that it's downright cruel to force an animal to pull a heavy carriage in the extreme heat and humidity, or in the cold snow and ice that they're often expected to work in, and it's questionable as to whether they're given sufficient water in the summer or blankets and shelter from the cold in the winter while they're pulling these carriages. Therefore, for the sake of the horses and human beings alike, I respectfully urge the City Council to vote for and pass Intro 943, Romanch's Law, as soon as possible. I also want to thank Speaker Menin and Chair Schulman for calling this hearing and all the members who have voted for it, as well as, thank you for putting language in the bill to help the carriage horse— the carriage drivers transition to new jobs. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all. So, now we're going to call a new panel. Thank you very much, and thank you for waiting. Maddy Johnson, Eva Usadi— I'm pronouncing it wrong, I'm sure. Patrick Norton, Christina Tabaka— to something like that— Tabakin, Caroline Zonis, and Regina Clark. Okay, they're not all here. Okay, so

just state your name for the record and then you can testify. Who's going first? Go ahead. Wait, we have to put the button on. Eva? Okay, go ahead.

EVA USADI: Eva Usadi.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes, I got it.

EVA USADI: Thank you very much for this hearing. I'm speaking in support of 0943. I am a New Yorker, born and raised in Brooklyn, currently in District 2. I've been a trauma therapist for 40 years. 20 of those years I have been an equine-assisted psychotherapist, meaning that I incorporate horses in psychotherapy with clients. Primarily that work has been with combat veterans. In this work, I have seen firsthand how horses depend on their senses and their ability to flee perceived danger to stay safe and regulated. We work with a horde— herd of horses at liberty, meaning no halters, no lead lines, no harnesses, or any other means of control or domination. And in all these years, we have had no injuries to people, no injuries to horses, none. Horses survive by using their senses to detect danger. Their nearly 360-degree vision, highly sensitive hearing, and acute sense of smell are adaptations that allow them to identify potential

threats and to react quickly. In Manhattan, those same senses are constantly bombarded by sirens, jackhammers, cars, buses, motorcycles, dense crowds, exhaust fumes, flashing lights, and nonstop unpredictable movement. A horse pulling a carriage cannot move freely away from what it perceives as a threat. This conflict between instinct and environment creates an inherent safety risk that no amount of training can eliminate. It's a public safety concern, and protecting the public is one of the City Council's core responsibilities. Horse-drawn carriages belonged to a different era of New York City's history. Today, we know far more about equine behavior, welfare, and public safety than we did a century ago. We cannot train away millions of years of evolution, and we should not ask horses to ignore instincts that have kept their species alive. The question before the—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] You got to- you got to summarize. Sorry.

EVA USADI: I'm almost finished. The question before the City Council is not whether some horses can be trained to tolerate parts of this work or whether better regulations can reduce the risk to

horses and citizens. The question is whether New York City is an appropriate place to ask horses to do work their biology is not built to withstand while also putting pedestrians, drivers, drivers, cyclists, joggers, and the horses at risk. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you so much. Next, state your name and then give testimony. Is the button on?

MADDY JOHNSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

MADDY JOHNSON: I'm Maddy, a longtime animal welfare advocate, a tri-racial, multilingual New Yorker, a legal immigrant citizen like our mayor, and professionally an architect, landscape architect, and urban planner who has lived and worked in several countries across the world. For those who say horse carriages are a part of old tradition, well, there was a time when flaying and beheading, drawing and quartering, and several methods of torture were also tradition. So we keep those and bring the guillotine back too? And chamber pots in lieu of indoor plumbing? Evolve. It's 2026. There are far more ecological, sustainable, humane alternatives of tourist transport. This is for the promising young

man who lost his life due to this archaic, outdated, inefficient, industry, which has no place in this century in this busy city when so many other cities in Europe and the US and Asia have banned this. It is beyond cruel to the horses, as several other panelists have pointed out, but if not even for compassion, merely from a safety perspective, this practice should be banned. For the ones defending this practice, it means the loss of life of a young man does not matter to you. Would you feel the same if the victim was one of your own kin and not a young man from South Asia, Romanch Mahajan— pronounce the name correctly? Would the proponents feel the same if this was the son of someone who represents your kind of immigrant? The what-about-isms, comparing the deaths to car accidents, even a poisonous plant, are ridiculous. I saw a display of gaslighting, lies, full-on projections, Machiavellian manipulation, sociopathy, and above all, DARVO, that is deny, attack, reverse role of victim and offender, from the defenders of this obsolete vicious practice. Evolve, speak the truth, not lies. So proponents of horse abuse, please get off your high horses. Just like cat and dog hoarders claim they love animals while

abusing them, riding horses to death and then sending them off to slaughter is selfish narcissism, not love for the horses. The city has several jobs with way better benefits that can absorb those who leave the industry.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Please summarize.

MADDY JOHNSON: If Romanch's law does not get passed, I'm still going to hope that someday New York will truly ban this barbaric industry. Thank you so much to the caucus and to all the council people who may choose logic, compassion, and common sense. Thank you. Shukriya. Dhanyavad. Merci.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Thank you very much. Are you— you're Patrick? Okay, great.

PATRICK NORTON: Yes. Hello, my name is Patrick Norton, and I'm a long-term resident of the Upper West Side. I live next to the 72nd Street entrance. Where I walk my dog every day, and I'm here to testify about what I've seen all too many times over the past decade. I've seen horses when it's over— out when it's over 90 degrees, horses when it's below freezing, horses left unattended, horses going up and down 72nd Street, horses going up and down

Central Park West, including the incredibly busy intersection. I've also seen runners and bikers almost crashing into horses, as well as dogs barking and lunging at the horses. Sometimes these dogs are even off-leash, and the horses are understandably startled. I've also witnessed too many close calls where the horses and carriages lose control, and if this madness continues, it's only a matter of time until there's another Ryder or another Romanch. You have the opportunity to end this. You have the opportunity to prevent future cruelty, injury, and death. Please vote yes on Romanch's Law. Otherwise, the next tragedy, the next death, the next time blood is spilt, that blood will be on your hands.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you so much. Thank you to this panel. Really appreciate it.

PATRICK NORTON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, next panel. Kathy Nizzari. Here? Not here? Okay, Danny Mo— Danny or Donny Moss? Donny, right? Donny Moss, right? I know [inaudible] RIS? RIS, American Museum of Natural History– Natural History. I can't read the name. No? Okay. Laura Leopardo? Paisley Anna Bailey? Nope. Alright, Donny, go.

DONNY MOSS: My name is Donny Moss. I made the documentary film Blinders: The Truth Behind the Tradition about the horse-drawn carriage controversy. I'd like to start by saying that when Council Member Gennaro wasn't busy belittling us for engaging in this civic right that we have in an extremely unprofessional manner, he made our argument for us. He said that when you see horses outside of the city, they're invariably grazing on a pasture. New York City has no pasture. Grazing is a fundamental instinct of any horse. New York City has no pasture where these horses can graze, run, roll, interact physically, as herd animals do, move about freely. And to add insult to injury, these horses see pastures every day that they can't even access. That, the lack of a pasture in and of itself, should be a reason why we don't have horse-drawn carriages in Manhattan. To Romanch's family, the city knew. The city knew that this would happen. Because for the past 20 years, we've been shouting from the rooftops and from inside these council chambers, and we've said explicitly that a child is going to fly out of a moving carriage, land on the pavement, and die. City officials chose politics ahead of public safety.

Romanch is a victim of political expediency. Mr. and Mrs. Mahajan, if you're watching, please know that we tried. We've been trying for years. On a final note, now that more people understand that no amount of regulation can stop a spooked horse from bolting and killing someone else, I'd love to know what the City Council and the Department of Health will do to prevent— between now and when this law takes effect, what is the City Council gonna do to protect tourists inside of the carriages and pedestrians, runners, and bicyclists who could get trampled by a spooked horse who bolts and runs uncontrollably through Central Park? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much, Donny. Appreciate it. Next.

KATHY NIZZARI: Afternoon, I'm Kathy Nizzari of Lights Out Coalition. Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Intro 943, Romanch's Law. These are the only horse-drawn carriages not obsolete in NYC and are still forced to work in conditions unsuited to their welfare. Reports of collapses, injuries, illegal working conditions, and deaths on city streets continue. For years, advocates warned it would take a human death before

this business finally ended. Tragically, unfortunately, that prediction came true when a promising young man named Romanch Mahajan lost his life. My heart goes out to him and his family. They should never have endured such a devastating loss or been forced to become advocates for change. Change is a reality of life. How many of us have had to find new employment at some point? When rideshare services reform the taxi industry, my own father's immigrant family's medallion lost its value. There was no bailout. They adapted. History's filled with occupations that disappeared, and workforce transitions are increasingly common. If we cannot manage this one, how will we respond when more than half a million local jobs predicted are lost to AI? We cannot just justify continuing a dangerous, outdated industry simply because people don't like change. The carriage drivers have something many displaced workers never had— union representation and a pathway to retraining and new jobs. Their union is well positioned to help them and should. The MTA, also with TWU, is actively hiring with strong wages and benefits. Romanch's death must not become another tragedy that is acknowledged and forgotten. The

fundamental right to life must always take precedence over commercial interests. Business must never come at the cost of living beings. I respectfully urge the council to pass Intro 943 without delay and get these poor horses off the streets now. And if I may, Chair Schulman, I wanted to respond to a question that came up earlier. Someone asked about NYPD hiring horse caregivers or caretakers, and according to nyc.gov, the NYPD frequently hires dedicated civilian staff to care for their horses. They work directly in the department stables and are responsible for feeding, grooming, cleaning stalls, and assisting the unit's veterinarians.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you very much. Alright, next?

LAURA LEOPARDO: My name is Laura Leopardo and I live in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn. I urge the committee to pass Romanch's Law, Intro 943. I grew up in Chicago, which ended its horse-drawn carriage rides, as many major cities around the world, because they have recognized that this industry is no longer viable in dense urban environments. I do appreciate that Intro 943 recognizes the livelihoods of carriage workers by providing workforce transition assistance.

That makes this legislation both compassionate and reasonable. I had originally planned to present every documented carriage accident from the past two decades to illustrate the ongoing dangers of this industry, but there are simply way too many to fit into two minutes. But the record does include runaway horses, collisions with taxis, buses, bicycles, pedestrians, parked cars, and other vehicles. As it's been said, no amount of regulation can eliminate the inherent risk of horses operating in New York City. As prey animals, as it's been said, horses can panic and bolt unpredictably. Here are just a few examples from the most recent past. Horses have bolted into Midtown traffic on multiple occasions. Passengers have been forced to jump from runaway carriages multiple times. Horses have crashed into signs and parked vehicles multiple times. Carriages have turned several times. Drivers have been injured and hospitalized. Then, as we all know, came June 17th. 18-year-old Romanch was killed after a horse bolted. After years of warnings and repeated accidents, the tragedy that so many feared finally occurred. We cannot say this was unforeseeable. The warning signs had been there for years. It was the culmination of a

long pattern of increasingly serious incidents that the city city turned a blind eye. Passing Intro 943 is an opportunity for New York City to lead with compassion, responsibility, and common sense. It will protect horses, support the workers through a fair transition, and most importantly, protect the public.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you to this panel. Appreciate it. I'm going to call a name I called before, Chris Ramirez. Is that person here? Oh. You are here. Okay, great. Great. Go ahead. Give yourself a second. Go ahead.

CHRIS RAMIREZ: Okay, I know you guys have had a very long day and I see everybody's attention dwindling, people on their phones, people conversing, and I really hope that I get your attention when I say that I found it very disrespectful and disturbing to hear that in a case about horses, that a councilman that's no longer even here would say, forget about the horse, it's already dead, and he won't hear anything that any of us are having to say. Others want to speak about alternate means of transport and compare Amazon trucks, e-bikes, trains, planes, cars to live sentient beings. Not to— not any

of the other things forementioned. And that is the pretense of our objection, that so many drivers treat these horses in the same indignant manner. Most of us grew up romanticizing the idea of horse and carriages. We normalized it as a part of the background of the city. But the reality is, for these horses, it's been decades of cruelty and neglect. With the introduction of video cameras and camera phones in society, along with undercover investigations, countless videos are now in the forefront of what this industry is really about. We begin with their homes, the coffin-sized stables with not even enough space to turn around or lie down in. It's rat-infested and there's no AC or heat. These horses freeze throughout the winter or swelter in the summer with no relief and limited ventilation. If anything, contrary to what one of the testimony says, you cannot in fact openly visit one of these stables with open access. I'm sorry. I'm losing you guys again. I'll wait. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

CHRIS RAMIREZ: I wasn’t done.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And just, you know-

CHRIS RAMIREZ: [interposing]You guys weren't listening.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just for the record, I was pushing back with anybody that was, you know, out of decorum up here. So-

CHRIS RAMIREZ: [interposing] I understand.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I've been doing that the whole day today.

CHRIS RAMIREZ: I understand.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: So no, no worries.

CHRIS RAMIREZ: I wasn't able to finish that because I feel like I lost everyone's attention, and I still have 10 seconds.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Go ahead.

CHRIS RAMIREZ: I want address the painful metal bars in their mouth and the many videos that have surfaced of the drivers yanking at the attachments of the bars, causing extreme pain for these docile animals. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Okay, next panel. Lisa Goldberg. Lisa Goldberg here? That's you? Okay. Tillie the Clown. Zach

Bouldian, I think it is. Zach? No? Okay. Margaret Lee? No? Okay, wait, give me– give me one second, sorry. Mr. Melody Tim or something to that effect? No? Okay. Marian Koenig, Koenig? And Linda Mann? Melody. Okay. So, from my right, your left. Go ahead. Just state your name for the record and then go into your testimony.

LINDA MANN: Linda Mann.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, great.

LINDA MANN: Chair Schulman and members of the committee that are still here, I know some of you have already made up your minds and nothing I can say say will change that. But I was brought up to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, and today I will speak for those whose world is shaped by constant noise, crowds, traffic, and stress. For those who are forced to live in an unnatural environment for their species, who never feel the natural ground beneath them, and for those who go back to enclosures that never come close to meeting their needs. This is an industry built on confinement, whether in the park or in their stalls. Walk by a HAC line and see the sad, defeated look in those eyes. Then go to a sanctuary where they feel

safe, probably for the first time in their lives, where they are given adequate space and allowed to live free from exploitation and abuse, where these sensitive, social herd animals are allowed to live naturally and see the difference in those eyes. I am a big believer in the concept of once you know, you can no longer say you didn't know when something happened. This is where we are now. You all know the danger. We saw it in real time. The world saw it in real time. And there was a family in India who lived it in real time. This hearing brings us one step closer to a city safe from that ever happening again. It brings us one step closer to giving these magnificent beings the freedom they deserve. For years they have been waiting for us to step in to end their suffering. They have waited far too long. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Alright, no clapping. Go ahead.]

TILLIE THE CLOWN: Me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

TILLIE THE CLOWN: Oh, hi, my name, my name is Tillie the Clown. I am a drag entertainer here in New York City, and I felt that with the very

rich history that queer people have in standing up for, you know, human and animal rights, I figured, you know, why not represent my community? So I sit before you today as a drag entertainer in the greatest city in the world. I'm an artist who benefits greatly from the tourism that sustains our nightlife, and I'm grateful for that. And there's a glaring archaic contradiction in our city. When I left, for- when I left my city of Philadelphia 14 years ago, I was trying to find a better- the next step up. I'd never thought that Philadelphia would end up being better than us. We pride ourselves on being a world-class destination with the best nightlife, museums, food, and we are still clinging to the exploitation of horse-drawn carriages. This is not a matter of commerce. It is a matter of biology. A giant prey animal is not built to thrive in New York's overstimulating concrete environment. Veterinary experts, many of which we've seen here today, have consistently found that pulling heavy carriages on unforgiving concrete leads to arthritis, hoof deterioration, chronic pain, and these animals are biologically imprisoned. They are kept in cramped stables where restricted movement causes colic, a

painful, often fatal condition while we are- while we are forcing them into a lifestyle that causes them internal agony. We are gathered here today after the tragic death of a human about to embark on adulthood, Romanch. My heart goes out to his family and the loved ones for their devastating loss, but we should not have had to wait for human tragedy to act. This has been a systemic failure for over a decade. We have seen evidence in our streets for years from Tickles back in 2015, who was euthanized after a fracture because he was no longer profitable product, to a more recent collapse of Ryder, who this bill was prior named after. Even regarding Deniz, who were— who died in the park, the industry may point to toxic plants as the cost, but the fact remains that these animals are being forced into urban environments where they're exposed to such dangers while working for this industry. The current system is clearly broken, marked by an annual turnover rate of over 70 horses with zero transparency regarding where these animals are sent once they are removed from city rolls. The union argues that we cannot phase out—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] I need you to- I need you to wrap up.

TILLIE THE CLOWN: Of course. But we all know, as we've seen today, the network of over four dozen sanctuaries have written a letter of intent to take them. Cities across the globe, from Philadelphia to Chicago, Salt Lake City, to London, Beijing, Barcelona, and Montreal have all put this terrible practice behind them.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, we have- alright.

TILLIE THE CLOWN: So my last words to you is thank you so much for your time, and let's make history and keep his- New York being on the future and the best city in the world.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you.

TILLIE THE CLOWN: Of course, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Next.

LISA GOLDBERG: Hello, my name is Lisa Goldberg. I'm a New York City resident and an animal advocate, and speaking in favor of Intro 943. The Central Park carriage horses are denied the freedom to graze, roam, and form the deep bonds with one another that are natural to these highly social herd animals. More than that, we've witnessed too many of them collapse and die on New York City streets, most

recently Deniz, Lady, and Ryder, but many others over the years. You don't have to be moved by the plight of the horses, though, to recognize how incredibly dangerous it is to have horse-drawn carriages in New York City. Horses are prey animals. They're hardwired instinct is to spook and run when they perceive a threat, a loud noise or a sudden movement, things that are everyday, unavoidable occurrences in New York City. We've seen so much video footage documenting harrowing near misses where horses have spooked and bolted and passersby have narrowly escaped being trampled. Now 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan has tragically been killed in a preventable incident that should never have been allowed to happen. I hope the City Council will respond to the Mahajan family's tragedy by passing Romanch's Law immediately, because if horses continue to pull carriages in New York City, it's only a matter of time before the next inevitable tragedy.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Thank you very much. Yes, ma'am.

MARGARET LEE: I'm Margaret Lee, New Yorker, animal defender. My thanks to Speaker Menin, bill sponsor Chris Marte, and co-sponsors of Intro

943, and the— and all who made this hearing possible— this— today's hearing possible. Many New Yorkers have waited decades for this moment. Immense and devastating heartbreak has finally brought us to this hearing on National Celebration of the Horse Day. I am here in support of Intro 943, Romanch's Law, named for 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan, who died while as a child riding in a Central Park horse-drawn carriage with his family. I am also here as one of the great majority of New Yorkers who have been long pleading for an end to this dangerous and cruel industry. Many of us even voted based on promises to ban horse carriages, only to be disappointed time and time again. The truth is simple. Horses do not belong on New York City streets. No amount of legislation, regulation, training, infrastructure changes can make horse carriages safe or ethical. The tragedies that preceded Romanch's death were foreseeable, and until this industry ends, more tragedies will inevitably follow. Four years ago, Ryder's Law, named for the exploited horse who collapsed while pulling a carriage, never even received the hearing it deserved. Despite the support of most New Yorkers, it was repeatedly blocked while activists like myself

spent years urging this city to choose compassion over tradition and profit. Today you have the opportunity to do what should have been done long ago. Pass Intro 943 and move it urgently, speedingly forward now before another horse or another person risks being harmed. Let New York finally become the compassionate, forward-thinking city it aspires to be. Release these long-suffering horses to caring sanctuaries waiting for them, where they can run freely and show the world that compassion has finally prevailed. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I want to thank this panel, appreciate it. Okay. Alright, next panel, Lisa Reddy, Steve Batista. Skyler Hoffman, Ellen Ruddick-Sunstein, Holly Voges— Voges, sorry, and Ed Schultz. Okay, starting with you. Make sure your mic is on. No, you have to push the button. Okay.

SKYLER HOFFMAN: All right.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: And identify yourself and then testify.

SKYLER HOFFMAN: I'm Skyler Hoffman.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

SKYLER HOFFMAN: And I want to be respectful of your time, so I'm going to try to actually finish this early. Sign of respect. Let's start off with poison shrubbery. Poison shrubbery. It's kind of ridiculous, right? Like, the audacity and greed of this horse carriage industry to expect that Central Park change everything to accommodate for their needs, kind of seems a little funny to me. And I really think that this is greed. I mean, I am an organizer, and I'm very interested in unions and labor. And so, when I see this sort of union that they have, and— but it's all of managers, and it's mainly representing their own greed. I think to myself, this is ridiculous. We're saving them. Who are we actually saving? People that want to force other beings to suffer to make them money. Let's get rid of this industry. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Next?

STEVE BATTISTA: Good afternoon. My name is Steve Battista. I've been a dog walker on the West Side of Manhattan for 26 years. So the congested gridlocked avenue paths the carriage industry takes to and from Central Park coincide with my own work

territory. I've seen it all. I've seen horses electrocuted. I have seen horses clipped and injured by vehicles. I have seen horses jump curbs, and bolt onto sidewalks. I have seen horses frantically pulling empty carriages lost by their drivers. I have seen terrified, overtaxed animals inhaling exhaust fumes and suffering in extreme weather conditions, suffering year after year in bondage. In August of 2025, a horse named Lady collapsed and died on 53rd Street in Hell's Kitchen. A carriage driver admitted to my face that the horse was forced to work with cancer. I have seen enough. We all have. The TWU and whatever shameless shills that may remain on the City Council are insulting New Yorkers when they falsely claim that any animal welfare reforms are applicable in this situation. The only answer to this ugly relic of history is a full ban. Mahatma Gandhi famously said that the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated. As I stand here today with my fellow citizens of conscience, I ask you to realize the greatness of this city and its movement towards progress by supporting the passage of Intro 943. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

ED SCHULTZ: Hi, my name is Ed Schultz. I'm a New York City public school teacher. I'm a proud union member, a son of an immigrant, and I'm a grateful constituent of City Council Member Shahana Hanif. Thank you all for being here, by the way, so late. I come today to urge you to pass Romanch's Law. The carriage horse industry has always claimed that their horses are retired to sanctuary when they can no longer pull. This despite the fact that former New York City carriage horse named Bernard was rescued from a notorious kill buyer auction in Pennsylvania in 2024, as reported on by the New York Post. I find it telling that today the carriage industry has repeatedly threatened that they will sell their horses to slaughter if this bill passes. One would expect that every carriage horse should have a retirement plan from the very first day they're connected to a carriage. That's the industry's responsibility. And if they don't, they are literally one serious injury away from being sold to a kill buyer, which they've acknowledged today. I teach my students that a fundamental part of democracy is that the majority rule. A vote for Romanch's Law is not

just a vote to protect horses and public safety. It's a vote for democracy, as an overwhelming majority of New York City residents want this bill to be law. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next.

ELLEN SUNSTEIN: Hi, my name is Ellen Sunstein. I'm a former equestrian turned horse advocate. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of Romanch's Law. When I was a child, I rode a horse-drawn carriage through Central Park. I offered a carrot to the weary horse, and he took it from my hand. I didn't realize at the time that that gentle horse was forced to pound the pavement day after day, even when it was swelteringly hot or blisteringly cold. At night, he'd go back to a tiny stall, likely aching and exhausted. I have known many horses in the years since, but I never forgot the feeling of that horse's breath in the palm of my hand. I've often wondered what became of him. Did he drop dead in the street like Lady and Deniz? Was he whipped like Ryder, or kicked while screaming like Luciana? Did he die after being forced to haul tourists in a heat wave like Billy? Did he spend his

last moments alone and terrified in a 60-square-foot stall? Such extreme confinement is harrowing for a horse whose most fundamental needs include social contact, free movement, and access to forage. When deprived of these needs, they can develop colic, ulcers, or musculoskeletal issues. They may sway endlessly or exhibit other repetitive stress-induced behaviors. As I've seen myself, some become shut down and unresponsive in a state similar to depression in humans. Intensive confinement is not horsemanship. I loved New York as a child, and I still do, but the carriage trade is a stain on the city. No one can save Lady, Deniz, Ryder, or Billy. No one can save Romanch, though you can honor him. I can't save the gentle, exhausted horse I met all those years ago, whose name I forget, but whose suffering I can't. But you can save the next horse. Please pass Romanch's Law.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. I want to thank this panel. Really appreciate it.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Okay, the next panel is Joe Schinkel, Benjamin Larkin— Lakin, maybe?

Rosemary Espinal. Elizabeth Farrell and Nicole Riviere. Thank you. You may begin.

BENJAMIN KONIGSBERG: Good evening, my name is Benjamin Konigsberg [sp?]. I'm a native New Yorker and I support Intro 943 prohibiting our city's horsedrawn carriage industry. This isn't about tradition or tourism, it's about the horses. Every carriage horse exists because humans intentionally bred them into a life of servitude. They didn't choose this work, we chose it for them.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Sorry, sorry, Benjamin. I said Benjamin Lakin?

BENJAMIN KONIGSBERG: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: That's you? Oh, I thought you said another name. Okay, sorry. Go ahead. Thank you.

BENJAMIN KONIGSBERG: Horses evolved to roam freely and live in family groups. Instead, carriage horses spend much of their lives confined to stalls as small as 60 square feet. Research has shown that prolonged stall confinement is associated with chronic stress, gastric ulcers, and other serious physical and psychological welfare problems. They walk on hard concrete and asphalt, breathe exhaust,

navigate loud noise and dense crowds despite their natural instinct to flee perceived danger at a moment's notice. To control them, they wear bits in their mouth, and veterinary research has documented that these bits can cause pain and injuries to the sensitive tissues of their mouth. We all remember Ryder, whose collapse shocked New York and raised questions about industry oversight, including allegations that records regarding his age had been falsified. And of course, Romanch, whose tragedy reminds us that this industry is not only dangerous for the horses but for New Yorkers and tourists. So the question before us isn't whether carriage horses are treated better than others. The question is, why do we continue exploiting sentient beings for entertainment when humane alternatives already exist? And all of these harms stem from one fundamental belief: that horses exist for us to use. They don't. Horses, like all animals, exist for their own purpose. They value their own lives independent of what they can provide to humans. They are not property. The measure of a city is not how it entertains its tourists, but how it treats the most

vulnerable beings in its care. Please vote yes on Intro 943. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

ROSEMARY ESPINAL: Good afternoon. My name is Rosemary Espinal. Honorable Council Members, a government that fails to protect its most vulnerable, it's not an effective government. And that includes horses who are made to work in excruciating and deplorable conditions in the streets of New York City. Animals need our protection. These horses suffer pain and depression from the atrocious conditions and hard labor they're made to endure. New York City should not be participating in this cruel and depraved industry. A human life was lost, but so have many horses lost their lives too in a cruel and senseless activity. To those council members who voted in the past to keep horse carriages, you bear some responsibility for the death of Mr. Romanch, because you failed to dismantle this industry when you had the power to do so. To council members today, I plead with you not to make the same mistakes that other council members made in the past. Please help put an end to this long and painful chapter for New York City and pass Intro 943

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

NICOLE RIVARD: Hi, I'm Nicole Rivard. It's an honor to be here on behalf of Friends of Animals. We were founded in New York in 1957. You can stop the carriage horse industry from claiming any more lives, and we urge you to pass 943 quickly. But we realize you can't legislate that the owners will willingly relinquish their horses, so we would also also support adding language that creates a fund to enable the city to facilitate a buyout of the horses from the owners who want to sell and help with placement fees at the sanctuaries who need them, which of course, Friends of Animals would contribute to, and we know other groups would as well. We can even accommodate five or six of the carriage horses at our own sanctuary. Because of Intro 943, the industry is trying to get a leg up, pun intended. It's pivoted from talking only about so-called safety measures like posts to spinning a narrative that all the horses are going to slaughter if this bill becomes law. But how come when they retire their own horses now from service, that's not a death sentence? How can both things be true? Being deadly is not the only reason the trade needs to be banned. It also

robs equines of their basic needs. People have talked about turnout for roaming free and socialization, but there is actual research that shows these things lower stress-related behaviors. And not only does the carriage horse industry take away the very things these animals need to be calm, then they have to pull carriages along with unassuming tourists into the unpredictable New York City environment. As an equestrian of 42 years, I know firsthand that even in the safest, calmest environments, horses may still freeze, bolt, or react defensively to sudden changes. The industry made drivers undergo safety training after the recent tragedy. They wanted the public and tourists to feel safer, but they aren't, and neither are the horses.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you all for your testimony. The next panel is Figi Ryder, Marilyn Galphin, Kathleen Raab, Nicolette Hoffman, Fiorella Valdivia [sic], Marley— Delmar Leon, Diane Petruzzelli– Petruzzelli. Thank you. You all may begin when you're ready. Just identify yourself for the record.

MARILYN GALFIN: Marilyn Galfin, Voices for Shelter Animals and support of Intro 943,

Romanch's Law. The tragic loss of Romanch Mahajan is a devastating reminder that the carriage horse industry is not only inhumane but is inherently dangerous to the public. The city can no longer look away as horses collapse and die in our streets, traumatizing and horrifying the public, as spooked horses run wild, and as drivers continue to violate laws including operating in brutal weather conditions. My attempts to get help to remove a carriage from the streets during a blizzard were met with total inaction, leaving me feeling completely helpless as I couldn't protect this horse. There were eight reported horse-related incidents in 13 months, and a recent poll shows majority of New Yorkers support a ban. Allowing this industry, this cruel industry, to continue is playing Russian roulette with the lives of New Yorkers, tourists, carriage horses, carriage drivers, and would be negligent, especially in today's city's chaotic, unsafe environment. We are way past the time for Band-Aids. No amount of regulation can make this so-called iconic practice acceptable anymore. Tradition should no longer be an excuse for an outdated, inhumane industry. It has already been banned in so many

places across the world, and it's long overdue in New York City. These majestic horses deserve retirement and a peaceful life flourishing in sanctuaries, not another day in traffic, leaving a mis— living a miserable life they are forced into. Furthermore, this bill provides a structured transition for workers, setting a modern standard for navigating change and addressing supporting the livelihood of the drivers. Not every industry gets that help. Now while the carriage horse trade is in plain sight, I cannot ignore the fact that we have a hidden tragedy— it's the adoptable treatable animals being needlessly killed in our city shelters which is long overdue and needs to be addressed.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you. Please wrap up.

MARILYN GALFIN: I just want to finish this off that- that shelter animals have no rights, and they receive lack of humane treatment. And what's happening now is neither acceptable, it's not a solution. I just ask that it's 2026, we pass Romanch's Law, and show our compassion and end this industry, but also realize that all life is sacred, and everything possible must be done by the city

government to protect it, including our shelter animals.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

KATHLEEN RAAB: Kathleen Raab. Members of the council, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of SPCA International about an issue that directly impacts animal welfare and the safety of all people in our city. We are here today because it is time that New York City move beyond horse-drawn carriages. This is an outdated practice that puts both horses and people at risk. Our cities are busier than ever, filled with traffic, construction, noise, and countless hazards that were never designed for large animals. Yet horses are still expected to navigate in these conditions every day. Recent tragedies have underscored these concerns within a matter of weeks. Another carriage horse collapsed and died. A man lost his life in an incident involving a horse-drawn carriage. These heartbreaking events remind us that the status quo is not without consequences. Cities are beginning to recognize that there is a better way. Just last month, Philadelphia voted to end horse-drawn carriage rides, demonstrating that communities can prevent their

history while embracing safer and more humane alternatives. New York has long been a leader in advancing animal welfare. We have the opportunity to once again lead with compassion by ending an outdated practice that no longer reflects the values of our city. We urge the council to support Romanch's Law that phases out horse-drawn carriages and prioritizes the safety and well-being of both New Yorkers and the horses who deserve a safer life. Let's be on the right side of history for our communities and for the animals who depend on us. Thank you for your time and consideration.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

DIANE PETRUZZELLI: My name's Diane Petruzzelli. I've worked with the SPCA for many years in animal adoption and humane education. Legislation. For years I've signed petitions, written letters, hoped someone would finally end the suffering of New York City's carriage horses. But after witnessing tragedy after tragedy, I realized these horses need more than our sympathy. They need our voices. Imagine spending every day surrounded by blaring horns, sirens, traffic, exhaust fumes, scorching heat, freezing temperatures, and miles of unforgiving

pavement. Imagine never having a choice, never being able to say, "I'm tired, I'm hurt, I'm afraid." That is the life of a New York City carriage horse. These beautiful animals were never meant to spend their lives pulling tourists through the busiest city in the world. Horses are meant to run through open fields, graze beside other horses, and simply be horses. Instead, they spend their entire lives walking on pavement, surrounded by noise and traffic, living a life they never chose nor would ever choose. Horse-drawn carriages belong to another century. They were created before automobiles existed. New York has always been a city that embraces progress. Today you have the opportunity to let our compassion evolve as well. And this is— this isn't only about animal welfare, it's also about public safety. Recent tragedies have reminded us of the risk to both horses and people. We should not have to wait for another tragedy before deciding that this outdated practice has to come to an end. If this were your horse, your dog, or the pet you love the most, would you want this life for them? Would you want them breathing exhaust, surrounded by blaring sirens and traffic, walking mile after mile on hard pavement in the heat

of summer and the cold of winter? These horses have spent their lives serving us. They never chose this life. They cannot stand before you today and ask for a different one. Only you can give them that. I respectfully ask that you vote yes on this legislation and help give these horses the future they've always deserved. Years from now, people will not ask why New York City ended horse-drawn carriages. They will ask why it took so long.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you. This side of the table.

DELMAR LEON: Thank you, Chairman and council members, for prioritizing this matter. My name is Delmar Leon, founder of Canine Rescue NYC. I believe the compounded numbers of accidents that have occurred over three decades on an ongoing basis only points to an industry who has been overlooked with little oversight while consistently showing neglect based on the numbers of accidents we have seen for decades, which culminated into the tragedy that called for its suspension after the death of Romanch. A precedent needs to be set with the death of Romanch, whom I take this opportunity to offer my condolences to the Mahajan's family. This bill is not

about removing the passion for riding your horse, as was heard by one panelist's testimony, but removing them from riding on the streets of New York City and Central Park. We also heard earlier from their main veterinary there is no standard policy in place to ensure their animal's well-being is being maintained. Assessment of the horse health is left to be determined by the horse rider or owner, and the horse owner or rider also decides when to call the vet. How are we ensuring the driver that horse that day will be looking out for the animal's welfare, it may mean— if it may mean no income for that day or week? We also heard earlier how council members had yet to be called back to schedule a meeting and only did so after weeks, which allows time to correct and/or cover up any deficiencies before the time comes for visit. The horse carriage drivers mentioned horses are creatures of habits, yet there is a pattern of accidents showing that in 30 years horses have yet to get used and accustomed to riding on the streets of New York City and Central Park. 1982, three horses collapsed and died on the streets in July, including Macho. November 1986, frightened horse taking off and crashing into building. May 1988, a horse falling

into manhole. May 1990, a horse being fatally pinned between a bus and a car. January 2006, a five-year-old gelding named Spotty spooks, bolt into traffic and wraps himself over the top of a station wagon. The horse breaks a leg and dies, becoming a major catalyst for organized campaigns to ban New York City horses. April 2014, Spartacus [sic], a carriage horse is pinned to the ground in an overturned carriage after being spooked by a bus. Two years later, in January 2016, Spartacus spooks— I would like to conclude–

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: [interposing] Thank you.

DELMAR LEON: it is time to ban carriage horses out of the streets of New York City and Central Park. This incident only demonstrates an industry that has been overlooked with little oversight, showing a pattern that has been overlooked.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you.

DELMAR LEON: To conclude, just one little thing—

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: [interposing] Your time is up. Thank you so much.

DELMAR LEON: Yeah. I just finalize this last thing?

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Go ahead.

DELMAR LEON: I would like to conclude by stating that I'm in favor of Romanch Ryder's Bill 1943, bringing attention to a similar matter happening within the animal shelter system at NYCACC, also left with no oversight and accountability, living in inhumane confinements, highly medicated, and ensured that they can cope with inhumane shelter environment. This couple of weeks alone—

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: [interposing] Okay, thank you. You can submit the rest of it.

DELMAR LEON: They have double the killings.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you so much.

DELMAR LEON: So please schedule an oversight hearing on NYC.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you so much. Thank you. Next.

FIORELLA VALDIVIA: My turn?

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Yes.

FIORELLA VALDIVIA: My name is Fiorella Valdivia. I live in District 5.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Talk closer to the microphone.

FIORELLA VALDIVIA: Okay. My name is Fiorella Valdivia. I live in District 5, few blocks from Central Park, so I see this every day. I would like to thank everyone who came here today, including all council members supporting Romanch's Law, Intro 943, and especially Speaker Julie Menin for her leadership. As someone who already lost a sibling in a tragedy, I know what Romanch's family is going through. Have— I have— they have to go through this pain for the rest of their life. And when his little brother sees another brother together, he will be in profound pain. This issue is far from ill-conceived and silly, as was suggested by Council Member James Gennaro. What a shame. I have a question for all the council members who have not supported Romanch Law, Intro 943. Do you really have the luxury to allow this to continue? Do you? We can see why carriage horses do not belong in densely populated settings like Central Park. We all know how heavily trafficky and loud New York is. The carriage industry is a 19th

century industry trying to fit in the 21st century. No occupation should take precedence over human life. The citizens of New York deserve a transformative change and not one to be compromised. This is an urgent matter, and the truth is that there is no regulation that can prevent this from happening again. And if we don't address— if we don't address this with urgency–

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: [interposing] Please conclude.

FIORELLA VALDIVIA: many more will follow Romanch and his family's destiny. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you so much. Thank you to this panel.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: The next panel is John Rosen— Rosen Green [sp?], sorry. Yes, no? Okay. Lauren Koenig. Nope. Yzraela Melman? Nope. Yelda Mosley [sp?]? Okay, come on. Roxanne Delgado? Yes? Okay, great. And Nellie McKay? Nope. Okay. Okay. Justina Adorno. Joanne Solako [sp?]. Are you Justina? Oh, you're Nellie. Okay, sorry. Okay, great. Hold on one sec. Joanne Silaco. Justina Adorno. No. Yalda Moslenian [sp?]. No, oh, that's you. Okay, I'm sorry. It's late. Donna Stein and Lorraine Fleischman. Okay,

Lorraine's not here. Donna's here. Okay. Alright, so we'll start with you guys. Just state your name for the record and then we'll— you'll give your testimony. Thank you.

YALDA MOSLEHIAN: Hi, good evening. Is it evening? Wow, I've been here since the morning. I don't need to hold it, that's right. Well, thank you, council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Yalda Moslehian and I'm an animal advocate based in Manhattan. So I'm just here as a human being and a resident. I work in tech and I'm also an actor, and I'm very much involved in New York City activities. And one of my favorite things to do— I live in the West Village, but I, on a monthly basis, will visit Central Park because it's just a nice escape, get the greenery. But every time I enter Central Park, I just see the horses and they look depressed. I mean, we see it. And it's like, it's so blatant in our faces. Every single time we enter the park, we see the horses. They're malnourished. You can see like the bony ribs. It's very disturbing. And I'm like, how is this still happening? New York, where is the need? What is the need for horse carriages? We have modern alternatives, pedicabs,

eco-friendly transit. We can walk- that don't require living animals to labor in traffic. Under New York law, animal cruelty is defined as every act, omission, or neglect whereby unjustifiable physical pain or suffering is caused or permitted. No carriage ride is worth a horse's suffering. These are not isolated incidents. There have been eight documented horse-related incidents in Central Park in the 13 months leading up to Romanch Mahajan's death. Eight in one of the most visited public spaces in the world. That is not a safety record. That is a pattern. It was mentioned earlier, veterinarians describe their basic needs, and it's the three Fs. Friends— they are social creatures. Forage— they need to— oh, okay. Well, I am in favor of the law, and I appreciate you taking this into consideration.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Absolutely.

YALDA MOSLEHIAN: And horses can't speak, so we are the voice for them. And let's ban this animal cruelty. And I just want to say, LinkedIn has an excellent coaching program to support the transferable skills that these carriage drivers have.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next.

ROXANNE DELGADO: Evening. My name is Roxanne Delgado. I reside in the Bronx. If it matters, I'm Latina. My parents are immigrants, or work— and I'm here because I support this bill. I just left work, and I work a very physical job, and my back is killing me. And I feel tired, but after this I'm going to go home, rest, take some medication, and if I don't feel better, I'll call out tomorrow. But the horses don't have that luxury. They're worked to death. And I have seen firsthand how these horses are double-shifted, overboarded, left to bake in the sun despite the fact that the driver is underneath a tree, refuge from the heat. And during those holiday seasons, they're worked to death. They work around with no rest. This is- and there's no enforcement of the minimal humane laws. So, like I said, I was here almost 15 years ago with the Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages with Intro 89, and things have not improved for the horses. It's gotten just worse. Things that we can't even address, like global warming. I'd like to mention that the drivers have unions. Those unions have many jobs on the website. They could help employ many of their workers. But the horses— it's not right what we're

doing to the horses. These horses are worked to death, and I feel like– I feel like the city council in general, the city has been the forefront of many issues that other cities follow along. But with horse-drawn carriage, we've been behind the issue. Many cities throughout the country and the city have banned horse-drawn carriage. It's for the same issues why we're here, because it's abusive. And yes, of course we want people to be employed, but there's not— jobs are not excuse to abuse animals. We are better than that. And I voted for term limits because of Gennaro, and he hasn't evolved. He's still with that same nonsense. I just— after 15 years, he's still back in that mentality. We as humans have to evolve every day, and I'm so disappointed in his behavior. I'd like to thank you for your time, and hopefully the city does the right thing.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Well, I want to tell you that for the record, all of us that are here now are on the bill. So–

ROXANNE DELGADO: Well, thank you for doing the right thing, and thank you for having the courage for those who don't have a voice and the most marginalized community like myself. We're

marginalized and we need people to advocate for us and so do those horses. That's why I'm here, because they're marginalized just like me.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I understand.

ROXANNE DELGADO: You have a great evening. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Next?

DONNA STEIN: Yes. Uh, my name is Donna Stein.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, put your mic on. Sorry. You have to push the button. Thank you.

DONNA STEIN: Okay. Now my time starts. My name is Donna Stein. I am speaking for myself and for C. White, lifelong New Yorkers and lifelong horse lovers. 20 years ago, Newsweek wrote, New York has the highest carriage horse accident rate in the country. The industry called for hitching posts, driver training. Newsweek feared only a human death could end it now. Now the eyes of the world are on us. Safe, humane horse-drawn carriages are not possible in New York because of the nature of the city. Dangerous urban traffic, crowded parks, all horses spook, prey animals, wary of danger, they bolt and run for their lives. 128 accidents since 1982, 29

work-related horse deaths, now Romanch, plus lives shortened by overwork and slaughter, no turnout to pasture, which horses- working horses require for their health and well-being to be horses with other horses. Climate extremes at busy seasons when they collapse and die in our streets, summer heat hotter on asphalt, humidity high— hard on horses, then the cold of the punishing winter holiday season. Concussive leg and hoof injuries, pounding pavement with respiratory harm coming from exhaust can end their working lives and lead to slaughter. Inadequate housing, even upstairs in stalls too small for draft horses. At the end, brutal slaughter. The history wants hitching posts in Central Park, but this invites disaster. Horses can spook tied to hitching horses— posts, sorry- breaking their necks, rearing, collapsing backward, runaways, dragging the post, injuries and death. Hitching posts do not make it safe for drivers to leave their horses. By law and good horse sense, horses must be attended at all times at the horse's head, including at a hitching post where the public can stress the horse. Negligence caused the death of Romanch and many horses. It's human to think, I'll only be a moment,

what could happen? But in that moment, horses spooked, the unthinkable occurred. More driver training a few years ago did nothing. It's no surprise to me that everyone who is against this law were in it— had a profit motive.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next, Nellie, right? Okay, thank you. Go ahead.

NELLIE MCKAY: Yes, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just state your name for the record, sorry.

NELLIE MCKAY: Oh, thank you. My name is Nellie Mckay. And I've been going to protests against the carriage horses since I was a little girl, so it's been a very long time. And, so I am here in support of Intro 943. As you have heard from so many people, these horses work in the sweltering heat and the freezing cold. They're easily spooked. They work next to loud, unpredictable vehicles and machinery. This exploitative and dangerous industry has gone on long enough, so please retire the horses to a caring sanctuary. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you so much. Thank you to this panel. Really appreciate you staying, appreciate your testimony. It's very

important to us, so thank you. Karen Kapnick. Yes, no? No. Firat is the last name on this? F-I-R-A-T? No. Christopher Leon Johnson and Raul Rivera.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Yeah. Hello, my name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I support Intro 943. I want to say this right now. There's a special place in hell for Jim Gennaro because he is one of the biggest adversaries when it comes to this this bill, and many others. I know I can't— I'm trying to be under decorum. I say this right now, that look, let's keep it 100 percent, that this bill is going to target two properties: the 52nd Street location and 30th Street location. Now I understand that a lot of people say it's a— is it not a land grab? It's a land grab, but it's a great land grab, because if that means that this type of land grab will save lives, I'm for it 100 percent. I'll say this right now, that TWU is a powerful union. They are a corrupt union. I got them this morning. They're a real corrupt union. They have a lot of elected officials under their thumb, including the spy ones. I know a lot of you guys term limited, and they're going to do whatever they got to do to make sure this bill dies in the City Council. I hope that you guys

have the balls to fight against them. Reynoso lost. The Borough President lost against Claire Valdez. If he could— if she could defeat him, you could defeat, James— John Samuelson and John Cicciarullo in the City Council. I'll say this right now, that when it comes to amendments, you have to make sure that the people that do the horse carriage drivers are protected. And the only reason why he's pissed off- John Cicciarullo is angry about- he's saying about casinos, when everybody know he— everybody in the industry know he gambles. He gambles a lot in Atlantic City. It's because that those casinos and the cleaners they're under 32BJ and HTC, and he know if they go to the— become a cleaner or a host at a casino like Resorts World, they— he's going to lose his members. So won't he just say, like-- won't he push for making them people bus drivers and bus drivers and conductors? Why is he not doing that? Oh, he don't care, because he know that once that happens, he's scared of getting voted out, out of office. So I say this right now, I support them 100 percent. Like I said, I know this- it's targeting 38th Street hub, 38th Street by Javits Center, and on 52nd Street on West Side by the West Side Highway.

But this is a great land grab. I support this bill. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Raul?

RAUL RIVERA: Good evening, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Raul Rivera. I'm a native New Yorker. I have been advocating in this city for almost nine years fighting for the drivers. If this council could not help the New York City TLC drivers, how do you expect to help horses? How do you expect to make things safe when you couldn't help the drivers? Let's call this what it is. Intro 0943 is a land grab by the real estate companies, a land grab by the developers, and both Council Member, Speaker Julie Menin and Mayor Mamdani knows it's a grab— it's a land grab. They know this has nothing to do with safety. Speaker Menin's husband is a real estate developer. That's why this land grab is happening. And when advocates like myself speak up, the committee is quick to cut off my testimony. What you're doing is weaponizing public safety. This has nothing to do with safety. This is about real estate. The most profitable business in New York City is real

estate. This isn't about horses. It's about the stables. You're taking the homes away from the horses. You're gentrifying New York City even for the horses. Case in point, the vessel at the Hudson Yards, several suicides there. No outrage for this council— from this council. No hearings on safety at Hudson Yards. You weaponize safety against working people while ignoring real safety failures in your pet projects. And let's be honest about Speaker Julie Menin's record. She's never supported the drivers. We asked for help, we asked for a meeting, we even got an email from her office that said not interested in meeting with the drivers. And where was this council for Priscilla's Law? Priscilla Loki was killed by an e-bike. Her family begged for Priscilla's Law. No one asked City Council- excuse me, no one at City Council cared enough. Alright, I'll submit my- the rest of the testimony, and-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] You can summarize if you want.

RAUL RIVERA: It's okay, it's a little longer.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, alright.

RAUL RIVERA: but I do want to say that Curtis Sliwa sold out New York, and he is officially now— I anoint him King of the Scumbags.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you, thank you both. And yeah, please make sure you submit the testimony. Okay. Alright. Thank you. Is there anybody here who has not testified that hasn't filled out a card yet? No? Okay. Then what we're going to do is we will now move to virtual testimony. Please wait for your name to be called to testify, and please select unmute when prompted. Okay, Caitlin Gamble?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CAITLIN GAMBLE: Hello, my name is Caitlin Gamble. I'm a resident of the Upper West Side. I used to live near the entrance of 72nd Street and Central Park where a few horses, maybe three to five, would line up. I would pass them several times a day while walking my dog, and it was distressing to see the carriage horses, particularly on hot days. I walked by at least once when a carriage horse was starting out on a ride when the temperature was over 90 degrees. As a New Yorker, I do not want to witness animal cruelty as I just try to go about my day. In addition to the horse carriages being a horror for

horses, it is a quality of life issue for residents who must witness the cruelty. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next is Falvoa Manson [sp?].

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Dubin [sp?]. Sorry, Manson Dubin [sp?]. Are you on? Do you want to testify? Valboa? Alright, let's move on. Clara Tavakoli-Ghosh?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CLARA TAVAKOLI-GHOSH: Hello, my name is Clara Tavakoli-Ghosh. And I am a multi-species ethicist with a master's from Harvard University. My work involves addressing the dominance of the anthropocentric worldview with respect for all species. These— if these horses were truly cared for and respected, they would not be in this industry. Lack of oversight and transparency for the well-being of horses in the carriage industry is not surprising, but it has been devastating to hear the extent of it in this council meeting. When we see a horse attached to a carriage collapsing in the street, there are countless devastated passersby. New Yorkers stop to try and help the horse. Some are crying, some are

filming, and time and again we see the driver looking on with an expression of annoyance rather than concern for the horse. Every sad passerby is not an animal rights activist, as those who exploit horses suggest, to minimize how many people care. Yes, New Yorkers care and are saddened by the continual displays of cruelty to horses being forced to work. Tourists expect New York City attractions to be fun and safe. Who truly enjoys this? Not the horses, not the residents, not the tourists, not even the drivers. Wasn't this supposed to be a pleasant experience? The way nostalgia works is that we recall something from a bygone time in our lives, often from childhood. No one alive today remembers the 1800s. What could be fun is real nostalgia. Instead, imagine unique museum-like spaces designed for immersion and photographs featuring styles and music from different eras of New York City, providing a historical experience that is actually fun and cruelty-free. The horses must finally be freed to live at sanctuaries and have a chance to feel relief, no longer forced to work until they collapse and die from pain and exhaustion. I very much look forward to this ban finally being made official. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Victoria Moran?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

VICTORIA MORAN: Hello, I'm Victoria Moran, a New Yorker by choice and an author. So grateful to be here and It breaks my heart that I'm not there in person. It's doctor's orders. As a young woman in Kansas City in the 1970s, I learned about the work of Gretchen Wyler and Pegine Fitzgerald and this movement to get the carriage horses off the streets of New York City, a place that seemed to me like the magical land of Oz. I love the idea that even then these people were working to be sure that New York was this inspirational, aspirational flagship American city. So, I watched through the '80s and the '90s and finally managed to move here to Oz in 2000 and joined the cause myself. I supported candidates who said that they would see that this ended, and they didn't. And after the deaths of so many horses and now this precious young human being. It's time. It's time. I lost a 16-year-old stepson, and I can tell you, you don't want to know what that feels like. This could have been prevented when I was in my 20s. I'm 76 now, and I'm still waiting. What

you do on this to bring Romanch's Law to be will not bring back lost lives, but you have in your hands the ability to prevent more carnage. I see there's a clash of cultures. Sometimes there's an argument between loving animals and hating cruelty, and I think we need to bring ourselves to the point where we can do both and make this city indeed livable for all. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Next is Una Rose.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

UNA ROSE: Okay, hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

UNA ROSE: Okay, okay. Hi, my name is Una. I'm from Toronto and I'm a longtime animal rights activist, and I'm speaking today on behalf of carriage horses and to give my support to the passing of Romanch’s Law and to ban the use of carriage horses in New York City. It is very important that this ban be passed and all these beautiful horses be retired to reputable sanctuaries and other non-working, loving forever homes. They all deserve a nice retirement and that could easily be arranged by the city working together with aligned activists and

welfare groups for all of them. For the drivers, the city could purchase electric carriages which other cities around the world have. They're really popular. They look like a lot of fun. So- and it would be— and they're green, so they're electric. So, they would be green as well. Historically, passing this bill would be furthering the proud history of New York City as a leader in animal welfare. ASPCA was founded by a New Yorker, Henry Burke, in early 1800s, who would walk the streets of New York city, berating drivers who abuse, neglected, or force sick animals to work. This decision, passing this bill, would confirm New York City is not only a great city for people but also a great progressive one for animals as well. And finally, as a tourist, I long to visit New York City. I live in Toronto, so it's not much of a journey, but I can't. I made a pledge to myself about 15 years ago I would not visit New York City until the carriage horse industry was banned. So, it's been 15 years and four mayors, and I'm still waiting for that. It's just— I— it would be too depressing to go into beautiful Central Park and see these horses that all look sad. They look bored. They look like just full of— just miserable. That would ruin my trip. So I

said no, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to support a city that supports this kind of animal abuse. So kindness to animals is deeply-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

UNA ROSE: [inaudible] and animal cruelty-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just, you know, summarize your end.

UNA ROSE: Okay, so let's not let the heroism and tragedy of the young man who died be ignored and denied. And let's not let this bill be delayed and postponed any further. Let's get this bill passed and let's ban this cruelty, because it's the right, smart, and kind thing to do for animals, for horses, for New Yorkers, for tourists, and for New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Sherry Ramsey?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Sherry Ramsey?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

SHERRY RAMSEY: Okay, you hear me? Good. Thank you. My name is Sherry Ramsey. I'm Co-chair of the New York City Bar Association Animal Cruelty

Committee, and we're very happy to be here to speak on this topic and be in support of Intro 0943 in relation to prohibiting the operation of court— of horse-drawn cabs. For approximately 20 years or more, the City Bar has urged the council to enact legislation to not only ameliorate the extremely harsh conditions under which our city carriage horses work and live, but at the same time, the City Bar has argued that all of these legislations previously would not create a fully humane condition, and that the ban of carriage horse rides was the only humane solution. Despite broad public vocal support for reforms, including the ASPCA and the Humane Society, no legislation can ameliorate some of the conditions which make the city a deadly and inappropriate environment for horses or eliminate the threats to public safety. And as such, this has hurt the horses and served as a betrayal of the public interest. As indicated by a landmark 2007 audit report by the New York City Comptroller, there's been no- at all adequate protection provisions under the current laws that have turned out to be failures so far. The administrative code, particularly the audit, found that horses were not provided enough drinking water,

risk overheating on hot asphalt. Had— he also discovered that the horses lack proper veterinary care and were forced to live in their own waste due to inadequate draining. He also cited the New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene and the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs for their legal non-compliance. Moreover, the presence of horses on the city's congested streets have always posed a danger to the public, as is evidenced by the numerous and unceasing instances of spooked horses bolting, putting both horses and people at risk. In a report on the previous—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired—

SHERRY RAMSEY: iteration of this bill, we identified dozens of–

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just give– give a summary of–, because we have to move on. We have a lot of– okay, thanks.

SHERRY RAMSEY: So there are lots of– although the agriculture and markets laws have prohibited things that should have been addressed through our law, they haven't been. And as a result, the horses get very little good treatment and are not

being turned out appropriately, as is essential for horse care. So in addition to addressing the problems, there are things that we think would be helpful in getting rid of the carriage horse.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We need— you need to wrap it up, like a couple of sentences. Just tell us where you're at and we have to move on.

SHERRY RAMSEY: So the ban would reduce us— this is exposure. They would protect the public from risk, and it would also be the most meaningful thing we can do for the horses. So we thank you so much, and in sum, we'd like to support the passage of 0943, which we believe is law–

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] Okay. And I also– I also want to encourage you, if you have longer testimony, to submit it at testimony–

SHERRY RAMSEY: [interposing] I did. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Oh, you did? Great, because we want to see the whole thing, and we want to also thank the Bar Association for being helpful to us in this.

SHERRY RAMSEY: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. Alright, next is Pauline Burns.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

PAULINE BURNS: Good evening. This is Pauline Burns. Can you hear me okay?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

PAULINE BURNS: Very good. I want to thank you for the opportunity to give some testimony. I'm president of the New York State Horse Council and would like to address the esteemed members of the New York City Council Health Committee. The New York Horse Council was founded in 1966 is an umbrella organization for the equine community residing in New York State. Our mission is to create a strong unified voice for all horse interests toward the preservation of a future for horses in New York State. The New York State Horse Council Board of Directors and its membership is composed of a diverse group of industry professionals, making our organization uniquely qualified to assist in all matters pertaining horses in New York State. At this time, the New York State Horse Council is abstaining from a direct position on Introduction 943, a bill to amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York in relation to

prohibiting the operation of horse-drawn cabs. We do recommend consideration of Introduction 937. The New York State Horse Council would like clarification on the intent of language contained in New York City Introduction 943 pertaining to the disposition of licensed horses. We agree horses should not be sold for slaughter, and it is in fact illegal in New York State per Agriculture and Markets Law Section 385. However, we also recognize that the carriage horses in New York City are privately owned, and as such, their owners are responsible for their humane treatment and disposition. We recognize New York City has evolved since the inception of the carriage industry.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: If you could just summarize the end part, because we—

PAULINA BURNS: [interposing] This is the end paragraph. We recognize New York City has evolved since the inception of the carriage industry, and that Central Park is now host to millions of tourists and residents who all have a vision for the use of the park. Your supportive enforcement of current regulations pertaining to suspensions and

revocations of licenses within the New York City carriage industry will improve the safety of the horses, drivers, passengers, and general public. We welcome the opportunity for thoughtful discussion so we can work together to find fair and humane paths forward for the city, the residents, the visitors, the carriage industry, and the horses. We also recognize that if—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] We have to- we can't. We can't. We have to move on, so just say a couple of sentences and we have to move on.

PAULINE BURNS: This is the end. We also recognize that there is a proposed phase-out period that will require responsible transition, and we would welcome an opportunity. I also have a list of recommendations that are set forth with the testimony, but thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you very much. Next is Nora Marino.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Nora Marino?

NORA MARINO: Yes, hi. Couldn't unmute myself. Hi, thank you for staying so late. My name is

Nora Marino, I'm an attorney. I've done a lot of animal rights litigation over the years, and I have two not-for-profit organizations for animals as well. One of them, the Legal Action Network for Animals, and the Animal Cruelty Exposure Fund. I don't want to repeat what's been going on here today. There's been a lot of great testimony in support of the bill, which I am in support of. I just want to mention a couple of things really quickly. First of all, some people have referred to the horse-drawn carriage industry as a transportation industry. It's not transportation, it's entertainment. People don't take horse-drawn carriages to get to work. They don't take horse-drawn carriages to meet their friend or go to dinner or go to an appointment or go to a job interview. People take horse-drawn carriages for one reason and one reason only, and it's entertainment. It is not transportation. So that needs to be clear. Also, no industry has ever received this government handholding or coddling that this bill is offering the members of the horse-drawn carriage industry who will be seeking other employment. Many industries fall by the wayside over the year- over the years. I mean, think about typewriter repairmen or print news,

or, I mean, the yellow taxi industry. I mean, so many industries become obsolete due to progress, and this is an industry that actually has the government willing to lend them a hand. I mean, that's extraordinary and very unheard of, if you think of the grand scheme of things. I also just want to mention that the horses bolting, which has been talked about a lot today, so I don't want to get too involved in that, but most of the incidents where a horse has bolted has occurred with the driver in the carriage. With Romanch, it happened to have— it happened to have occurred when he was— the driver was not in the carriage. But I think almost every other bolting incident that I can think of was with the driver in the carriage. The driver could not control this.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You have to— you have to summarize. Everybody has two minutes. We have a lot of people that are waiting to testify.

NORA MARINO: I know you do. I know. I know. Anyway, so I'm just saying that in or out of the carriage, post or no post, the bolting is a risk to the citizens of the city, the visitors to the

park, and the horses' safety. And I'm not going to get into the cruelty to the animals because number one, I don't have time, but number two, you've heard—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: [interposing] You can submit– you can submit testimony online, your full testimony online. So–

NORA MARINO: I absolutely will. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Please do that. Thank you. Alright, bye. Nina Marie Perino is next.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Nina Marie Perino,

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

NINA MARIE PERINO: Yes, I just unmuted. Thank you. I think everything has been covered that I wanted to say. I support the bill fully. Live in Florida, but I'm originally from Long Island, and going into the city,depressing to see the horse carriages. I see them here in Florida, too. And I've been signing and sharing petitions, calling council members, calling the mayor. De Blasio promised it. Every mayor that came into office promised to ban horse carriages. We're still waiting. I don't know why it has to exist. It's completely unnecessary. And

thank you for saying that they are not used for transportation. It’s purely entertainment. And think about the autonomy that you have that the horses don't. They don't have a choice of what they're doing, when they eat, if they're cold or if they're hot, if they want to walk around. Just think about when you're waiting in line somewhere. Imagine that's your whole life, and somebody controls when you go to the bathroom. You go to the bathroom right where you are. They live in a concrete prison, upstairs in a concrete prison. That's their life for carting people's fat asses around. Enough. Let's do it. Have a heart. Have compassion. Don't just think about your own needs. We can have fun without harming animals and other people. I've cried through the whole testimony of Romanch’s family. I was heartbroken. It was just so unnecessary. Tried to get this passed for so long and knew this would happen. And now it did. And I hate that it has to come to a human life being lost to people to care about all beings. We're all the same in all the important ways. We all want to be free from pain. We want to be loved. We want kindness and care and companionship and community and support and freedom. And I want to get up, or I wanted to sit

down, I want to lay down now. I don't wanna be told what to do. We're unnecessary-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

NINA MARIE PERINO: [inaudible] people here.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Can you please summarize?

NINA MARIE PERINO: That's it. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you very much. Next is Nathan Semmel.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

NATHAN SEMMEL: Good evening. My name is Nathan Semmel. My wife Meredith and I are District 7 residents in Manhattan. Our representative is Majority Leader Shaun Abreu. When we saw the video that Leader Abreu posted of his goddaughter Jada asking the council to ban horse carriages, we were thrilled. I immediately texted him to thank him, and he responded right away. He wrote, my man, took me some time, exclamation point. That phrase took me some time, got me thinking. Council Member Abreu was a good man and a wonderful council member. And I

suspect from our conversations over the years that he's never been comfortable with horse carriages. However, the conviction just wasn't quite there to stick his neck out. And I suspect there are many members of this committee and council who have felt the same way. Good people, uncomfortable with horse carriages in a modern urban environment. But for various reasons not quite uncomfortable enough to do something about it, to do the right thing. And I responded to the council member and I said, that's okay, the arc of progress bends towards justice. And he immediately wrote back, yes, sir. I'm not here to litigate the past or ask anyone what took them so long or sit in judgment. I'm here to celebrate being on the precipice of justice. But I do so with a message to those members who still find themselves not ready or unwilling. There are now flashing red lights with conspicuous warning signs screaming two things: horses in New York City parks and streets are unpredictable, and horse carriages kill people. Members, "took me some time" will never be an acceptable response or explanation in the future. To those members who for years have been willing to

protect the horses, I thank you. To those who it took some time—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just summarize. Okay,

NATHAN SEMMEL: I'm equally grateful. And one more sentence. To the gentleman who earlier said that advocates are exploiting Romanch's death. You don't get to tell people who have warned for years of this tragedy happening that they are exploiting when it does.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you very much. Next, Nancy DeJesus.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Nancy DeJesus?

NANCY DEJESUS: I'm here. I was trying to unmute. Sorry. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: That's okay.

NANCY DEJESUS: My name is Nancy DeJesus, and I am a native New Yorker who currently lives in Manhattan, and I'm here to support Intro 943, Romanch’s Law. Tales of old have romanticized the

role of horse and carriage in battles, love stories, and adventures. While these images are reflected upon with a nostalgic wistfulness, they do not reflect the reality of our present lives. We are in a modern world with different challenges, dangers, and an evolved sense and understanding of what safety for all creatures looks like today. This is evidenced in polls such as one taken just this month by the Central Park Conservancy, which reported that 68 percent of New Yorkers support a ban on horse carriages. It's also reflected in the numerous and unavoidable tragedies that have occurred year after year. Horses like Ryder and Deniz have lived lives of endless brutality. Their only respite to retire to a concrete stall with minimal ventilation and no room to move. And they are gone. And just last month, an 18-year-old visitor to our city, Romanch, died during a family vacation on a carriage ride trying to save his mother when the horse carrying them became frightened as a direct result of the dangers and realities of our present time, honking horns, relentless traffic, and concrete paths. And folks will rightfully ask what will happen to the drivers. The provisions in Intro 943 not only ensure safety

for the horses and transition out of this cruel and outdated practice, but will also utilize and oversee a workforce development program that will assist these drivers to securely transition to other employment. Horses will no longer be victimized and used to create a false sense of nostalgia in our city. No more innocent lives will be lost, and drivers will not lose their jobs. Please end this. Don't let the loss of a young man's life and so many horses be without consequence. Those who seek to romanticize this practice can find it in the works of literature from long ago, where it should remain. I implore the members of the City Council to vote in favor of Romanch's Law and take direct action to prevent additional suffering and loss of life. Please be compassionate and do the right thing.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Alright, next is Monica Sharma.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MONICA SHARMA: Thank you for staying so late. We have been online since 10:00 a.m., and I appreciate what's going on over here. I just want— like, everything has almost been covered by everybody

who's been talking, and I totally am in support of this bill, but I'm so amazed, you know, that- I understand this was originally for the welfare and the well-being of horses. I am a pet lover myself. I have two rescue dogs. I have two dogs in the past that we've lost, but I cannot compare the life of my son to a life of my pet. And I love my pets as much as you can think. It's just come down to a human life being in the part of a horse, you know, well-being. I don't know how we are comparing the two. It's very unfortunate. I just hope no mother ever has to think, you know, is my son the same importance as a horse on a street? Horse lives are very important. Dog lives, extremely important. Any pet, any life, extremely important. Everyone has a right to live. But don't bring human life down to, you know, thinking we're with the horses. It's really, really not comparable. It's sad that, you know, it happened the way it did happen. Everyone has a right to get a fair living, you know. They have a right to livelihood. They should completely be able to achieve whatever dream they have. And it's wrong of them to say that they cannot adapt to a new lifestyle or adapt to a thing. Everybody adapts to everything. We've been through

three different businesses in our lifetime, three different careers. After my children, I started something else. Before my life, I had something else. Everyone changes, everyone evolves, everyone can continue to grow into something else. If your livelihood is a reason for somebody's death, change it. It's not worth it. We are all going to die one day, but, you know, I would be devastated to know that because of me—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Time is up, and if you want to just summarize in a couple of sentences, that's fine.

MONICA SHARMA: I'm just in support of the bill. I'm a lot in support of the bill. This bill should definitely be passed, and I appreciate all the councilmen over here and the councilwomen and everybody here who's been so respectful and patient. But I must say that Councilman Gennaro was very rude-

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay.

MONICA SHARMA: to the people who did not support him.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: I hear you. We have to, we have to move on. Thank you. Melissa Pellicer?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Melissa Pellicer. Oh, okay. Go ahead.

MELISSA PELLICER: Yes, good evening, ma'am. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

MELISSA PELLICER: Wonderful. Thank you so much. Good evening, Chair Schulman, Speaker Menin, Council Member Marte, members of the committee. I'm sorry that I could not attend in person. My name is Melissa Pellicer. I'm the founder of One Kind World Foundation, and I respectfully urge you to pass Intro 0943, Romanch Law. It has been mentioned multiple times today that horses are prey animals. They have survived by perceiving danger and fleeing from it. No regulation or enforcement mechanism can override millions of years of evolution. They are meant to traverse vast landscapes, forage freely, and live within enduring family bands. It is their inviolable right to be born and to live free, and we have stolen this right from them. Every human enterprise built upon the use of horses begins with the same

assumption: that another living being's freedom may be subordinated to our desires. There is a reason the traditional expression is to break a horse. Before a horse can serve our purpose, its own will must first be overcome. Throughout this hearing, it was suggested that those of us who defend animals seek to remove them from human lives. That misunderstands our position entirely. We do not seek to remove horses from the human story. We seek to remove oppression from theirs. Let us call this what it is. It is animal exploitation. These are magnificent sentient beings, and they were never ours to use. Their lives belong to them. It was said today that horse-drawn carriages have been part of New York City since 1858. History is not only a record of traditions we preserve, it is also a record of practices humanity eventually found the courage to abandon. Longevity has never conferred moral legitimacy. Human alternatives exist. We have the ingenuity and compassion—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You have to summarize, because we got to move on.

MELISSA PELLICER: Thank you, ma'am. I just wanted to thank you for your time today, and that's it. Thank you so very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You're very welcome. Thank you. Next is Jennifer Garrett.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JENNIFER GARRETT: Hi, my name is Jennifer Garrett. It's an honor to speak with you. Thank you for staying so late. I'm an attorney, a volunteer for Voters for Animal Rights, and I serve on the board of Catskill Animal Sanctuary in Saugerties, New York. I'm testifying today in my personal capacity as a New Yorker in strong support of Intro 943, Romanch's Law. I moved to New York 16 years ago, and I've been walking past the horses in the park ever since. Without a doubt, these horses are neglected and abused, and they are forced to work in dangerous conditions. As we have seen, way too many have died on the street, and those that haven't, they often disappear or are sold to auction or slaughter. We should all be embarrassed and outraged that with their one life, we have treated horses in New York City in this horrendous way for so long. I've spent my career in law and risk management, and I wish to

make the point clear that this industry is beyond regulation. The city has issued additional regulations for decades. The safe, responsible, necessary path forward is a wind-down. If anything, this ban needs to happen faster. I wish to thank Speaker Menin, Chair Schulman, Council Member Marte, the Animal Welfare Caucus, and every co-sponsor of Intro 943, including my Council Member Julie Won, for their leadership and compassion. History will remember this council for its courage. I truly believe that. You certainly are my heroes already. As a premier global city, New York City, we owe it to the millions of people who come from around the world to visit and to our residents, human and animal, to put an end to this cruel, outdated, unsafe industry. Our city is better than this. We have a duty to prevent future tragedies., and other cities around the world will look to us to set the example. With the passage of Romanch's Law, you will save lives, and you will honor Romanch in the strongest way possible. We need to act now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you so much, and big fan of V4. Thank you. Fiona Walsh is next.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Fiona Walsh? Faith Rashid.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

FAITH RASHID: Good evening, I'm Faith Rashid, concerned private citizen, lifelong New Yorker. It's time to pass Romanch's Law, Intro 943. I care deeply about this issue because I feel horses should not be used purely for entertainment and profit. Horse carriage rides are a threat to the health and safety of humans and horses. Too many horses have suffered and died in this industry, and unfortunately, now 18-year-old Romanch Mahajan, who had his whole life ahead of him, was tragically killed on June 16th, 2026. My deepest condolences go to his family. My background in education and occupational therapy has shown me that the benefits of hippotherapy and equine-assisted therapy— hippotherapy is a medical treatment strategy utilizing the horse's natural rhythmic movement to engage and improve a patient's sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems. It is widely used as a modality treatment for physically and developmentally disabled children and teens. This therapy is also used by veterans who are healing from psychological

and emotional trauma. Carriage horses can successfully transition to hippotherapy or equine-assisted programs. Hippotherapy requires a calm, docile horse with a low flight response. Retired horses, of course, evaluated to see if they do have the right temperament. They will have the opportunity to be well taken care of and loved. These centers are mostly located at equine centers and farm-like facilities, often run by licensed therapists. My daughter and myself have volunteered at two different centers here on Long Island, so I've seen the conditions at these facilities. They truly are very wonderful programs. The horse carriage industry is an archaic tradition that several major U.S. cities have already banned or actively phasing out to protect animal welfare and public safety. It's time for New York to pass Romanch Law and transition and explore animal-free electric alternatives so carriage drivers can—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

FAITH RASHID: into new employment. There was a time and place for the horse carriage rides, but that was in the past. So please pass this

legislation now. Thank you for your time and giving me the opportunity to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. We appreciate your testimony. Thank you. Endo Yuki?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Endo Yuki? Okay. Emily Harting, H-A-R-T-I-N-G.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

EMILY HARTING: Hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

EMILY HARTING: Hi. When I was a kid until I was in my mid-20s, I worked at a Clydesdale farm in Massachusetts. These one-ton animals were my best friends. They were sensitive, loving, and intelligent. I was so lucky to get a chance to work with them. One of the biggest things we looked forward to every year was driving our horses with the wagon in the town's Fourth of July parade. We would prepare for weeks to desensitize the horses to things like fun snaps. We would play loud music. We showed them balloons. We threw hard candies at their feet. Anything we could think of that they might encounter, we showed them so they wouldn't be afraid. When we prepare for the parade, we would bathe and shine them

up until they were glowing. We braided their manes and tails in red, white, and blue. We would walk the parade route as proud as could be with our friends who were looking their best and behaving admirably. We were a crowd favorite and something people looked forward to seeing every year. I say this to underscore that I have no problem with horses using— being used to pull wagons or carts or plows. No problem with riding or otherwise working with and using horses. The partnership that develops between a horse and their human is beautiful. I know, I've been a part of one. I have a problem with the way that carriage horses in the city are treated, the conditions in which they are kept, and the environment in which they must work. They're abused, forced to work when they're lame, sore, old, injured, or sick. They are kept in tenement buildings with no room to lie down or to rest their weary legs, tenements that we long ago deemed unfit for human life. They are driven through traffic in Midtown Manhattan, a place where I, as a person who learned to drive in Boston, is still nervous to drive. In all types of weather, including brutal heat and humidity, when we're told by newscasters to avoid going

outdoors. Pounding on the pavement, expected to plod along no matter what, only to return to a hot, dark, airless stall where they can't lay down and rest. This is antiquated, abusive–

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just can you please summarize and then give us your name also at the end?

EMILY HARTING: Sure. I just want to also say that I'm so heartsick for the Romanch family. What a living nightmare that they are experiencing, and I'm holding them in my prayers. It is beyond high time that we outlawed the practice of horse-drawn carriages in New York City. Please pass Romanch's law.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright. And your name for the record? Sorry.

EMILY HARTING: Emily Harting, H-A-R-T-I-N-G.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you so much. And thank you for your testimony. Next is—

EMILY HARTING: [interposing] Thank you so much. Next is Dr. Lauren Lindner.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

LAUREN LINDNER: Hello. Checking to see if you can hear me or not.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes, we can. And please keep it to two minutes. We have a lot of people waiting to testify. Thank you.

LAUREN LINDNER: I shall. This is Dr. Lauren Lindner. I'm in support of the bill, and I'm a native New Yorker, grew up riding horses in Central Park from the age of seven- Claremont Stables, Dixie Doo in Queens. Been riding and caring for horses all my life. I moved to California to complete my graduate school education. And I'm going to turn my video on. And I- and also because I wanted to start a horse sanctuary based on the love that I developed for horses as a child. I want to provide two different perspectives. One is that as a sanctuary owner and as an ethologist, an animal behaviorist, I know what it takes to provide an ideal life for a horse. I have studied equine behavior, equine ecology for the past 40 years. Horses may be bred to pull carriages, but that doesn't mean that's what they want to do day after day in an environment that is simply not conducive for horses, albeit their ability to adapt, reluctantly or not, with blinders and curb

bits and whips to many of the things humans ask them to do. Once you have the land, however, and the pasture and barn and fencing and all the other appropriate infrastructure, it does not cost more than $6,000 a year for a reliable and reputable sanctuary to provide a home for a horse. My sanctuary is willing to provide homes for several of the horses from the carriage industry, and their former owners are welcome to continue to visit with them should they so desire. The other perspective that I want to offer is that I'm not only an animal behaviorist, but I'm also a human behaviorist, a licensed clinical psychologist. And as a child, I was personally traumatized by seeing the horses in Central Park pulling carriages. I didn't understand how they were allowed to be in the sun, in the rain, on concrete with feed bags. I never saw them getting water. I was in several— Central Park several times a week. I asked my parents repeatedly why this was allowed, and I've found since that others, children and adults, are also distressed—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

LAUREN LINDNER: by seeing these horses [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Please summarize it. Summarize the end.

LAUREN LINDNER: My summary is that— yes, ma'am- traditions are often changed once we recognize the cruelties behind them. Let's go ahead and change this one.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you so much for your testimony. Next is Cynthia Bathurst.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Cynthia Bathurst? Cindy Anthony Favia.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. I'm sorry. I'll be right back.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Are you— right. Next?

CINDY ANTHONY FAVIA: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Wait,

CINDY ANTHONY FAVIA: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

CINDY ANTHONY FAVIA: Hello, I'm sorry. I'm just getting my paper here. I'm sorry. Well, my name is Cindy Anthony Favia, and I'm- sorry. So the

reason why I'm speaking here is because I have two children that have been involved in the animal rights community since they're seven and nine years old. They are now 20 and 22, and they have stood on the line as animal rights activists. When my daughter was a little girl, she saw the carriage horses in Manhattan, and she had said, why are those horses here? Aren't they supposed to be where there's grass and there's green fields and everything like that? Why are they— are they breathing up all that garbage from buses and everything? And she used to always question that. And then we started standing there and what- you know, asking why are they still there? And so the reason, they've stood there for all those years- they have gone and protested and everything through the Blasio and everybody. So, they've been involved in this for 10-plus years. The carriage horse has to be out of New York, and it needs to end now. And it's not a form of transportation. My daughter told me that when she was nine years old, that, that is not transportation. We have buses clearly that everybody could see, trains, cabs, pedicabs, everything like that, their own feet. The horses are not here to be used by anybody like that.

So, that's the reason why I stood here. We don't need any more lost humans or animals, and you need to pass– please please, for my children's sake, please pass Intro 943. Let the horses— let them, let them live out happy lives now, please. I thank you for your time. Thank you for allowing me to talk, and appreciate everything.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Car Pelletieri [sp?]?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Kara Pelletieri. Allison Soule?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ALLISON SOULE: Good evening, members of the Committee on Health. My name is Allison Soule. I'm a native New Yorker, and I live on the Upper West Side. Thank you, Speaker Menin, for your historic leadership. By backing Romanch's Law last night, you proved this council will no longer look the other way. For too long, the horse carriage industry has scapegoated its tragedies, from decades of horse deaths, including Ryder, to the devastating loss of Romanch Mahajan. Unbiased polls have consistently shown 70 percent of New Yorkers want the exploitation

to end. As a daily Central Park dog walker who tries to avoid the West 72nd Street entrance to spare my own heartbreak, I routinely witness the reality. Many drivers sit staring into their phones, ignoring horses that appear malnourished and lame, exhibiting the classic head jerk and leg raise of an animal in pain. The industry in part defends this with mandated five-week furloughs to the country, but let's be honest about the pipeline. Many are originally purchased from Pennsylvania Amish country after years of exhausting farm labor where whipping is well documented. Even if they are allegedly resting during furlough, that environment follows them. One driver admitted to me that his horse returned with a fresh whip gash on its nose. After logging long days on concrete, these horses walk congested city streets back to cramped, poorly ventilated, fire hazardous stables. DOH data shows a massive turnover rate. Records compiled by animal welfare groups showed over 500 horses left the registry over an eight-year span. Horses are routinely dumped back into auctions, facing farm labor or slaughter, with no verification of true retirement. Urban carriage horses are purely a tourist attraction-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time-expired.

ALLISON SOULE: not a [inaudible] necessity. Please pass Intro 943, mandate proof of safe retirement, and transition drivers into alternative employment.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you.

ALLISON SOULE: For Romanch and Ryder, I thank you for your consideration.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much for your testimony. Audra Gibson is next.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

AUDRA GIBSON: Hello, good evening. My name for the record is Audra Gibson. I am very much in the minority, in comparison to those who have testified that I am here to oppose Romanch's Law. I think what happened to that young man is devastating, but was an accident. Background-wise, I work in Midtown Manhattan. Prior to that, I lived in Charleston, South Carolina for 20 years, and for approximately four and a half of those years, worked in the carriage industry. It was my job to make sure that the horses got enough rest between tours, constantly in front of water. I measured their

breathing respirations between tours. I made sure that their temperatures were taken between every single tour. If a temperature was too high, we immediately pulled those horses off of tour rotation and cooled them down. We were responsible for vet care, farrier care, dental equine care, and more. There's absolutely zero percent of the industry that I was involved with that was anything close to animal cruelty or abuse. And I find it offensive that so many people have just blatantly accused people in the industry of that. We loved the those horses and animals like members of our family. I saw many carriage owners spend thousands of dollars taking care of animals that they knew would never go back on tour, never be back in the industry, to make sure that they were well cared for. There is an unfair standard that is being held here. Over 100 people a year are killed crossing the street in the city of New York. There are people that fall from—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Can you summarize the rest of what you have to say and then you could submit the lengthier testimony to us?

AUDRA GIBSON: I can, if you would be so kind to give me the address, I'd be happy to submit that.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: It's testimony@council.nyc.gov.

ALLISON GIBSON: To conclude, I would say— that Charleston has over 40,000 carriage tours a year. We're the most highly regulated industry in the— in the world. And so you can regulate around this. You can regulate for safety and do so successfully.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Really appreciate it. So again, it's testimony@council.nyc.gov. Okay? Great, thank you so much. And you have 72 hours from the end of this hearing to do so. Okay, thank you. Dee Shroff is the next person. S-H-R-O-F-F.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

DEE SHROFF: Hi there. My name is Dee Schroff, and I'm a part of the vast majority of New Yorkers who are sick and tired of witnessing these horses being exploited in our streets. And as a proud union member, I also understand how vital it is to ensure that those working in this industry are

supported as they transition into other employment once horse carriages are finally phased out. I encourage the many tax payers who have put their name in support— to put their name in support of this bill and listen to the 70 percent of New Yorkers that support the end of this industry, find the courage to stand up to— against the Transit Workers Union. And to the TWU representatives comparing horse carriage rides to other forms of transit, there is an obvious difference here. A subway conductor or a bus driver who isn't feeling well stays home from work until they feel better. A horse can't. They have zero consent in the matter. These horses are forced to work their bodies into the ground whether they like it or not. It's no surprise when you see them collapse and die on our streets. You can say you love horses all you want, but at the end of the day, the fact is you are exploiting these animals for profit. New Yorkers go to our city parks to escape the chaos of the big city, to clear our minds, breathe in fresh air, and surround ourselves in nature. And we are sick and tired of being forced to witness this cruelty in our streets and in our park. Enough is enough. And lastly, to Representative Gennaro, thank

you for perfectly embodying the dying death rattle of this outdated horse carriage industry today. Peace to all.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you very much. Really appreciate the testimony. Elaine Cury, C-U-R-Y, is next.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. Elaine Curry?

ELAINE CURY: I can't—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: We can hear you. No, now we can't. Go ahead.

ELAINE CURY: Oh, great. Okay, hold on.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, you're good now. You're good now. Nope.

ELAINE CURY: Fuck. Stop pressing your mute button. Just— now press it once.

ELAINE CURY: Okay, so—

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: All right, now you're good. Don't touch anything. Just—

ELAINE CURY: I won't touch anything. Okay, thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Start her over.

ELAINE CURY: What makes— I can. First of all, South Carolina has nothing to do with New York

City, so all that's great in South Carolina, it doesn't apply here. I would like to make two points that were not made during the expert testimony that you had all day, and I have been here since 10 o'clock in the morning. I was born in New New York City. We have property in New York City. Having said that, I am a retired international rider. I have 70 years of high horse experience. I also drive. I have driven for 20 years, so I have some experience in driving. One of the points was that you're— one of your councilmen had a problem. He was berating one of your garden committee men about having yews in New York City. Horses are born with an innate sense of what they can eat and what they can't eat. I think they have like a memory of like 300 or 500 plants that they can eat and what they cannot eat. When a horse eats something that's poisonous, it's because they're hungry, and so they will eat what's available. That's number one. The other thing— the other point I wanted to make is that it's not just working these horses in New York City. That's bad enough. But these horses, these particular horses, have navicular— they're arthritic. They are already used before they come to New York City, and they are

not taken care of by expert horsemen as they would like to pretend. They turn them out in any condition. One of the examples of that is Lady and Ryder. And the last point I wanted to make was that when a horse falls down on the ground, whether they—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You need- you need to summarize because we need to move on.

ELAINE CURY: Okay. When they fall down on the ground, it's because they absolutely can't. Horses do not like to get down on the ground unless they feel they're safe. And I thank you for listening.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. All right, next is Mar— Marietta Horr.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. Hello.

MARIETTA HORR: Hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Yes.

MARIETTA HORR: Okay, I can't get the picture to come in. I'm not sure why. I'll try to talk as fast as I can. A lot of what I'm going to say has already been said, so I apologize for that. But I just wanted to say how many horses have died. Deniz in June, 2026, he laid on the ground for 10 minutes

without medical attention. He struggled in agony when he dropped. People watched in horror. Ryder in 2022, Emaciated horse who collapsed and died, likely due to illness and heat exhaustion. He laid on the ground over an hour without vet care. His driver slapped him, whipped him, and screamed at him. His owner lied about his age to the city. His owner was charged with overdriving, torturing, and injuring animals. Lady, a standardbred cross mare, August 2025, she collapsed walking back to the stable after working. She had been working for less than two months, not fit for this job or overworked. Ashisha, March 2020, 12 years old, had to be euthanized after she collapsed. Max collapse in Central Park in 2017. Tickles, 18-year-old horse, euthanized after leg fracture in 2015. Billy, 2022, 14 years old, found dead in stall after heat wave, died in colic. Two other horses euthanized after contracting colic. 06-2022, Freddie, a frightened carriage horse, ran into oncoming traffic the wrong way, eventually crashing into two cars. Frustrating driver grabbed the situation by honking their horns. 6/20/22, Luciana [sp?], a carriage horse collapsed in Central Park and could not get up for an hour. Horrified onlookers watched

and screamed as drivers pulled on their tail and pushed on her neck to get her to stand. September 2021, a horse pulling a carriage crashed into a car in Manhattan. The horse collapsed. It was unconscious for several minutes. July 2021, an unapproached-unprovoked attack. A shirtless man punched and kicked three carriage horses in Central Park. October 2018, a carriage horse collapsed south of Central Park. The driver was reported to have been acting recklessly. January 2018, a horse-drawn carriage overturned near Central Park, sending the horse and driver both into shock. May 5, 2017, after being spooked by traffic, Billy, a carriage horse, crashed into a taxi. Billy was trapped underneath the taxi.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: You've gotta— no, no, no. You've gotta tell us what you're trying to tell us. Get— just summarize two sentences, two sentences, because I gotta move on.

MARIETTA HORR: [inaudible] Okay, I'm sorry, I'll summarize. This is not like an occasional accident, as they're saying. This is like a list of 25 instances that happened to horses. A lot of them have died. Also, there are a lot of cities and

countries now that are— excuse me— banning these carriage rides. I have 23 listed.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright.

MARIETTA HORR: [inaudible] banning.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright, thank you very much.

MARIETTA HORR: Okay, thank you so much. I appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Thank you. We have Danielle Moore Chap— Chappuis. Danielle Marie, I'm sorry. Danielle. Danielle Marie Chappuis. Chappuis. C-H-A-P-P-U-I-S. Michael Phillips?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Michael Phillips? Alyssa Renee Fernandez?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alyssa Renee Fernandez? Margaret Lee?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Margaret Lee? Okay, I'm going to read off these names.

UNIDENTIFIED: I had already— presented my testimony. I'm just listening to the other Zoom callers.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Alright.

UNIDENTIFIED: I was there in person. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you. Michelle Mahana, Susan Pence, N— Naleli Mejia [sp?], Danielle Chin, Sam Moskowitz, Dr.— oh, he did it. Nico Nieves, Christ Ramirez, Jonathan Parison, Katie, Noel Smith, Dan Shoup. Daniel Chapuis, I'm calling again.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Danny M? No, can't do it. What were we up to? Dan Shoup?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: No, we're just calling the names. Jeff Soto, Sam Chapnick, Patricia Miller, Juliana Savio, Velma Duplantier, Susan Palmer Marshall, Roxanne Delgado, Kelly Scott, Christian Pietrapiana.

DANIEL CHAPPUIS: Hello? Hello?

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Is that Danny?

DANIEL CHAPPUIS: [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, go ahead. You have two minutes.

DANIEL CHAPPUIS: Okay, my testimony is going to start in one minute 55 seconds. Please don't interrupt. I'm the son of a resilient Swiss farmer from Fribourg [sic] where the cow milk is used to make the Gruyère and Vacherin that compose the famous— world-famous cheese fondue as well as an [inaudible]. My father farmed on a horse. After World War II, his father got hit by a truck backing up, ended in a wheelchair and died. It was too much for my grandma and five kids. They sold the farm and moved to my hometown, Geneva. There they found jobs in construction. The only daughter, Yvonne, my godmother, took care of grandma and cooked for the four boys. During World War II, my father was on the France at the Swiss-German border. Once he helped a peasant in that street, and in return, the farmer gave my lovely dad a banana. In Fribourg, they knew only the oranges for Christmas, so he gave the banana to his horse, who did the job anyway. While visiting me, we took the horse carriage ride in [inaudible]. Also, he featured in a picture together with the [inaudible]. In 1986, I was— I went to see the horse carriages in front of the Harry Strasson Horatio Grady at 52nd 7th Avenue. Tourists who visit all

ages, including us, children, love them. Everywhere now we have these company dogs, in the supermarket, the MTA buses and subway. They bark most of the time and I get aggravated. We have to preserve the horse and carriages because of the [inaudible] values. The foreigners spend billions of dollars, they deserve something better than an AI-driven motor vehicle. In the City Council, a misguided mayor, Mamdani, approved a ban. I will sue the so-called honorable mayor and the council for $25 billion for unfair treatment compared to the abuse service, those programs. Tourists don't deserve anonymous electric cars.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay. Time is up. Time is up.

DANIEL CHAPPUIS: [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Just cut him off. Cut him off. Cut him off. All right, time is up. Katie Bordenaro?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Jasmine Mills? No, we're just calling the names. Hattis Belichi, Gaurav Mahajan. Oh, we did that. Ritchard Joswal, Janet

Quispe, Amy Grillo, Leanne Jeanette Cook— No, I'm not doing that. Becky Norton, Pamela Perkins, Eugenia Rentschhoff, Herbin Shah, Geraldine Martin, Natik Alexan— no, we did that already. Sarah Miles Lennox. No, I know. Katie Bimefour, Claire Marston, Matthew Giarusso, Ben, Jenny Martin, Marisol Brisman, Allison Mosk— Moscovecchio, Lucy Digeronimo, Corinne Vanden Heuvel, Allison Thaler, Sophie Higgins, Susan Grabina, Janice Brody, Dolores Orr, Jean Hall, Sarah Brovman— I don't know who that is. No. Aurora Bavia, Aurora Usha, Emily Bowden Torres, Sumi Aztec, Ellen Hawley, Allison Z. Christina Jamal? Okay. Thank you to everyone who has testified. If there is anyone present in the room or on Zoom- Who's on? Is it—

UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah, hi. I know it's late. I will— I'm in favor of Ryder's law. I will submit my testimony in writing.

CHAIRPERSON SCHULMAN: Okay, thank you very much. Appreciate that. If— thank you to everyone who has testified. If there's anyone present in the room or on Zoom that has not had the opportunity to testify, please raise your hand. Use the Zoom raise hand function. Let's see. Okay. Seeing no one else, I would like to note that written testimony, which will

be reviewed in full by committee staff, may be submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. I also want to— I want to thank Council Member Carmen De La Rosa. I want to thank Chris Marte. I want to thank Council Member Council Member Phil Wong, who came and left and came back, and— I want to thank the council administrative staff, Michelle Otis, Raquel Faria, Mark Bermudez. I also want to thank the committee staff again, Christopher Peppe [sp?], Elizabeth Artz [sp?], Josh Newman. It's been a very long day, and I want to thank my team Jonathan Boucher [sp?], Kevin McAleer [sp?], Samie New [sp?], who's here- went and came back. It was very grueling testimony. We got a lot done today. I want to thank everyone for all of their patience. I particularly want to thank the Speaker, Julie Menin, for her leadership on this and for helping get us through all of this. And with that, I am concluding this hearing.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.

Date August 7, 2026