Good Afternoon Chairwoman Barron and fellow Council Members, my name is Gabrielle Starr and I am the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at New York University. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today as you review programs that provide access to higher education for incarcerated individuals.

I am very pleased to share with you details about a program NYU launched this past spring providing educational access to incarcerated individuals. The NYU Prison Education Program brings college education to individuals at the Wallkill Correctional Facility, located in Ulster County New York, approximately two hours outside New York City. The Wallkill Facility, which is a medium security, all-male prison, was assigned to us through coordination with the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. It did not previously offer higher education programs; and the population is important because many of the individuals return home within five years or fewer.

The NYU Prison Education Program offers credit-bearing university courses that enable students to earn an Associate of Arts Degree from NYU as well as non-credit bearing workshops. Because the program is supported by a $500,000 grant from the Ford Foundation, the courses are provided to incarcerated students at no cost to them. Once released from prison, students in the program will be able to continue their education at NYU or transfer credits to another institution. NYU is currently raising funds to support scholarships that would allow these students to continue their work towards a Bachelor of Arts degree at NYU.

In addition to courses, the NYU Prison Education Program includes educational and employment counseling, community support for families, and other services such as legal assistance to address human rights, housing, and employment issues. By offering these additional support services, the program is committed to developing opportunities for our students while in prison and upon their release. We have also partnered with the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions, which is one of the nation’s leading community-based organizations that tackle post-prison release issues.

We began the program this past Spring semester with two courses offered; four additional courses were offered over the summer semester, and we are currently offering four courses this fall. In total, 70 men have participated in the program, so far, which includes 52 students taking for-credit academic classes as well as 18 individuals participating in non-credit programming such as book clubs, performing arts worships and meditation workshops. Courses are taught by NYU faculty and include intensive liberal arts study, such as Critical Perspectives on Justice through Creative Writing, as well as skills-based courses such as Foundations of Speech Communications. We hope to offer courses in law, business and social work in the coming semesters.
While the Wallkill Facility is outside the five boroughs, it’s worth noting that 51% of the individuals taking part in NYU’s Prison Education Program, in response to a survey, report being from New York City. This program has allowed NYU to re-engage in social justice education in a manner that is immediately relevant to our city and community. We believe that programs improving access to higher education for incarcerated individuals such as NYU’s offers families, communities and individuals a safer, better and more productive future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and I welcome any questions you have.