

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
HUMAN SERVICES AND VETERANS COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday, April 8, 2026**

HUMAN SERVICES AND VETERANS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Al-Zubi, Co-Chair
Councillor McGovern, Co-Chair
Councillor Flaherty
Councillor Simmons
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Human Services and Veterans Committee was held on Wednesday, April 8, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 12:45 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Al-Zubi. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Co-Chair Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Flaherty – Present/Remote
Councillor McGovern – Absent
Councillor Simmons – Present/Remote
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote

Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to review and discuss the final research report on Rise Up Cambridge, CMA 2026-28. Present at the meeting was City Manager Yi-An Huang, Director of Veterans Services, Cynthia Harris, Executive Director of the CEOC, Tina Alu, Financial Empowerment Manager of the CEOC, Shakeela Darden, President of the Cambridge Community Foundation, Geeta Pradhan, and Chief of Staff for the Cambridge Community Foundation, Elizabeth Patton. Present via Zoom from MDRC was Research Associate, Mina Addo and Technical Research Analyst, Katerina Galkin. Mayor Siddiqui and Councillor Nolan were also present.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Geeta Pradhan for opening remarks. Geeta Pradhan shared results from the Rise Up Cambridge program and highlighted how the program provided financial relief and stability for families impacted by poverty, COVID-19, and inflation.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Mina Addo and Katerina Galkin who gave a presentation titled “Rise Up Cambridge Final Evaluation”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Tina Alu who provided an overview of the experiences that have been shared by families who benefited from the program and how the cash assistance was able to provide stability during uncertain times. Tina Alu also shared information related to how the families were affected once the program ended and rising costs continued. Tina Alu encouraged the City to continue to support programs that help provide financial assistance to residents.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Shakeela Darden who shared stories from families who participated in the Rise Up program and emphasized the social and emotional impacts financial stability have on families. Shakeela Darden explained how the program was able to reduce stress and strengthen relationships, adding that poverty can affect students' emotional wellbeing, confidence, and their sense of belonging. Shakeela Darden pointed out that with the program, parents were able to have more time, flexibility, and stability to support their children.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who spoke in favor of continuing to support the Rise Up program and emphasized the importance that cash assistance can have to allow families to support their needs and priorities. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler explained how unrestricted funding can be more efficient than traditional assistance programs because families have the flexibility to use the money in ways that best support their financial situation, such as using it towards childcare, housing, or job training.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Councillor Nolan who shared comments related to how the Rise Up research study was conducted and questioned why not all participants completed the survey and how the survey results were measured. Mina Addo and Katerina Galkin explained that survey participation was voluntary which contributed to the results. Katerina Galkin added that the first round of surveys was sent randomly to a selected group and later surveys were distributed more largely to households that were eligible. Councillor Nolan shared concerns about the lack of baseline data, pointing out that it makes it more difficult to measure long term impacts and changes over time. Councillor Nolan also spoke on the importance of understanding which parts of the program may have the strongest long-term benefits for families, such as childcare support, financial planning, and job training. Councillor Nolan emphasized the benefits of continuing to study and review stress levels, the wellbeing of families, and other emotional impacts in future research.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized City Manager Huang who offered comments on the Rise Up program and how the cash assistance helped to provide stability and relief for many Cambridge families. City Manager Huang shared how the program was able to allow families to be flexible with their spending and use the money in ways that would best support their families, such as groceries, rent, childcare, and transportation. City Manager Huang acknowledged the stories shared by families but added that poverty cannot be solved by one program alone. The City Manager shared information related to the City's ongoing efforts and investments in affordable housing, rental assistance, afterschool programs, summer camps, and universal preschool. City Manager Huang emphasized the importance of continuing to review the research and overseeing how the City will use financial resources with the ending of ARPA funding.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi questioned whether the 18 month duration of the Rise Up program was long enough to obtain sufficient and measurable results to review the long-term impacts and outcomes

for families. Mina Addo explained how the study was designed and noted that additional research may be necessary to understand the full impact of the program. Co-Chair Al-Zubi asked for more information related to household incomes and increases in incomes for families that live below the poverty line. Mina Addo shared that rising costs of living, unpredictable employment, and the loss of benefits can all be factors that contribute to financial instability. Co-Chair Al-Zubi emphasized the importance of understanding the emotional and social impacts of poverty, noting that those can both be difficult to measure with traditional research methods.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Mayor Siddiqui who highlighted the importance of recognizing the quality-of-life benefits of the Rise Up program, such as reduced stress for parents and improving family stability and relationships. Mayor Siddiqui pointed out that helping families avoid going deeper into poverty is an important outcome of the program. Mayor Siddiqui emphasized that it is important for the City to continue to help families while also investing in goals and initiatives, such as affordable housing and childcare. Tina Alu shared that requests for emergency cash assistance are continuing to grow and shared the ongoing challenges the CEOC faces while trying to challenge to balance the limited resources that are available. Tina Alu provided examples of help the CEOC can offer families looking for assistance, such as rental support and grocery gift cards. Mayor Siddiqui spoke in strong support of the City continuing to support antipoverty efforts and creating partnerships to help with those efforts. Mayor Siddiqui thanked staff, researchers from MDRC, and community partners for all their work.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Councillor Nolan who asked additional questions related to the evaluation and research, and if it included qualitative measures related to stress levels, family engagement, and emotional wellbeing. The team from MDRC explained that the survey included questions related to distress, stress reduction, and family time, but noted that there was not a baseline to make comparisons to those measures. Councillor Nolan shared concerns about limited baseline data.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi recognized Geeta Pradhan who shared information related to the financial uncertainties low-income families in Cambridge face and pointed out that many households struggle to afford basic needs even when they are working. Geeta Pradhan offered suggestions on future programs and strategies, such as supporting specific household needs while also understanding the broader values within the community regarding poverty and family stability.

Co-Chair Al-Zubi offered closing remarks and thanked everyone who was involved with the Rise Up program and those continuing to support Cambridge families.

With discussion being over, Co-Chair Al-Zubi adjourned the meeting at 2:17p.m.

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. The video for this meeting can be viewed at: [Apr 08, 2026 Human Services and Veterans Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)