



The Department of Finance Fiscal 2025 Executive Budget Hearing Testimony

I. Introduction

Good afternoon, Chair Brannan, members of the Finance Committee, and members of the City Council.

My name is Preston Niblack, and I am the commissioner of the New York City Department of Finance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm joined by the department's first deputy commissioner, Jeffrey Shear, and our chief financial officer and deputy commissioner for administration and planning, Jacqueline James. I am grateful for their presence and support today and everyday.

II. Accomplishments

When I testified before the committee in March, I told you about some of DOF's most important recent accomplishments, including the redesign of our website, our new online Property Information Portal, renewed engagement with tax practitioners, and a record number of outreach events related to the annual notice of property value.

I am pleased to share additional good news resulting from our legislative efforts at the state level. The state budget included two items that we had actively supported: First, enhancing our ability to prevent, prosecute, and rectify deed fraud, and second, giving us the authority to inspect, fine, and close illicit cannabis shops.

As you know, Sheriff Miranda is leading a multi-agency enforcement action to shut down illegal smoke and cannabis shops across the five boroughs. Operation Padlock to Protect has hit the ground running. In its first few weeks, the operation has already sealed 175 stores.

These are priorities of the Adams administration, and their achievement will mean a safer New York for everyone.

III. FY 2025 budget

Turning now to our budget for the coming year.

The department's fiscal year 2025 budget is \$347.1 million, up \$6.1 million from the adopted fiscal year 2024 budget. This increase is largely due to the implementation of collective bargaining increases. The budget includes \$191.1 million in personal services funding to support an authorized headcount of 1,983.

The proposed budget will allow us to continue the great work the entire DOF team has been doing, as well as to take on new initiatives led by this administration.

IV. Customer service updates

Customer service remains the Department of Finance’s primary focus. Perhaps no agency in city government serves the public in as many ways as we do. If you own a home, start a business, or receive a parking ticket, you are, or soon will be, a Department of Finance customer. We are responsible for collecting the revenue that makes the city run—and we are committed to doing so in a friendly and professional manner.

I would like to highlight three customer service initiatives that will deliver concrete results for our customers in fiscal year 2025.

First, we have modernized our business tax and collections system to make it easier for people to pay what they owe and get help when they need it. Customers can now enroll in payment plans for ECB and parking violations debt online, as well as sign up for automatic payment deductions, which should help people stay current with their payment plans.

To supplement the new system and provide more options for customers, we have deployed a chatbot for business tax, Environmental Control Board, and parking debt in our eServices portal. Our users started taking advantage of the chatbot, who we call Linda, right away. Linda helps customers find what they need, which in turn reduces calls to the Collections Division, leading to better and faster customer service.

The second item I would like to highlight is a suite of improvements in the area of property tax exemptions.

As you know, the Department of Finance administers personal tax exemptions that significantly reduce the cost of housing for vulnerable New Yorkers. These include the Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE) and the Disabled Homeowners' Exemption (DHE), which serve nearly 51,000 and 2,600 residents respectively. Additionally, the Rent Freeze Program serves nearly 61,000 households, with nearly 50,000 receiving the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and 11,000 receiving the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE).

We are continuously seeking to help New Yorkers apply and qualify for these benefits. As you will recall, last year we got legislation enacted in Albany to greatly simplify the income definition used to determine eligibility for all four senior and disabled benefits.

Beginning last December, we reached out to over 19,000 households to encourage them to apply or reapply, and due to these efforts, 3,200 new property owners will receive senior citizen or disability exemptions in the upcoming tax year.

One of our goals this year was that any homeowner who submitted a completed application by the March 15th deadline would see their exemption on their first quarter statement of account in June. By introducing automated processing enhancements, and through the hard work of our Personal Exemptions Administration team, I'm pleased to report that we achieved our goal and that every homeowner whose application was approved will see their exemption on their June tax bill.

If I may, I want to take a moment to introduce to you the Personal Exemptions Administration team, led by Assistant Commissioner Pierre Dejean. Their hard work and dedication to their mission are what make it possible for us to achieve results like this so that tens of thousands of New Yorkers can continue to afford to stay in their homes.

The third customer service item I would like to mention is our continued outreach to New Yorkers in all five boroughs.

Led by our Assistant Commissioner Jackie Gold, our External Affairs team continues to reach more New Yorkers in their communities than ever before. This year alone, the DOF outreach team has conducted or taken part in 226 events, including the Mayor's town halls and councilmember district events. If you or any of your colleagues are interested in having us attend an event in the district, please let us know.

V. Plans for the coming year

Over the coming year, we will continue to make improvements and lead initiatives to meet our agency mandate. Our work will continue to be guided by principles of fairness, equity, and respect for our customers.

We are making changes in our Parking Violations Bureau to make disputing a ticket easier and fairer for drivers. We're tackling the problem of tickets issued to motorists whose license plates have been stolen or lost, by allowing the Office of the Parking Summons Advocate to represent vehicle owners who receive multiple tickets against lost or stolen plates.

We continue to expand digital access to apply for and manage personal exemptions, including the Veterans, Clergy and STAR programs.

And we are moving full steam ahead on what will be a legacy initiative for Mayor Adams and this Council, the long-awaited reform of our property tax system.



Many of our initiatives will require your support, and we look forward to working with the Council on these and other projects.

VI. Closing

To conclude, the Department of Finance remains dedicated to delivering top-tier customer service to all New Yorkers.

Every time I come here, I struggle to keep my testimony brief. That's because at every monthly check-in I have with our business units, and in each weekly memo from the divisions, a project is brought to my attention that highlights the DOF team's tireless commitment to improving our interactions with customers and performing our key functions more efficiently and effectively.

While I wish I had the time to present more of these initiatives, and the people behind them, to you, suffice it to say I am very proud of the agency I represent. I hope your experiences with DOF, and those of your constituents, reflect our continued dedication. We appreciate your ongoing support and are grateful for our continued collaboration.

We welcome any opportunity to assist with the needs of your constituents—our door is always open.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I'll be happy to address any questions you may have.