

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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October 28, 2025
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Fl. Hearing Rm. 2

B E F O R E: Alexa Avilés
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher
Gale A. Brewer
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Shahana K. Hanif
Rita C. Joseph
Shekar Krishnan

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

Jumaane Williams
Public Advocate

Manuel Castro
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Commissioner

Lorena Lucero
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Deputy
Commissioner of Programs and Policy

Enrique Chavira Cantu
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Director of
Policy and Program Initiatives

Rosa Cohen Cruz
Bronx Defender Services

Shawn Blumberg
Brooklyn Defender Services

Deborah Lee
Legal Aid Immigration Law Unit

Christine Clarke
Legal Services NYC

Sierra Kraft
ICARE Coalition

Pooja Asnami
Sanctuary for Families

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

Celina Munoz
The Door

Marilia Richards
KIND

Raluca Oncioiu
Catholic Migration Services

Desiree Hernandez Sanchez
Catholic Charity Community Services

Jorge Paz Reyes
Unlocal

Lauren Miglcaccio
Immigrant Justice Corps

Margarita Guzman
Violence Intervention Program

Yasmeen Hamza
Womankind

Hamra Ahmad
Her Justice

Paula Inhargue
United Neighborhood Houses

Brandon Lloyd
Urban Resource Institute

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

Carlyn Cowen
Chinese American Planning Council

Lisa Zhen
Homecrest Community Services

Riya Ortiz
Damayan Migrant Workers Association

Navdeep Bains
Asian American Federation

Jane Shim
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Airenakhue Omoragbon
African Communities Together

Devashish Basnet
New York Immigration Coalition

Yesenia Mata
La Colmena

Alejandra Aragon
Mixteca

Adama Bah
Afrikana

Power Malu
ROCC NYC

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

Amadou Ly
Amadou Ly Foundation

William Medina
Los Deliveristas

Chia-Chia Wang
Church World Service

Roberto Jean Francois
CUUS Global

Ligia Guallpa
Workers Justice Project

Nilbia Coyote
NICE

Nadya Lucero
NICE

Christopher Leon Johnson

Jodi Ziesemer
NYLAG

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, welcome to the New York City Council hearing on the Committee on Immigration. At this time, please silence all electronics and do not approach the dais. Any questions or concerns, please contact our Sergeant at Arms. Chair, you may begin.

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: This meeting is finally being called to order. Thank you all for your patience with our technical difficulties. So good morning everyone. Buenos dias. I'm Council Member Alexa Avilés, Chair of the Committee on Immigration. Thank you for joining us today. We will be examining services for immigrant New Yorkers. I'd like to begin by thanking the representatives from the administration, members of the public, and my committee colleagues who have joined us here today. I'd like to welcome Council Member Cabán, Council Member De La Rosa, Council Member Hanif, Council Member Brewer, Council Member Bottcher, Council Member Salaam, and Public Advocate Jumaane Williams. New York City is a city of immigrants. In fact, 60 percent of the population are immigrants and children of immigrants. This city owes so much to

our immigrant communities, many of whom have contributed to the vibrancy and creativity that makes New York City special. At today's hearing, we will hear from the administration and advocates on the legal resources and needs of our immigrant communities, and identify what must be done to keep them safe. Over the past year we have seen heinous and despicable actions from our federal government targeting and harming our immigrant communities, including disrupting and eliminating pathways to immigration status, violent and unconstitutional arrests in courthouses, and elimination of federal funding from legal service providers. I could unfortunately go on for much longer, but the bottom line is that we are here today to focus on how to get legal services to our immigrant neighbors who need it now more than ever. Access to competent professional well-funded legal services is incredibly important and something the city is well-suited to support. If it is in tandem with community providers already addressing the needs of the community. The Council has supported many of these providers and is pursuing significant funding in this year's budget negotiations. In light of the hostility and threats

from our federal government to our immigrant communities, we must continue to do more. We look forward to hearing from the administration about their legal service resources, their collaboration with community providers, and their responses to the rapidly-changing legal needs and information. We also look forward to hearing from advocates and legal service providers who tirelessly defend and support immigrant New Yorkers. Lastly, the Committee on Immigration will hear Council Member Tiffany Cabán's Resolution 1014 which condemns the Trump Administration's use of a federalized National Guard to repress free speech, militarize American cities, and carry on his anti-immigrant agenda. I look forward to hearing more from Council Member Cabán on her resolution. I would like to thank the committee staff for their work on this hearing, including Nicole Cata [sp?], Senior Legislative Counsel, Rebecca Barilla [sp?], Senior Policy Analyst, Carolina Gil [sp?], Principal Capital Analyst, Florentine Cabore [sp?], Unit Head, and finally, I'd like to thank my staff, Chief of Staff Eric Cerna [sp?], Deputy Chief of Staff Christina Bottego [sp?], Legislative Fellow Lilly Yu [sp?], and everyone

working in the background to make this hearing run smoothly. I will now turn it over to Council Member Cabán for a brief statement on her Resolution.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, Chair Avilés. I am here in support of Resolution 1014 which condemns the Trump administration's use of a federalized National Guard to repress free speech, militarize our cities, and advance an anti-immigrant agenda. What we witnessed in Los Angeles, Chicago, and elsewhere this year is nothing less than a full-scale assault on democracy. To see federal troops sent onto city streets to serve Donald Tump's fascist agenda and terrorize our immigrant siblings is a dramatic testament to the rise of authoritarianism and xenophobic racism in this government. Let's be honest about what's happening. The Trump administration is testing how far it can go, and if we think for a second that this won't happen here, that New York City is somehow immune, we're kidding ourselves. This is an administration that has openly threatened to send federal forces into our city to override our laws, steal our funds, and target our immigrant neighbors. They're looking for any pretext, any opportunity to invade our streets under

the banner of "security." That's why this resolution matters. We must be on the record in opposition. And to my colleagues, the resolution alone is not enough. Words are not enough. We need action from the city's leadership to prepare for a federal assault. That means organizing, legal readiness, coordination with community organizations and legislation to strengthen our sanctuary city and protect our neighbors. This is about defending democracy itself. New York has always stood as a beacon and a sanctuary for the poor and for the vulnerable, and we cannot let that beacon be put out by the threat of militarization. I urge my colleagues and every New Yorker to stand united in support of this resolution and to commit far beyond these words here to doing the work of ensuring that New York City remains a place of freedom and equality for everyone. Thanks, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council Member. Next, I will turn it over to Public Advocate for a statement.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Testing.
Thank you so much, Madam Chair. As was mentioned, my

name is Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate for the City of New York. I do hope all of us are--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Hello?

PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: We got to change rooms again?

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Oh, this is working.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: They're all working? It's just me. Testing, testing. There we go. Back on. Okay. Thanks again. Yes, I was just saying, I hope all of us are praying for Jamaica at this moment in time. There was some unfortunate fatalities already happening, and I don't even think the eye has passed over. So, we're going to have some responses probably here in the city, because we know there's a lot of Jamaican Americans who are here. One, I just want to say to Commissioner Castro and the team, thank you for the work that you did, and I think there are things we think could have been done a little better, but I appreciate having people who actually care there. And I have to name the lack of leadership or sometimes harmful leadership that came from Eric Adams as the people who care were trying to do their jobs. That's me talking and not you. I want to thank Chair Avilés and the members of

the Committee on immigration for holding this hearing today on legal service for immigration-- immigrant New Yorkers. most of my testimony will be about the resolution that Council Member Cabán has. Today, in Trump's America, immigrants are treated as criminals and are kidnapped from our streets or our courthouses by masked federal agents, irrespective of whether the person residing in the United States is a citizen, permanent resident, out of status, or without status. They're treated as criminals and not afforded due process. Sixth Amendment in the U.S. Constitution ensures individuals a right to counsel in criminal proceedings to ensure that no one is improperly incarcerated for lacking the means of hiring an attorney. The 14th Amendment, among others, prohibits depriving an individual of life, liberty and property without due process of law. Immigrants now more than ever need access to attorneys and legal services to avoid improper detention, discriminated removal proceedings, the indignity and violence our current detention systems for-profit concentration camps, and the horror of disappearing after coming into contact with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE agents. Trump has emboldened law enforcement and ICE agents

to detain people under whatever means necessary, then deport them respective of their status according to the National Association of Immigrant Judges. Since January 2025, nearly 100 immigrant judges have either left or been let go. The corresponding backlog of cases has increased exponentially with fewer judges left to preside. During President Obama's second term, there were 516,031 immigration cases nationwide. That number grew to 1.26 million during Trump's first term and escalated to 3.71 million during Biden's administration. I would be remiss if I didn't say, as people may have known, the Obama administration was actually the "Deporter in Chief" until this [inaudible] in, and quite frankly the infrastructure that he built out is the one that is being used exponentially worse than anybody could have ever dreamed of. Trump has stated that he would bring in military attorneys and judges, Judge Advocate Generals, or JAGs, to temporarily fill the vacancies in Immigration Court. If JAG staff by training work in cases defined by USMH or Uniformed Code of Military Justice are assigned to cover immigration cases nationwide on a quickly-trained immigration law, then providing legal services to

immigrants is imperative. Immigration Court is not a military tribunal or court marshal, and we cannot allow this administration to continue to treat our friends, families, and neighbors arriving in court for standard legal proceedings as if their action require military discipline. Lastly, I wholeheartedly support Council Member Tiffany Cabán's resolution condemning the Trump administration's use of federalized National Guard to repress free speech, militarize American cities, and carry out this anti-immigrant agenda. I'd like to be signed onto it. I'm speaking as not just an American citizen, but as a son of immigrants from the island of Grenada. And I want name when we say immigrants we're usually talking about Black and Brown immigrants in particular that are being attacked, and remind folks that they are trying to use our fears and our biases against us. They are throwing up buzz words and people who make people feel uncomfortable for whatever reason to militarize and literally practice military drills in our city. We've seen it in Canal Street. We see what's happening 26 Federal Plaza. I will say I'm happy then about nine days-- eight days we're going to have a mayor that actually cares and

will speak up against it and work with us to do whatever we can to protect the citizens and residents of New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Now, I'll turn it over to Counsel to swear in the administration.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Avilés. We will now hear testimony from the administration. We will hear from MOIA Commissioner Manuel Castro, Lorena Lucero, Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Policy, and Enrique Chavira Cantu, Director of Policy and Program Initiatives. Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation. Panelists, 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?

UNIDENTIFIED: I do, yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin when ready.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair Avilés and the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and for your partnership in the last four years. Thank you, Public Advocate Williams, for

joining us today and for your advocacy on behalf of immigrant communities. My name is Manuel Castro. I serve as the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I'm joined today by Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Policy Lorena Lucero and Director of Programs and Policy Initiatives, Enrique Chavira Cantu. I want to first start by acknowledging the difficult moment our communities are living through. We've all seen what's happening at 26 Federal Plaza and in our neighborhoods across New York City. And last week, federal Immigration Enforcement conducted a raid that targeted and detained street vendors, immigrants from West Africa on Canal Street. I want to say that on behalf of MOIA and on behalf of myself we condemn these raids and anti-immigrant actions conducted by the federal government, actions that have resulted in tremendous distress and anxiety in our immigrant communities, and I know that many across the city like myself and the team members that join me here today continue to have family and loved ones that are directly impacted. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage our immigrant communities to continue to access city services. As you've heard from the

1 school's chancellor directly, continue to send your
2 children to school and to rely on your school
3 communities for support. As you've heard directly
4 from the Police Commissioner, if you witness or
5 experience a crime, continue to call 911 and seek
6 help. As you've heard from the president of the
7 Health + Hospitals system, and our Commissioner of
8 the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, please
9 continue to seek care from our public hospitals and
10 from our public health system. This city government
11 is made of people, public servants, educators, health
12 care workers, your neighbors who deeply care about
13 your safety and your future. And we will remain
14 committed to you and stand here for you. Today, I am
15 proud to share that MOIA's Immigration Legal Services
16 and our other programs continue to expand access to
17 critical services and information to our immigrant
18 communities. Since 2022, when I joined as
19 Commissioner, our programming and our funding for
20 legal services have nearly doubled, and today, I want
21 to take this opportunity to thank City Council,
22 Council Speaker Adams, for your commitment and
23 ongoing support to immigration legal services. In
24 the last budget negotiation, we saw historic funding
25

dedicated to legal services, and we greatly appreciate the partnership on behalf of Speaker Adams and her staff in the past several months in making sure that our immigrant communities and immigrant nonprofits receive the support that they need. We appreciate the effort to support people when they need it the most. Now, I want to describe our immigration legal services programs, but in the interest of time, I may cut it short, but you'll have in writing the full description of all these programs. First, I'd like to start with our MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers. This summer, MOIA launched the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers program. This program is modeled after the State's Office of New Americans, ONA Centers. Our network consists of 38 MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers composed of 29 unique contractors providing culturally and linguistically-competent immigration legal support across the five boroughs. This model was created to leverage the expertise and experience of nonprofits and community-based organizations who are already embedded in the city's immigrant communities. This model encourages a wider, decentralized approach for immigration legal providers

to build or strengthen connections with hospitals, schools, libraries, and other local institutions. This new model represents a flexible approach that meets the current and emerging needs of New York City's immigrant communities, both in their language and in their neighborhoods. Since the program's July 2025 launch, the MOIA Centers have conducted approximately 3,500 comprehensive legal screenings, supporting immigrants in a variety of legal needs. Next, the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative. This collaborative provides legal assistance to immigrant New Yorkers who are detained or at imminent risk of detention or deportation. In light of the current needs, MOIA has increased our investment in the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative by \$1.1 million in this fiscal year. MOIA has also partnered with the New York City Public School's project Open Arms program to implement a dedicated referral pathway and Know Your Rights training for New York City schools at public schools across New York City. Next, the Haitian Response Initiative. The Haitian Response Initiative is a network of eight legal and community-based organizations focused on serving the needs of Haitian New Yorkers. This model program provides

culturally and linguistically competent case management, social services, referrals, and resources such as housing and mental health and legal assistance. Next, our Legal and Technical Assistance Program. MOIA partner with experts in immigration law and legal services and provide free access to critical legal technical assistance and training resources for MOIA centers. This includes a significant partnership with Immigrant ARC or IARC to provide ongoing mentorship and assistance to legal providers. All centers also have access to free select online training and webinars to nationwide legal technical assistance programs through the Catholic Legal Immigration Network. The MOIA Technical Mentorship Program provides dedicated support to our MOIA through the Immigrant Justice Corps who also offer additional legal assistance and technical assistance support. Next, we continue to fund MOIA's immigration legal hotline operated by Catholic Charity. In this calendar-- in calendar 2024, over 64,000 people called our MOIA legal hotline. So far in calendar year 2025, the MOIA legal hotline has received calls from nearly 46,000 people. Trained hotline counselors help immigrant

New Yorkers navigate their options for connecting to comprehensive immigration legal screenings. The MOIA legal hotline has also held phone banks to provide targeted information and respond to urgent needs in the immigrant community. And like I said, now, in the interest of time, I'll conclude my remarks and you should have the rest of the descriptions in my written testimony. I want to thank the many public servants throughout the city government who continue to show up for immigrant New Yorkers. I hope that you are proud as I am of what we have accomplished in the last four years. Never would have I imagined as a high school student, still undocumented, when I first visited City Hall, that one day I would become a Commissioner for the City of New York, and for that, it has been a true honor. I want to thank my team at MOIA for your hard work and commitment to immigrant communities. I want to thank my family, my wife, my child for your unconditional love, support, and patience in what has been a rollercoaster of a four years. Thanks to my mother who set us out on this journey and for everything that you've made possible. And lastly, thank you to the City Council for your continued commitment, and I stand firmly in support

of your advocacy on behalf of our immigrant communities. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Commissioner. Excuse me. So, thank you for abbreviating what is already an abbreviated testimony, given our delays. So, I'm going to just jump in to the questions, and then at some point I'll seg to my colleagues so they can ask their questions. I don't want to hold them up. So, let's start from the top for the record. So, what is the mission and primary function of the Immigration Legal Support Centers, and how do they differ from Action NYC?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, when we took stock at the prior program, Action NYC, you know, we really wanted to keep the core of the program consistent so as to provide legal access to immigrant communities, in particular comprehensive legal screenings and navigation and direct support in our immigration courts and through our legal system. But we wanted to make modifications so that the way we spoke about our legal services were understood by immigrant communities. So, we significantly changed our-- the way that we talk about our legal services, changing our branding from Action NYC to MOIA Centers

or MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers. This is in response to feedback from the community itself, that Action NYC really did not communicate the intent of the program. And throughout all of our programs, we wanted to institute a plain language protocol to ensure that our immigrant communities were not confused about what they were accessing. I'll let my Deputy Commissioner speak more about the program itself.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I hope this is working. Okay, good. So, I'll walk you through six main differences, and happy to answer any questions regarding it. Number one is deliverables, and I'll walk you through it. Number two, number of contracts. Three is the communities in which folks are served in geographic reach. Fourth is staffing. Fifth is referrals-- I'm sorry, fifth is the LTM, Legal Technical Mentorship Support. So, I'll walk you through the deliverables first. Action NYC and the changes that we made now is that we shifted to what we refer to as a units of service, where the nonprofits that have received the funding are able to meet deliverables in a variety of ways, really having an eye towards flexibility here, because we

1 understood that the legal landscape was changing,
2 given the-- you know, the higher need of pro-se
3 assistance, but also this additional need and
4 continuous need of supporting folks with complex
5 cases. Action NYC, for the majority, took
6 straightforward cases with the exception of the work
7 that was done in hospitals, schools, and libraries.
8 with this new model, providers if they choose can
9 work through-- can do both. So, that's one, and then
10 I'll go into the number of contracts. Action NYC had
11 18 contracts, and they were each funded at a
12 different level depending of the type. So, for CBOs,
13 hospitals, libraries and schools there was a change.
14 Now, we have a unified system of 25 contracts where
15 each contractor is funded at \$250,000 per year. As a
16 reminder, this is a three-year contract. My math is
17 not amazing, but you have that. And then community
18 geographic reach, here under this new model, the RFX
19 explicitly mentioned and highlighted 21 districts
20 that-- of higher immigration population that we
21 wanted the program to be focused on. Staffing: under
22 this new model, the providers have the ability to
23 hire one attorney or DOJ fully-accredited rep.
24 Referrals Under Action NYC, referrals to [inaudible]
25

1 or other support services were down as needed and
2 refer out to IOI [sic] for complex cases. Under this
3 new model, providers have the ability to-- only 25 of
4 the referrals have to be done via the city and we've
5 worked out, you know, a system with the providers.
6 And I want-- the last one I think is really the
7 biggest difference which is now embedded in the
8 program is a legal technical mentorship component in
9 which there is a dedicated provider, and the
10 Commissioner mentioned IARC, who is primarily
11 providing technical mentorship services to the legal
12 support centers. This is important and key because
13 the immigration landscape is moving so quickly and
14 changing so fast that when it was envisioned we
15 thought that embedding a mentorship component that
16 was within sort of the system of the program would be
17 important given changes that could potentially happen
18 in the administration.

19
20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you for
21 walking through those. I just-- maybe need to go
22 back to some of those-- some of those elements. I
23 guess, Commissioner, you mentioned that much of the
24 change, well in addition to what Lorena mentioned is-

- was plain language protocol. I'm not sure I understand what that means.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, we've-- you know, in our efforts to make sure that immigrant communities understand the services that MOIA and other of partners are providing, we've simplified our language so that we can better translate it and convert it into other languages, including Action NYC by calling it MOIA Centers, MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers which is more straightforward language. In other of our programs, as you know, We Speak NYC also underwent change in the way that we speak about it. And this is important because again Action NYC and other acronyms or branding that MOIA and other agencies use are not easily translated and interpreted in other languages. We wanted to just make that change. Took longer than expected. And again, as I mentioned in my testimony, we took a look at the Office of New Americans, ONA Centers, as a model, as an inspiration. We admire their branding and their use of plain language, and we wanted to replicate that. But we wanted to remain consistent with the core components of the legal service work which is to provide comprehensive legal screenings.

1
2 So, that remained, and as Deputy Commissioner
3 mentioned, adding a legal technical mentorship
4 component knowing the challenges in professional
5 development and keeping abreast of the changes in the
6 landscaping of legal services.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in terms of the-
8 - in terms of the unit of service, you mentioned
9 there's flexibility, I think each of these certainly-
10 - there was a lot of concern from providers in the
11 RFX that in fact it as the opposite, that it was less
12 flexible. And the former-- the former Action NYC
13 contracts were \$245,000 per organization, and the new
14 contracts are \$250,000 per organization. It sounds
15 like there's still a conflict between deliverables,
16 expectations and the staffing structure with only a
17 5,000 increase.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: On the units
19 of service, and I think there's a couple of questions
20 there that will parse out, but on the units-- you
21 know, and I've been hearing, you know-- we take this
22 super serious in regard to the change and we've been
23 very intentional about not only having a pre-meeting
24 to the launch of the program with providers, and
25 meeting with providers individually as well as a

1 cohort. We start-- and it goes again with the units
2 of service, and we will take feedback as needed, but
3 the intention behind was in order to fulfill, again,
4 like the changing landscape which includes screenings
5 and full rep [sic], but also a pro-se support for
6 both straightforward and complex cases. We've heard
7 from providers in these meetings, and as like things
8 comes up we've made, you know, changes and
9 clarifications, because the real intention is really
10 to provide flexibility because we understand the
11 landscape is changing. In regards to funding, we
12 heard it in the-- during the concept paper. We heard
13 it during the RFX, and that's why you saw some
14 changes from the concept to the RFX, because we
15 under-- we heard everybody. But we were limited to
16 the amount that we had to sort of provide and because
17 of that, we structured in the way that we did. But I
18 might have missed a couple of questions, Chair, so
19 please.

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And Chair, if I
22 may, we want to be as helpful as possible to the
23 council in understanding our legal services program.
24 We have a very useful table that compares the before
25 and after. We'd love to provide that to you or

1 describe it here today. The prior program had three
2 tiers, three different funding tiers. The current
3 program evens out all the providers at \$250 each, and
4 so we're happy to provide that description today or
5 send you that table. It's important to us that you
6 have all this information, of course. You know, the
7 procurement process was quite long. We had a number
8 of rounds of feedback. We took most of this feedback
9 because we couldn't change everything completely, but
10 you know, I-- the team did a really comprehensive job
11 at engaging our contracted partner at DSS in that
12 process. I don't know if you want to add more.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I'll just
15 add that-- and I'm getting the live numbers as we
16 speak. But under the old contracts for CBOs there is
17 a range of \$175K, \$245K, and \$315K. And
18 acknowledging like what you're saying, right, that
19 there was change in some of the funding, but I think
20 that our approach, again, because we wanted to create
21 this unified system of legal support centers, it was
22 to even it out and to provide legal service centers
23 the same amount of funding.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, I mean, this
25 is-- obviously, we've had this conversation before

1 and the changes and the concerns from the provider
2 community. Well, I think it is-- it begs the
3 question around fairness versus equity, and not
4 everyone is actually doing the same work or has the
5 actual competency to do the work in this changing
6 landscape. So, certainly flexibility and ample
7 funding is critical to doing the work. So, in terms
8 of-- can you tell me what the total funding allocated
9 for Immigrant Legal Service Support Centers and which
10 budget lines or agencies fund them?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Give me one
13 second, Chair. So, for the Immigrant Legal Support
14 Centers, the agency, they all sit with the Department
15 of Social Services, and there are 25-- and I'm
16 referring to the one under the procurement, and the
17 funding levels are \$250,000.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: In the total? Oh,
19 sorry.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: No, no. And
21 then the Legal Technical Mentorship is funded at
22 \$400,000.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And what is the
24 total?
25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: The total per year is \$6,250,000 for the Legal Support Centers.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And so currently, how many centers are operating?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Excuse me, Chair, sorry. \$6,650,000.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: How many centers are currently operating and where are they located in geography and how those locations were chosen?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yeah, and I also want to add that besides the Legal Support Centers that I'm referencing under the procurement, because I think that's where questions are focused on, embedded in that is also a network of additional contracts, and this is from the bucket of our former Action NYC contractors that have a one-year contract with us. Those contractors are also sort of a part of this network, so I just want to clarify that, because I think your questions are exclusively focused on the-- just the procurement piece, so, the RFX piece. But your question was where are they located?

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, I guess before you go to the location, since you mentioned-- I know

the \$4.4 million that the administration cut from these services that the Council restored for these one-year contracts, have they been dispended and where have they gone?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes. So, I can start there-- and go ahead Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Before the Deputy Commissioner describes how we've spent that funding, I think this is why the funding that provided by the Council was so tremendously helpful. So, you know, with some of these providers that we can't have on three-year contracts, we generally fund year-to-year. with the additional funding that Council provided, we were able to continue that year-to-year funding to these providers and continue to fund the critical work that they do and fill in the gaps, as you mentioned, Chair, those providers that are providing more sort of dedicated and specific work in certain communities.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Commissioner, this work wasn't new. This was work that was defunded by Eric Adams that we are working to restore together. I just-- so this is ongoing work--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing Yep.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: that was--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing]

Ongoing work, correct.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yeah, so and we've also been in communication with council finance about the \$4.4. The \$4.4 was received in part by Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, NMIC, IJC, Immigrant Justice Corp, and Catholic Charities. There was left over amount that I don't have in front of me that we also went back to Council to request if we could use the additional leftover for our providers to use for filing things and postage, and that part of the work is on their way right now. And then my colleague, Enrique, because I know you also asked about where they are located.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Before--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]

Oh, go ahead.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I guess before we go there-- so the-- you submitted a request to reallocate money to filing fees and postage. Council also provided an additional \$850,000 for fees. So, are you saying you want more money for fees?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Well,--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Which is separate and apart from the \$4.4 million.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: That's separate and apart, Chair, because-- and we thank the Council for that. I know that it's not official yet, because I think it has to pass a resolution [inaudible], but we put it all together so there can be additional funding given to the providers that we oversee.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And what would be the formula that you would utilize to distribute these unallocated resources?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I can pass it over to my colleague, Enrique.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, we took a quick look at filings for the previous fiscal years and we talked to providers about certain projections. We took a survey of the amount of initiatives that folks have with MOIA, and so we kind of-- we did a two-tier system with five providers. We'll be getting greater amount given that the filings that is in the nature of their business typically motions to reopen or charge significantly more expensive than before.

Those who are doing a lot more of those filings are going to get a little more money, and then the rest of our providers will get some as well. So, we took a survey of needs while also looking at historic filing trends.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. Which I think-- is there wiggle room in that given kind of the current environment?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Definitely, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, great. I think we're back to the original question.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: locations, Chair?

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Say?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Do-- you wanted to know about the locations.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. And how many of the centers are operating? I know we have 25 contracts. Are there 25 Legal Service Support Centers operating right now?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: All of them are operating.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. And can you tell us where the geographic locations--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]

Okay, I'll give it my colleague Enrique.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yes. So, the-- our legal service-- legal support centers are present throughout 21 community district. Those are also the 21 districts that were the foundation of the RFP that were evaluated through the process. Those community districts were chosen specifically based on census survey data. And what we did was we took a look at the average of non-citizens in New York City which is 14.72 percent, and which shows 21 community districts that are higher or that have a higher concentration than the New York City average. And so, happy to provide those two you, but they do include a few in Queens, across the five boroughs, and then we can go through list of the 25 cents if you'd like we also have a map where all of them are located that we can provide to you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You can provide that to the Council.

DIRECTR CHAVIRA: Great.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Can you tell us what specific legal services are offered at the centers? For example, is it asylum application

1 assistance? Is it TPS renewal, SIG [sic] screenings,
2 referrals, fully-- representation.

3
4 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yeah, so it's-- it'll
5 be a mix of services throughout. We, as we mentioned
6 earlier, our goal was to provide as much flexibility
7 for providers. All providers are given points for
8 doing a full legal screening and a follow-up action.
9 That follow-up action could be full representation in
10 either a straight or complex case. It could be pro-
11 se assistance in a straightforward or a complex case,
12 as well as brief advice and counsel or a referral to
13 an IOI provider.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, just for clarity
15 on the record, so can any person walk into any legal
16 service provider and receive-- or any legal service
17 center and receive any manner of these supports?
18 They're not going to get referred to somebody else in
19 another area.

20 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, it depends on the
21 capacity that the legal provider has, and it also
22 depends on their physical out-take [sic] protocols.
23 Some of our legal service centers don't accept
24 physical walk-ins for safety or other reasons. All
25 of the information on how to get-- how to be referred

or how to get an appointment is on our website, but it can also be achieved if someone reaches out to our hotline.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. Can you provide to the Council exactly with each of these service centers what are the limitations for each of the service centers? Because I will tell you, if we have 25 centers that do 25 different things with various criteria, I am 100 percent sure the public is very confused by that.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Definitely, definitely. We'll definitely provide that. I'll also say that as the Deputy Commissioner mentioned before, one of the bigger new features of the legal support centers is the legal technical mentor who is working individually with every single one of these support centers to identify gaps in capacity, and they'll be working with them one-on-one to try to fill those gaps, whether it's through trainings or office hours, additional items like that, we'll make sure to get that over to you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: In terms of the-- when you restructured the RFX and you determined that there would be a technical support element to it,

what were the gaps that you were trying to address through that resource?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I think more than gaps, I think we were also understanding that capacity was a big constraint for our legal service providers. So, it is, first of all, an effort to-- and you mentioned this briefly. Because we know that some of the legal service providers-- again, like this is prior to what we know now, because it was before the procurement. We understood-- and the concept paper-- we understood that there were new organizations that were being created based on the response that we were seeing with new arrivals. And we understand that there was a need for legal and technical mentorship support that was intentionally embedded here, because we wanted to build capacity and open it up for, you know, nonprofits and a range of nonprofits to bid and potentially, you know, receive the contract. So, that was the biggest part. I think that would be one, and I think-- I'll stop there, because I've mentioned the--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Yeah, because, I appreciate that, but that is utterly vague. So, could you give me a variety of examples,

1 right? Because you do have a suite of capacity-- of
2 service providers with a range of experience, right?
3 What were some of the specific things that in terms
4 of actual capacity that you were targeting to do with
5 these resources? And I'd like to recognize Council
6 Member Joseph has joined us.

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, while Deputy
9 Commissioner pulls up the information, I do want to
10 say that really the intent behind this RFP was to
11 build out community capacity as Enrique mentioned,
12 focusing on these 21 community districts where
13 there's a high density of foreign-born or immigrant
14 communities. And the intent behind the technical
15 mentorship program is to build up the capacity of
16 each of these centers to be able to provide at the
17 very least all the basic immigration legal services
18 that any of these centers should be providing such as
19 assistance for naturalization, for instance, or
20 renewals of green cards or filing TPS and so forth.
21 Then there are complex cases, and as you know, we're
22 facing a very complex environment supporting those
23 people who have been detained or at imminent risk of
24 being detained, and for that, we need additional
25 assistance. So, I just wanted to provide that. And

1 I want to say this and get this out before we move
2 on-- I would say that while 25 centers was an
3 accomplishment-- many of them are here and I'm sure
4 we'll share their experiences-- we need many more and
5 I advocate for additional supports to these 25
6 centers and more, especially in the environment that
7 we're in. Go ahead, Deputy Commissioner.

9 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: And I'll add, Chair,
10 and let me know if this is what you're looking for.
11 If not, happy to add some more. I think some of the
12 areas where we're seeing the most need, and that even
13 when we've started thinking about what this was going
14 to look like and what future needs for the community
15 were going to be, we either saw that certain
16 organizations were not just not, you know, engaging
17 in these types of cases or what have you, but we saw
18 a great need for additional work around special
19 immigrant juvenile status and immigrant youth in
20 general. We knew that there would be a greater need
21 for rapid response, motions to reopen, filing habeas,
22 those types of proceedings, asylum, anything-- you
23 know, anything that we formerly thought was a
24 straightforward case now becomes complex given
25 differences in federal immigration law. So, I'm

1 happy to go into some of the things we can do maybe
2 later and some of the things that we're doing on
3 other issues like immigration, some of the trainings
4 we've set up to help start building that capacity
5 whenever you're ready.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. Yeah. I
8 think that begins to start to address, because
9 community capacity is such a vague term given the
10 diversity both-- and we're talking about longstanding
11 service providers. So, it's a very confusing
12 proposition when you're telling me, you know,
13 naturalization support for organizations that have
14 been doing that for over-- well over a decade. So,
15 it's hard to discern what this is. It still feels
16 very vague. In terms of-- I'm going to ask one more
17 question, and then I want to turn it over to my
18 colleagues and we can resume our questioning. In
19 terms of the-- let me see. Were-- did MOIA ensure
20 that individuals who were previously served by Action
21 NYC were not left without access to legal assistance
22 during the transition of the programs?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Our pro--
24 we've talked to our providers. I'm going to say that
25 we worked with our providers to wind down and/or

1 provide continuous services to the individuals. This
2 is part of when we discussed the extension of the
3 one-year contracts for the former Action NYC
4 providers, and it was sort of meant to-- when we went
5 back to them, we asked that the focus should be that,
6 ensuring that individuals continue to-- that they
7 closed out cases and that's what was part of the
8 intention of some of the additional funding.

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And just to add to
11 that, and I know this is incredibly confusing,
12 because this process-- procurement process is messy.
13 Those providers continue to be part of our portfolio
14 as we've been able to extend their contracts an
15 additional year. We don't know what happens next
16 fiscal year, but if we're able to maintain those
17 contracts, we can-- those providers can continue to
18 serve their particular communities. Now, we have the
19 MOIA Centers, the 25 that we've been discussing, but
20 then we have other programs as I shared. The Rapid
21 Response Legal Collaborative that are meant to
22 complement the work that we do, and they have a
23 particular focus we can describe. So, the universe
24 of providers that we have are beyond the 25 that
25 we've been discussing. We just want to make that

clear, and we can provide that. on our website we have a list of all of our providers that our community can access, but we can provide all this information to you as well.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. So, I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues for questioning. Council Member Brewer, would you like to-- oh, okay. Council Member Hanif, would you like to?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, Chair Avilés, and thank you all for being here and your powerful testimony, Commissioner. [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [inaudible] fire drill.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I know. Am I good to go? Oh, okay. I would like to know how is MOIA measuring success with the number of cases open, cases won, or people left waiting?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yeah, so we conduct-- as of right now, we've conducted quarterly one-on-one's with our legal service providers, but they also have monthly reporting requirements. Our team, our Associate Director who's right behind me, Derick Gomez and Julia Stone who's our program manager, have

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COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: we're happy to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But the-- but you're basically saying the metrics exist because you're doing this quarterly.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Exactly. We've been meeting with them. I feel like they're annoyed by us, but we've been very intentional about understanding what's working and what's not working, right? Because we launched this July and summer, and we've been meeting with them individually, but also as a group to really get a sense of how things are working out. But we can try to circle back with that.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: And I could just-- I'll add just right now target per quarter is 150 units of service. Most organizations are between 125 to 175.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Clients? What's the units of--

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: [interposing] Units of service is the amount of points I guess you could say

that are awarded towards a specific action that includes a screening, plus a follow-up action.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: And then last thing I'll say is that as of the most recent reporting period, we've seen throughout the 25 Legal Support Centers and also our one-year support centers a total of 3,500 screenings.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: 3,500 screenings, okay. And then are also tracking cases won, like folks got through?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yes. We are still-- as part of our data collection process, we make note of changes on filings every month. That includes cases filed, cases open, cases accepted, cases rejected, cases denied. We don't have that in front of us probably just yet, but we'll be happy to get that to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And there's not a public report available is there, or is this internal?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yeah, this is all internal for now, yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: We'd love to see it. Which-- which of the services are baselined currently?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [inaudible]

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: We can't hear you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yeah, sorry I'm looking for it.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: While my colleagues look for what's baselined and not baselined, I would-- you know, this is unusual, but I would advocate that all of our funding be baselined, because our community groups--

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [inaudible] That's were--

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: need the longstanding support.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, I'll start. I'm looking through my chart here. But Rapid Response Legal Collaborative is baselined. I'm waling you through the programs. And the Legal Support Centers as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then that leaves out like IOI, NYFUP [sic].

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, IOI is administered by the Department of Social Services, not MOIA.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, MOIA is currently only administering the Rapid Response.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: It's actually several programs. One, legal support centers and what we've been focused on today, the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative. We also have the immigrant rights workshops. We also have-- this is under formerly via our English Learning and Support Centers. This is in reference to the We Speak classes that we have. And we also have HRI, the Haitian Response Initiative.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Are those-- are those--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing] HRI is as well. I missed that one.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And Council, thank you for those questions. I think that is at the heart of why this is all messy and complicated. I would-- since I'm at it, I would also advocate that all immigrant or legal services programs be housed under MOIA and have oversight so that we can clearly

1
2 communicate to you what the metrics are and the
3 outcomes of each of these programs, because they're
4 all spread across different agencies, have different
5 oversights. It's just really complicated. We do
6 appreciate the partnership with the Speaker's Office
7 as we have conversations about how to get to this and
8 be able to work closely with our providers, and
9 that's why our providers feel like things are all
10 over the place, because they are, and we want to fix
11 that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And I just have a
13 couple more questions. With the challenges of
14 federal asylum funding, what is the City's plan to
15 sustain services if that money is unavailable or
16 reduces, and then what would it cost if you all have
17 calculated this to guarantee a right to counsel for
18 everybody facing deportation or major immigration
19 proceedings?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We have great
21 analysis that were developed by advocates which I'm
22 sure my colleagues will have. I would say the
23 analysis is limited to those who are-- who have
24 pending immigration court processes, but I have said
25 in the past that the universe of those people who

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DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: And then as regarding the question, the cost-- there's data that shows that it would cost about \$188.5 million to provide services to every immigrant New Yorker. As the Commissioner mentioned, there's these two buckets that we're working with, right? We have folks who are-- who have an active case in immigration court, and then other immigrant New Yorkers who might not have a case in immigration court, but still have immigrant needs. We can break down that figure further into \$145 million for those to provide free legal counsel to New Yorkers in Immigration Court, and then \$43.5 million for other immigration services. And I believe-- I'm going to double-check

1
2 with the team here, but I believe this a report from
3 Vera.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Oh, great. And
5 then what's the number right now? What are we--
6 what's the total number?

7 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: We are currently, I
8 believe, with the administration and the City Council
9 funding, I believe across the city it's \$120 million,
10 if not a little more, maybe \$123. I will say that
11 despite this, and as we have this conversation, it's
12 also important to recognize that there's still a
13 capacity issue across the city and across
14 organizations in general just in the field.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then finally,
16 what are you hearing from providers, the challenges?

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think while there
18 has been historic investment, again, thanks to the
19 City Council, I think you'll hear from our providers
20 say that one, year-to-year funding is really
21 difficult to manage, because of course nothing's
22 guaranteed the following year. And so to be able to
23 hire and build up and not know whether you'll have
24 the funding available, it's a big challenge. Also,
25 the availability of frankly legal staff, right, and

maintaining compensation that's competitive, right?

It is quite a challenge from providers, and I really do feel for them. As someone who ran a nonprofit and understand these challenges, which is why I would advocate for these funds to be baselined.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: We also heard, and I think you all heard the same thing, requests for filing fees, because that change-- the increase of that in need to support with additional funding.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: I'll just add-- sorry-- last thing we heard which I think we-- everybody in this room will probably include in their testimony today and something we've all said as well is multi-year funding, right? It's really had to do the work without knowing if a program is going to be available for next year or not, which again goes to Commissioner's point on the importance of all of these initiatives being baselined.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. Thanks, Chair. Thank you. We hear that loud and clear and certainly during the budget time we were saying, screaming it from the rooftops. Next, I'd like to turn it over to Council Member Cabán.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Is this thing on?

Okay. This is weird. It all worked really well when we first got in here. You know, I'm going to be super, super brief and then end up yielding my time because my wonderful colleagues have asked what I wanted to ask. I mean, I really wanted to know about the plans for continuity of funding so that providers can like hire qualified staff full-time, year over year, and that was pretty much covered. But can you talk a little bit about how you also plan to make sure funding is flexible enough to allow providers to respond to rapidly-changing needs?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: This is why we created this units system when-- and the idea here, and again, this goes back to the change of models and like instead of having, like, total number of people served, we created a system that Enrique mentioned regarding units of service that allows providers to really choose based on like what they've been-- are seeing day-to-day in regards to the types of cases that they want to take, as long as they meet the 600 units of service. As I mentioned before, again, we're like brand new iteration of this, so we are taking feedback as well from providers, if things

are working, if they're not, but this is part of why we're meeting with them so frequently.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And in terms of how that feedback will work, right, like if there are-- with good intention, this is what's being put forth, but if providers are finding challenges with it and unable to use funding in the ways that are going to most immediately best support the folks that they are serving, what's your process there to make sure, oh well, we didn't account for this. it didn't really fall. Like, what's-- is there going to be like a retroactive adjust-- like something that allows that-- you know, they do-- they know what to do on any given day before any of us do. So, I guess that's my follow-up.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I would say we stand at the ready to make any modifications to contracts. That does take time and that does delay things. Right now, our priority is to make sure that the contracts are registered so folks can get paid, organizations can get paid, but we are certainly in conversation with groups. Now, we do modify one contract, we have to modify all. so it takes a certain amount of work. But we understand the

challenges that providers are facing, and we want to make sure that we're adaptable.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah, I mean, that's why, you know, obviously we're all up here advocating for just the broadest, lowest barrier access to just dollars as soon as possible so that organizations can be as nimble as they need to be in like a really, really unpredictable environment at the moment. Thank you, Chair.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Council Member, before we move on, I want to say this and I can only speak on behalf of myself, not the administration, but I fully support your resolution standing firm against the anti-immigrant actions by the federal government. Thank you, Council Member, for doing that, and I encourage all New Yorkers to do the same. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Council Member Joseph?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chair, and Commissioner, always great to see you. My line of questioning will always be-- will be around young people. As we're seeing they're entering 26 Federal Plaza from the youngest of 16 in custody now, Dylan

1 Muktar [sp?]. How are you working with New York City
2 Public Schools? I know we just allocated funding for
3 Project Open Arms to make sure that young people have
4 representation when they go to court. Can you walk
5 us and let us know how that's--

6
7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]
8 Yeah, thank-- oh, go ahead.

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] Thank
10 you, Council Member. I'll let my colleagues talk
11 more about the specifics, but I've enjoyed a really
12 close relationship with the current Chancellor. She
13 led a lot of the work prior to her role as Chancellor
14 in welcoming and embracing asylum seekers, children.
15 She knows my background, my story as one of those
16 children, and I shared my story with children and
17 families often with her. We've recently entered into
18 a partnership to make sure that we're able to rapidly
19 respond to any family who either has a family member
20 or child who's been detained or who is at imminent
21 risk of being detained, and the Project Open Arms has
22 been an incredible ally. You know, I thank the
23 Council for matching those funds and adding funds so
24 that Project Open Arms can hire additional staff. I
25 can't say enough about the important work that we can

do with our immigrant families in the school building, with our principals and parent coordinators. I often say this, I would not be here today without the caring support of my teachers and my school communities.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Thank you for the question, because I think this is one of the things at least I'm very proud of. We have been working with Project Open Arms, and I would say that I probably speak to them the minimum three times a week. What we did was establish a direct link to our existing rapid response legal collaborative. The way that it works is as follows. The Chancellor has given a directive to all principals no matter-- all principals to elevate cases of deportation and/or family members who have been detained to be elevated to Project Open Arms. At that point, Project Open Arms works directly with the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative to triage those cases, and to them-- that's-- I think, again like, so thankful to the Council for the addition. I think it's \$2.2.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yes. Yes, ma'am.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, thank you very much for the \$2.2. And we work closely with the

1 Council because we shared that with them even before
2 launch, and we said part of what we're doing with the
3 RLC is establishing this, and if interested, you
4 know, let's all bring it together. So, thank the
5 Council, and also there's pending conversations to be
6 had with Project Open Arms to extend those touch
7 points. So, one, it would be-- just to sort of walk
8 you through the work that's actually happening. It's
9 representation, and there's also KYR work that's
10 going to be done with three different groups. One,
11 parents. Two, staff, and three, young people from
12 the ages 16 to 21 which is the target population.
13 And if you would allow me, I want to have Enrique
14 talk a little bit of some of the SIJ work that we're
15 done as well.

17 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yeah. Oh, go ahead.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: No, go ahead.

19 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Just to add to what
20 Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner said
21 specifically in relation to students, the City has
22 filed, at this point that I know of, at least three
23 amicus briefs in support, so that's one thing. And
24 then related to SIJ, I think there might be other
25 questions here, but we started tracking the issue at

1 the beginning of the year when providers across the
2 city learned that they wouldn't be getting-- or
3 learned that there might be an interruption in the
4 funding that they get to represent unaccompanied
5 children. That was--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing] And
7 again, the Council stepped up and funded that.

8 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Again, yes. And thank
9 you so much for that. We saw other changes, right?
10 The refusal to give youth deferred action changes to
11 sponsorship requirements, and so we started to engage
12 to really get a number on what the need was going to
13 be across New York City. And given y'all's
14 investment and the city investment in these legal
15 services, we've been able to work very closely with
16 ICARE who was at first coordinating amongst their
17 members, but has now expanded there coordination
18 works to ensure that we're being, you know,-- trying
19 to avoid duplicity as best we can, and so now there
20 will be a centralized conduit basically in the city
21 where any immigrant youth needing-- sorry-- needing
22 services--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]
24 Sounded like an emergency buzzer, right?
25

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: will be able to get services.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: One of the things that we noticed and was brought to my attention as the Education Chair, young accompanied minors will also be receiving text messages to self-deport, and they would be paid \$2,500 to do so. What advice are you giving these young people when they receive these type of messages?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, I believe you're referencing what we saw was coined "Operation Freaky Friday."

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Correc.t

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: We-- the first thing we did was engage with legal service providers to see what was happening in practice and to see if anybody had received one of these letters or text messages or anything like that. Guidance that our hotline is currently giving includes basically call the hotline if you receive anything and you don't know what it is, and remember that you have the right to speak to an attorney before signing anything. Based on our conversations, the instances were very limited and the government has pulled away from some of those

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COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: With families and parents so they know that this is aware-- that this is the services.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Council Member, if I may, before we move on? We recently entered into a partnership with Unlocal-- again, shout out to all the providers and advocates here-- to launch a Dreamer's Center to provide services to Dreamers still enrolled in our public schools and who are now graduating without access to any legal status, and of course, to provide legal services. This is year-to-year funding. Again, I would advocate, as you'll probably hear from them, to continue this work, and it's something that I'm incredibly proud of as I shared before as someone who experienced that and know how difficult that is. And also, we're launching a graphic novel based on our Know Your Rights material. This is in partnership with Project Open Arms, and we want to get this into the hands of

as many children and family as possible. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. First of all, just congratulations to you, Department of Education, and everybody else. Language, so you have language centers, I went the other day to the-- I guess it was New York Immigration Coalition doing that cooperative. So, and it seemed to make sense. I have people living with me who speak Fulani. So, I'm getting better at the Fulani, but there's a lot of language. So how-- is that working? Do we have enough language support now, or is it always challenging?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Absolutely, and thank you, Council Member, for stopping by. Actually, it was part of this work over 10 years ago with the New York Immigration Coalition when I was there, and it's great to see that come to fruition. We have at MOIA hired linguists and staff who are subject matter experts of the specific language communities. We focused on the top 10, because that's our legal mandate. However, we need to go

1
2 above and beyond that and have available staff and
3 partners like the NYC and the interpreter bank and
4 cooperatives to be able to reach as many people as
5 possible. You know, language-- as I've expressed in
6 previous hearings, we believe is a civil right, but
7 it's also a lifeline. If people cannot get the
8 information that they need in a timely fashion, it
9 can result in ripple effects, and I would say we need
10 more.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I agree.
12 Some of these young people speak five languages.
13 That's my experience. So, it's something that they
14 could be used for from coming from Africa. The other
15 question is-- all great work, but then when what's
16 going on 26 Federal Plaza is abhorrent as we all
17 know. So, my question is, I guess is it your office
18 that's in charge, or who? Just trying to keep up
19 with the hell that's going on there. And then how do
20 we respond to it. It's almost like, you know, silly
21 putty. It's so horrific. You can't do-- you know
22 better than I, but you can't do virtual hearings with
23 most of these damn judges. You can't do anything
24 that would make sense to keep people safe. So, I just
25 didn't know who keeps track of hell, and then who

1
2 does something about it? I mean, I don't even know
3 if we can. I just was trying to figure out what's
4 the process if there is one. I mean, you're doing
5 everything you can, but then this extra layer is
6 unmentionable.

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Council
8 Member. Accompanying families and individuals to
9 their Immigration Court hearing is amongst the most
10 important and also sensitive work that can be
11 happening. It's also important to protect those
12 organizations and of course report them, because it's
13 courageous work. It's not easy. It's as you
14 described, Council Member. We provide support and
15 funding to organizations that are underground at 26
16 Federal Plaza and elsewhere. You know, when I
17 accompany or meet with families prior to their court
18 hearings is to give them encouragement, but I do want
19 to protect their identity and information and also
20 the providers because they're under quite a lot of
21 pressure. And so I would just say that it's
22 difficult because as you know, a lot of what happens
23 there is difficult to ascertain, but it's
24 heartbreaking when people don't come out and they
25 disappear.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Are there court--
I should know this, but are there court challenges
either by NYLAG or other nonprofit organizations or
even some of the big firms to what is going on or is
it just pointless to even try to address it?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yeah, there
have been lawsuits done by some providers. I'm
forgetting the names of the providers, but there have
been based on what's happening right now. I will
also say that the Mayor also-- there's so many issues
at 26 Federal Plaza. You're focusing right now legal
services, but there's also been very publicly
reported of conditions in which people have been put
in--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
Correct, correct.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: And there I
can say that the Mayor has sent a letter, official
letter, asking for the inspection of the facilities
that I know other elected officials have called for
it as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. My other
question is just are any of the big firms helping

1 with this, or it's mostly relying on city efforts?
2 Just out of curiosity.

3
4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: We would
5 have to defer to the Law Department there, because
6 there are litigation matters that we're just not
7 privy to given the sensitivity of them. So, we
8 wouldn't be able to answer that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.
10 Go ahead.

11 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Council Member, just
12 to answer your question on court challenges. African
13 Communities Together and The Door did file a lawsuit
14 against the practice of detaining people.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Particularly that
16 one 16-year-old, yeah.

17 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: And we did file an
18 amicus in support, so I just wanted to state that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank--

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. I'm a
21 little confused because in our prior hearing your
22 Chief of Staff stated that MOIA's policy was to stay
23 away from 26 Federal Plaza, and right now, you're
24 suggesting that that is not the case, or am I not
25 understanding?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we're not send-- actually sending staff into 26 Federal Plaza. We work with our contractors who are on the ground. As you know, we have limited capacity to be able to do that ourselves as a staff. You know, I certainly stop by. I don't, you know, again as I said before, I don't engage or do so to bring attention to the situation. It's mostly to provide support and comfort to any family who may need prior to entry.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. Thank you. Thank you for the clarification. Can I ask why MOIA would not set up a table outside to provide information to people? And additionally, does your support-- did you add additional support to the nonprofit providers? Because this work of accompaniment is above and beyond their already contracted services. Did MOIA provide additional support for this work?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, we do this work, and I'll let Enrique talk more about it. We do through our Rapid Response Legal Collaborative which support has grown.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: That's post-detainment, though. We're talking about people

walking in, right, and not knowing their rights.
We're talking about people who don't have access to
attorneys, right?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Correct. Yeah, during
the renewal of our one-year contracts, we sat down
with our providers to talk a little bit more about
their deliverables and visit them closely, and
several of those do include accompaniment and that
type of work to allow for some other flexibility
needed to do-- to meet the moment.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, accompaniment is
stipulated as work in the--

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: [interposing] As
accompaniment--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] In the
RFX, in the contract?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: In their-- in their
deliverables. And this is the one-year. So, the
one-year renewals that we were able to continue.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, so those are
the \$4.4 million additional. The six-- the other
money doesn't include accompaniment. I'm sorry--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]
So, let me--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] maybe I'm getting it confused.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Let me go back.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: This is new information.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And Chair, I-- while they look for information, I am not opposed to increasing our presence there. We've had to triage, and of course, for us it's better for people-- to get to people prior to their visits so that we can hopefully provide them with some sort of legal assistance or someone that can accompany them. And so we focus mostly, again, out in the neighborhoods and where we can connect people to providers. But again, I am not opposed. It's-- I don't know exactly what was said.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I just-- it's more, actually more curiosity--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] Yeah, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: around deployment of resources when you see the growing horror show--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing]
Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: that is 26 Federal Plaza and the emotional toll that it certainly takes on the providers and everyone involved, and just watching hoards of people walk into that building, thankfully for New Yorkers who are there who've created their own pieces of information, right, to give to people and who are doing it in language accessible ways that our city government hasn't figured out that this is a place we should also be.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Just to offer clarity on the contracts, Chair, and I mentioned this at the beginning, but just-- acknowledging that I would have been super confusing. But there's one bucket of contract. There's-- this is all under the umbrella of our legal support centers via our RFX. There's three-year contracts for 25 legal support centers, including our legal technical mentor, as I mentioned. What Enrique's talking about is 13 providers which includes funding from Council that we were able to-- who were former Action NYC providers who we-- who will have a one-

1
2 year contract. When we were negotiating and speaking
3 to them about what made sense regarding the
4 deliverables at that point we, you know, said if
5 accompaniment is something you want to do, we're open
6 to it, and we could change deliverables as needed so
7 you could fit that need.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: But again,
10 to those who want to do that, right?

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you know how many
12 providers are done accompaniment?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I mean, the
14 one that comes to mind right now is NYLAG, because
15 that's part-- that was part of the one-year extension
16 and because we knew that with their work with the
17 Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, we knew that they
18 had the expertise to do that.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, that 100 percent
20 true. I have seen NYLAG there every single time I've
21 been there. But I've seen also a lot of other
22 organizations. So, potentially this is just all
23 unfunded New Yorkers and CBOs.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: And you
25 know, we can go back to them, too, because I know

that for sure NYLAG comes to mind because that was one that we-- 100 percent accurate, and we can come back to some of the others of the 13 as well, the 25.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, what is MOIA's-- actually, I'd like to recognize we've been joined by Council Member Shekar Krishnan. What is MOIA's protocol for responding when asylum-seekers in city shelters or city care are detained by federal authorities or face imminent risk of deportation?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Can you repeat that, Chair? I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. What is MOIA's protocol for responding when individuals in city shelters or city care are detained by federal authorities or face imminent deportation?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Okay. So, if we are informed that's-- because it's massive, right? Like, there's different agencies are involved. When we are made aware, we make every effort to connect them to our legal service providers. It's the same thing as the Department of Social Services, and I don't want to speak to them, because I don't know the ins and outs, but I know that we do coordinate in regards to just services,

and to triage to ensure that individuals have access to services.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in the case where we still have giant facilities with vulnerable individuals in them, and we just had this circumstance outside the Row Hotel. Thousands of people are in there who are vulnerable. What is the administration's plan to address the fact that ICE will camp out in front of these facilities?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, like I said earlier, Chair, Department of Social Services manages their own contracts to provide legal services to individuals, immigration legal services. So, they have their own internal protocols. I would say that any immigration enforcement actions outside of facilities like shelters is incredibly dangerous because, of course, people who are coming to use those services will have second thoughts about going to access those services. So, we, you know, we have - and today denounce those actions as well. Again, we don't want people to be afraid to come forward to their court visits, to access shelter, to go to school as a result. Again, as I said earlier, it

gets complicated with our provision of legal services because different agencies manage portfolios, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Commissioner, thank you for denouncing so much today. I deeply--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: appreciate it. So, for DSS, right, that contract is not obviously not yours to manage, the facility is not yours to manage, but what I'm asking more specifically is how is MOIA pushing DSS. We've already seen it happen where ICE agents are standing outside of our shelter facility and potentially taking folks from the facility and others who are just in the vicinity. What is MOIA doing, or what is MOIA pushing DSS to do to ensure to the extent possible that there are additional protocols that should be sought after? There are different actions, like what-- how is MOIA responding to this reality, this condition that will continue?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we've held a number of conversations with advocates who've expressed the same thing, and DSS and other providers are asking their staff to be mindful of their protocols that are-- and should be in place in the

event that there's an incident at the shelter or outside the shelter.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. Alright. I'm not sure I totally understood your answer to be honest, but I think we can move on. I think the point-- we would love to see what the protocols are, because it doesn't seem like there are any, and we fear that this will continue to augment. In terms of-- oh, let's see. Hold on. So, when-- is MOIA notified when a client or a shelter resident is detained by federal authorities during a court appearance, and how quickly is that information relayed to their attorney or legal provider?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: The answer's no.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: It looked like uniform no.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: We do-- if-- I think we are all living in the same space where we are watching the news, speaking to providers, and watching some of the changes that are happening in the federal landscape. If we learn of anything we'll check in just to ensure, but again, like I can't speak for DSS who isn't here, but you know, we have

had again like coordination calls and figuring out if folks need additional services.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, we know with NYFUP program, right, that is trying to ensure legal representation post-detainment, and we know the complexity that is inserted when people are shifted, you know, moved to Louisiana, do the contracts continue to allow for this ongoing reality that people are expedited, removed on purpose.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I can't speak about NYFUP, because we don't administer it. However, I will say that there are programs-- we've talked to at least the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, but the work is just expansive, right? What we do do is via the Cities for Action Program that we also house at MOIA, which is a network of 200 cities from across the country that are pro-immigrant, we have talked to fellow cities where some of these-- where we know that people are being taken to identify additional touch points and/or legal service support for them.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: I'll just say in general there are additional complicating factors to interstate representation, right? If somebody's

1 removed to Texas or Louisiana or transferred, excuse
2 me, the attorney representing in New York may or may
3 not have the licenses required to practice, even
4 though immigration is federal and that can be
5 practiced across the country. There might be other
6 processes that require that attorney to have a
7 license in that jurisdiction. And so there are other
8 complicating factors that we won't necessarily be
9 able to solve for per say.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Is there any
12 particular plan given that we know where these
13 facilities, like the ones that are used most often,
14 Texas, Louisiana, and southern states to start to
15 address that? I think you, Lorena, started
16 mentioning a potential model, but like--

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I think the
18 key with what's happening is communication and
19 coordination. So, again, like what we have done is
20 as cases come up, we have shared information from
21 other legal service providers, but a formal
22 conversation has not yet happened, Chair. However,
23 due to the patterns, people want to make sure that at
24 least at the very minimum there are a list of pro
25 bono services which as you know again, unfortunately,

but are not the same as the level of New York. So, to add to the jurisdictional challenges, there's funding challenges and other challenges.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, what happens to a case as soon as someone gets moved to an out-of-state facility?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Well, I think it depends, and I'm hearing Enrique go, so if you want to jump in-- no, no, go ahead. Go ahead.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: I think it depends on the contract. I think it depends on the issue at-hand. It's-- can't give a blanket answer.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, is there-- is there-- does MOIA have any plans given federal enforcement actions? And I think we're probably over 5,000 people that have been detained at 26 Federal Plaza at this point. Do you have any plans at all to address this issue within your capacity in a more forward way than depending on the providers who are maxed out?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That really depends on the available resources we have to additional staff to be able to do this work. You know, our focus has been-- and my colleagues here can share

1 more. It's been on making sure that providers have
2 support as registering their contracts so that they
3 can get paid. Then they can fully staff, and that's
4 a big challenge, of course. I think we've done
5 everything to speed up the process, and I think we're
6 at-- in a good place. And again, I'm not-- I'm open
7 to doing more on the ground, but again, we need more
8 staff and resources to be able to do that.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: And I will
11 say that we have focused on just build and adding
12 onto infrastructure. So, I spoke a little bit about
13 the Department of Ed-- because part of the issue is
14 also well, I think now the information that's out,
15 but how do we get to people at the right moment. So,
16 because of that, we've created this work with the
17 Department of Education. We have also-- and I know
18 you haven't asked about this yet, but the funding and
19 some of the changes that we've done with the legal
20 support hotline as well just to increase access
21 points for individuals who are calling about some of
22 these issues. Preparing our hotline counsel is very
23 intentionally-- I don't know if Liz or Margaret are
24 here from Catholic Charities, because most are
25 calling them probably every other day, but just to

1 build the infrastructure for our hotline counselors
2 to be at the ready if calls are received regarding
3 some of these issues. So, I would identify those,
4 too, as some of the work that we've been building in
5 regards to infrastructure.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, how does-- how
8 is MOIA coordinating with legal service providers to
9 ensure rapid deployment of legal counsel to
10 individuals who are detained or in enforcement
11 operations like we just saw?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Well, we
13 just met with our legal service centers just last
14 Friday just to walk through scenarios, but also
15 detention and deportation frameworks of support and
16 work and things that have to be done. So, I would
17 say that we've met with them. This is where we're
18 leveraging the legal technical mentor program IARC to
19 support us with some of this work, because there's--
20 we face challenges, right? Challenge number one is
21 what you started with. It's just not all of the
22 providers have this niche expertise. So, building
23 that support system and trainings which we hve done
24 to give them that ability to capacity will always be
25 an issue, and working through, again, via our LTM,

1 and I am definitely getting ahead of myself here, but
2 figuring out a way to map out-- and Enrique was
3 talking a little bit about this, and this is why
4 we're meeting with them. Map out a capacity and
5 specificity of any specialized work that they will be
6 doing, and that's some of the work that's ongoing
7 right now. I will say that we also leverage and work
8 with our Rapid Response Legal Collaborative to see
9 what other support we can provide. I know that
10 Council has been very gracious in funding them
11 additionally, but also in providing additional
12 funding for NYFUP as well.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I definitely
15 appreciate that. I think I'm a little confused
16 about-- I mean, I think it's fair to say that this
17 context is incredibly difficult for everyone
18 involved, certainly, but I think I'm really
19 struggling with the mapping out capacity in real-time
20 when we've already expended all the resources and made
21 all those decisions like not having a sense of what
22 the capacity actually is. So, I-- maybe I'm missing
23 something and not--

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]
25 I would say that I hope you-- we have a meeting of

1 the minds here, but what I'm specifically-- at the
2 core of what I'm referring to is our legal support
3 centers which some providers are new, and not to sort
4 of be dismissive of what you're saying, that
5 providers overlap, but that's part of what I'm trying
6 to get at, that we are trying to get a better sense
7 of some of the new providers that are coming in, but
8 also like meet these new providers. Some of them have
9 restructured the way that they're providing services
10 as well and/or what they want to do, and that's what
11 I mean by that.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. I think we
14 have more to discuss, but don't need to do it-- do
15 not agree. I mean, I think clearly there's a lot of
16 new providers and there's a changing context and
17 there are more expert providers also on deck with new
18 needs which is part of the challenge of having a
19 whole new program at a whole new time that wasn't
20 actually-- you know, only gave them \$5,000 more in
21 their contracts. So, let's see. Does MOIA
22 coordinate with detention facilities, federal
23 agencies or legal service providers to facilitate
24 attorney/client communication? And if so, is there
25 an established process MOIA can point to?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, we don't. We don't coordinate with federal agencies on enforcement or the detention centers, and that--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Not on enforcement.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Oh, sorry.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: We absolutely do not do that.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Right.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: On facilitating attorney/client communication, like making sure that their people--

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: No.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: How is MOIA addressing reports that detained individuals often just lose contact with their legal representative for days and weeks after being detained or while in court or legal appointments?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Repeat the question, sorry.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: How are you addressing the reports that individuals are losing contact with their legal representatives?

1
2 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, we, I think as
3 we've mentioned we really-- we work with our
4 contracted providers to see what support we can
5 provide, and if anything is elevated to us. Outside
6 of that, though, if it's not made known to us
7 directly, we wouldn't really be privy to that
8 information. But where it is known to us or where we
9 hear of an instance or reach out-- one example I
10 could say was recently in the New York Times. We
11 heard of a youth who was put in detention who was
12 under 18. After their mom had self-removed, we
13 immediately reached out to Flores counsel who is in
14 charge of overseeing compliance with the Flores
15 Settlement Agreement in ORR shelters to provide any
16 support. And then they then connected us with other
17 providers so that we can continue that conversation.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And how is
19 MOIA ensuring continuity of legal representation and
20 case management when someone is detained and
21 transferred to a facility outside of New York City?

22 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Again, that's a very
23 tricky one. We engage closely with our providers to
24 see if there's some support we can provide, but given
25 the interstate challenges, it's not always a

straightforward or necessarily fruitful conversation that gets to a desired result.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, is case management-- so, I-- legal representation is one, and I hear the jurisdictional challenges with that aspect, but the case management aspect, is any part of it also directed to family members of impacted individuals, and does that-- and is there any continuity there and/or support?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: This is part of the work that-- well, the answer to your question-- well part to the answer of your question is yes, especially with the work that we're doing with the Department of Education and those cases that we learn, because of course, if one parent is picked up, then we hear from the other parent who might be picked up, and that's sort of part of the work that we're doing, again, with the DOE, but that's very specific. I think-- but some of the rest of the cases to Enrique's point and if we hear about them, we'll try to triage again to leverage some of the legal service support centers if we can. But I can say is that with the Department of Education, it's very sort

of specific and we try to get to the whole family if we can.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in terms of the provider-- first of all, I mean, the partnership with the Department of Education Project Open Arms, you know, I think that's exactly what we should be doing is overlaying and integrating services. So, you know, obviously thank you for your partnership on that. It's super important. But we have everybody else, right? You have 25 centers and people are often connected to families. It's very rare for them to be just floating individuals, although there are a bunch. So, does any part of the case service management, does that continue? Is there a continuum of support or encouragement? And how are providers encouraged to do that?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yeah, so as part of the RFP process, the ability to provide case management and additional services was one of the things that the committee considered where applicants for the RFP laid out their network and their access to additional support beyond legal services. And it is expected through the RFP that folks are provided that case management, or at least at minimum a

1 referral to that case management where it's not
2 available. I'm not particularly privy to a lot of
3 that stuff, right, and given the RFP process we can't
4 really discuss a lot of that. But I think that's
5 what you're trying to get at.

6
7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And maybe the
8 funding is elsewhere, but in terms of the \$250 for
9 the legal support centers, that is strictly legal
10 service provision. That's not case management,
11 unless that-- that's incorrect.

12 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: it's legal service
13 provision and community navigator, community
14 navigation which it could be case management.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, breakdown for me
16 how \$250,000 works with an attorney and-- I'm sorry,
17 I'm just having--

18 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: [interposing] You're
19 good.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You just blew my
21 mind, because it's even more diluted than I thought.

22 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, there are-- there
23 are legal service requirements. There are not case
24 management requirements, even though it was a
25 consideration for the RFP if that makes sense.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, they were not case service management requirements?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: no, but there is an expectation written to--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Expectation.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: into the scope of work, yes.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. An unfunded expectation, okay. Okay. I understand. How does MOIA currently support or plan to support families and individuals impacted by detention or released from detention? And how is MOIA's non-detained removal support plans look like if those exist?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Well, again, I think-- and just sort of acknowledging that this is sort of very specific, but again, working closely with the DOE to see if there are other services and/or other family members who might need support. And again, like, if we are made aware of a case, then we'll pivot and sort of figure out if there's additional services that a family might need. So, for example, if there have been issues where families have asked to be connected to counselor ser-- general

counsel, for example, and we'll leverage those relationships to connect folks, and if there's other city services, we'll do that as well. But that's if we're sort of made aware of some of that, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in the context of, I think we're aware of, and it's probably more-- there's obviously three high school students that were detained at their hearing, and I'm sure many, many more student whose parents were impacted that we don't know. Do you have a sense of how many students are directly impacted that we are aware of?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I don't have that number, but I can get it from the work that we're doing with the Department of Ed-- I just don't have it in front of me, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: No.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We do.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Oh.
Somewhere under the page.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: While we get that, I will just say that we will only have the number for the ones that are made known to us through that project. Everything else because those youth are in ORR care, and that information is kept very much

solely to the people who have access to represent those kids. We wouldn't-- I believe, and I'm not finding it just yet, but I believe it's something like 14 that we've been made aware of, but I will double check.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. You can report it when you find it later. What is MOIA's relationship with the Mayor's Office to facilitate pro bono legal assistance?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: We had a call with committee counsel, I think last week, so I'm just going to repeat some of the top lines that were shared during that call. Their office, as you know, is relative new, so we have been working with them just to coordinate because the way that it's being built, and again I'm going to limit it because it's the Executive Director Macuse [sp?] is not here, but additional services that might be needed, they're not solely focused on immigration. So, it was shared that part of the work is leveraging the pro bono community here in New York to do things, for example, like housing and other issues that might not be already covered by contractors in the City of New York. So, we have met with the Executive Director to

walk and to sort of also walk through some of the gaps that we see in services. But that's the extent of some of the communication that we've had with them, with the office.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, one phone call to understand what that--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]
No, it's been several.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And has MOIA shared feedback and advise around what the need is?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]
I know the next question. Go for it. Yes, I mean, we know that there are consequences after one individual is picked up for a family which means that rent will be due and services for legal services will be needed, children will not be picked up, support, in figuring out family planning, just to sort of name-- utilities will not be paid. So, things that really sort of put funding toward additional services that come with one person being picked up. Which is an array of issues and services.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: For sure. And I guess since we're here, you know, we did invite the Executive Director to attend this hearing, and it would have been fitting, but of course, they're not here. And I know you cannot respond for that office which is a continued challenge. But I'm going to read some of the questions on the record, and we are requesting that they respond in very timely fashion. So, for those of the public who are not aware, in July of 2025, the Mayor's Office to Facilitate Pro Bono Legal Assistance was announced in tandem with a new investment for legal services for immigrant communities. This office will connect New Yorkers with free legal services, including immigration legal assistance. The website appears to be active and to just function as a repository of legal providers where individuals can seek legal assistance by filling out some kind of referral form. The questions for this office, and if certainly if you can respond to any of them I'd be delighted. We'd like to know that the core mission of this office is and how it differs from your immigration legal support centers, or the DYCD-funded legal contracts? No, okay. We'd like to know how it plans to

integrate with the existing legal service providers. We'd like to know what is the Fiscal 26 budget for this office and what portion of that funding versus direct services, particularly when MOIA needs more staffing. How many staff currently work in the office and what are their primary functions? We'd like to know this office coordinates with MOIA, DYCD, and DSS to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure consistent quality across programs. We'd like to know how many private law firms, bar associations, or individuals and attorneys have committed to providing pro bono legal assistance through this office and how it plans to collaborate with existing legal service organizations. We'd like to know what the process is in place to recruit, train, and vet pro bono attorneys to ensure that they are competent in complex immigration matters like asylum, SIJ, and removal defense. We'd love to know what an estimated number of asylum-seekers or immigrants who have been - who have received pro bono legal assistance through these partnerships in fiscal 26. And certainly, we'd love to know how this office plans to assess the impact of its services on the legal outcomes of immigrant clients. And so, we'll put those in the

record for that office to respond. Thank you for sitting with me through those questions. I'm going to actually just take a step back. I realize we jumped into a line of questioning and skipped over a couple other things. I think-- and Enrique, you mentioned some of the deliverables in the contracts for the legal service center, units of service and then I think you mentioned some other things. But can you just walk me through like what are the deliverables that you are looking towards specifically?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Definitely. So, each legal service-- legal support center is expected to complete 600 units of service. 500 of those, a minimum of 500, have to be achieved by what we call acquired activities. Those are a comprehensive immigration legal screening plus a follow-up action. So, that could be full rep or pro-se rep in a straightforward or complex case. So, that's four different types. A referral to IOI or just brief advice and counsel where in the event that somebody doesn't qualify for something or anything like that. elective activities, each legal support center can choose to reach their 600 by completing certain

activities that they'll be appointed or awarded points for. So, that could be an attorney consultation day, a half-day Know Your Rights, or informational presentation held at their support center, or held in partnership with a hospital, library, school, or faith-based institution, as well as a self-help immigration workshop, legal clinics, or in the interest of building capacity, they can also get elective service units if they train a certain amount of volunteers and get them accredited by the DOJ.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And then--

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: [interposing] And we can provide the breakdown to you.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, that'd be great. And then you mentioned there's monthly check-ins. How many-- how many staff are reviewing, I guess, those monthly reporting structures, and how are you able to keep abreast of assessing?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: I just want to clarify real quick the dif-- just the check-in and the data, right, just because--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Fair point.

1
2 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: the team is conducting
3 quarterly, like, one-on-one check-ins which are very
4 time sensitive, but the monthly data is analyzed by
5 three people on our team, four sometimes. So, it'd
6 be our associate director, the program manager, our
7 data specialist and then just kind of as general
8 office achievements. Our Chief of Staff will take a
9 look at those, too. But on the compliance side, it's
10 usually two folks on our team.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you think that is
12 sufficient?

13 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: I would say that
14 there-- we always benefit from additional staff.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Good answer. In
16 terms of pay-outs, how consistent have the pay-outs
17 been and have contracted services been regularly paid
18 on time?

19 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: We do not have any
20 information on that just yet because the contracts
21 have not-- well, most contracts have not been
22 registered. I believe as of the last time we checked
23 four of the 25 were registered. But we are working
24 very, very closely with the DSS contracts team
25

[inaudible] everybody involved to get those-- to get those registered as soon as possible.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you know why-- what's the delay for that registration?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: It varies. Some of it is, you know, not issues, but inconsistency in a certain address within X document. It really just varies across the providers. I think a good amount of them, though, are in the last stage awaiting Comptroller registration.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And I know we've kind of talked about this in terms of the-- even the playing field. But given the diverse needs of the communities across the five boroughs, how is MOIA ensuring equitable distribution of resources and services to like certainly areas with the highest demands?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Sorry, can you repeat the question. I'm--

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Yeah. How is MOIA ensuring equitable distribution of resources given we know we have areas of the city that have the highest demands?

1
2 DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: Yeah. So, we're
3 maintaining a very close communication with our
4 providers to identify their needs, again, within the-
5 - in the context of the additional fringe y'all gave
6 us. We reached out to see what those needs are or
7 were. I'll also say that for every individual, for
8 every provider is experiencing any issues or delays
9 in the registration of their contract, we make
10 ourselves available and call them directly and
11 connect them directly with our contacts at DSS to get
12 the process moving as forward as possible.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I'm going to
14 add two things. I know that part one of your question
15 is contracts, and then part two of your question is
16 district community specific, I think. For part one,
17 just to add to what Enrique laid out, out of the 25
18 contracts-- this is again the legal support centers--
19 19 are pending Comptroller approval. So, they're
20 with the Comptroller right now. And then two are
21 pending registration package completion which is the
22 back and forth that we're having with some of the
23 contractors for missing information, and then four,
24 as Enrique mentioned, have been registered. And then
25 regarding the districts, I don't have it in front of

1
2 me, but I know that to what Enrique mentioned with
3 the RFX when it was built out, the intention was to
4 provide providers that were in immigrant-dense
5 neighborhoods using data, right, to sort of-- to
6 figure that part out, to ensure that there were
7 services, and to the point that you're making, in
8 areas where there are higher concentrations of
9 immigrant New Yorkers.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank
11 you for the clarification around the status of the
12 contracts. Obviously, it's a pain point for
13 everybody, particularly given the volume of work that
14 is happening.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I will say
16 that we have been-- again, I know I keep saying this
17 but we're taking this so serious in regards to our
18 awareness that people-- we need them registered in
19 order for folks to get paid. So, it has been a very--
20 - a top priority for us to move that as quickly as
21 possible, and I think we're getting there.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you-- what are
23 the mechanisms in place for clients to provide
24 feedback to the new model?
25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I mean, now we will take it back because I think the point that you're really highlighting here is-- of course we will hear from-- well, there's actually-- we hear from mostly are hot line operators. If there's an issue with the just even accessing services for one of our legal service centers, and most of this might be due to just hours of operation, for example, and then we do hear and we do-- Commissioner Castro has really dedicated his time to speaking with community members extensively. So, there has been moments where, you know, we'll hear back from there, but an international mechanism like a survey or something like that has not been developed yet, that we have as of now. So, I would say some of our legal service providers and then part of some of the outreach that's done via Commissioner's events but also like other MOIA staff.

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: And I'll add that our outreach team always elevates any-- our constituency service team will elevate any-- whether they get a call or whether they see something on the field, they'll also elevate that to us directly, and we'll

step in where we can, reach out to the legal service provider and try to provide some type of follow-up.

CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And what are the instructions-- wait. What instructions are provided on the MOIA legal support hotline if someone says that they or a loved one have been detained?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, let me, if I can take a step back, Chair, and just walk you through what actually happens when you call the hotline, and then, but I can skip to that answer, too. The first thing that happens when somebody calls our hotline is that similar to 311 there's-- somebody answers and there's three languages, but we're also looking to expand and the voicemail or the interactive voice response system says that the call is confidential and then gives the caller the option to select a preferred language. From that moment the second step is that there is a scripted intake that we've worked with the counselors and develop, and then step three is sort of when the screening happens. If somebody has called and identifies that they have been and/or needs services, they would be directed to either-- primarily to the RLC and our intake specialists will fill out forms. We've

1 implemented another system in which we've made-- we
2 have asked to be made aware such cases are being
3 flagged so we can elevate. And we've taken it a step
4 further. We've brought in the Rapid Response Legal
5 Collaborative to meet with hotline counselors to
6 ensure that, again, like back to the meeting of the
7 minds, like what's missing? What has to change? How
8 can we make this coordination better? And that's
9 part of the work that we're doing. With some of the
10 additional funding that MOIA has put in via sort of
11 like this-- our work towards, you know, just
12 responding in a rapid way, there's also a hotline
13 counselors that's going to be exclusively dedicated
14 to some of this work. We learned through our
15 engagement primarily with Catholic Charities that
16 they also a deportation related hotline for ONA,
17 which also sort of they manage.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: My mic is on.

20 Thank you. Thank you for that response. So, I'm
21 going to-- I'm going to turn it over to Council
22 Member Bottcher, but I'm also going to turn over the
23 presiding of the hearing to Council Member Brewer for
24 a bit. I hopefully will be back soon enough. So,
25 Council Member Bottcher?

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: Thank you,
3 Chair Avilés, and thank you to all the members of the
4 committee and to the administration for being here
5 today. Can you confirm whether the Adams
6 administration or anyone in the Adams administration
7 had any advance knowledge of the federal enforcement
8 operation on Canal Street, specifically the one
9 executed by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
10 and partner agencies, and if so, what was the timing
11 and nature of those briefings?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Council
13 Member. I cannot speak on behalf of the entire
14 administration, but I will tell you that like many
15 others, we heard the rumors. We heard-- we hear
16 rumors about possible enforcement actions that don't
17 come to fruition. In this case, they did. MOIA upon
18 learning of these rumors, we prepared to send out
19 information to community members, get in touch with
20 anyone who may have been impacted. In this case, we
21 reached out to the Street Vendor Project and other
22 advocate groups that were involved in responding. We
23 sent out a mass mailing with our immigration legal
24 hotline to make sure that any family impacted can
25 have a place to reach and report that their family

1 member may have gone missing and needs support. But
2 again, in the environment that we're in, it is always
3 uncertain whether a rumor or information that is
4 being spread is true or not. We also received
5 information, for instance Friday of last week, that
6 did not pan out. And for us, it's important to say
7 to the community that we have to manage this
8 information carefully. We don't want to cause any
9 panic, but we certainly have to be prepared for any
10 type of enforcement. But again, I can only speak on
11 behalf of MOIA. I'd have to defer to City Hall and
12 other agencies, you know.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Had your
15 agency, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, had you
16 heard any rumors about Canal Street, in particular?

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, that's what I
18 said. We had heard rumors, and again, we immediately
19 prepared to send out information and reach out to any
20 impacted individual.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: But you can't
22 speak to others in the Adam's Administration whether
23 the NYPD was given any heads up or anyone else in the
24 admin?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, we'd have to defer to them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: Thank you.
Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All set? Are you done, Council Member? Okay. I'm-- a couple-- just a few questions and then you're done. One of them is the asylum application help center which we all visited. What-- does this come-- do we know how many completed applications there were at the time of the closure, and those who were not completed, how did they get asylum applications referred and completed if at all?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: We don't have that information. We would have to defer to OASO, but we can circle back.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. That would be helpful. People ask all the time. I know this probably pie in the sky, but do you have any plans, God help us, if the National Guard troops are federalized in New York City? Commissioner or somebody?

DIRECTOR CHAVIRA: So, a lot of these conversations happening, you know, as the Director of

1
2 Programs and Policy, I probably won't-- don't have a
3 lot of insight into them, but I also just-- a lot of
4 those conversations happen in settings where
5 privilege is invoked, and we wouldn't be able to
6 share a lot in a public forum like this one. So,
7 I'll just leave it there.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Conversation is
9 taking place, that's good. Okay.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: But we'll
11 also say that like we've been as a city very clear
12 that the National Guard is not needed in City of New
13 York. We condemn those actions and even trying to
14 bring tax in here, and you know, I think just to add
15 to what Enrique mentioned, there have been multiple
16 scenarios that we've been working through since 2024
17 in regards to what could happen. But toward
18 Enrique's point, there's a bit of a limit of what we
19 can say.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Chicago story of
21 that person's house and the workers was about as
22 horrible as it gets. So, I would assume then that
23 the agencies that you're working with regarding this
24 topic internally that you have priorities and you are
25

meeting, but understandably not to be discussed in public, is that correct?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright. You're done. Thank you very much. And we're going to call the panel. Next. Thank you very much and for all your work.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you so much, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I now open the hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this is a government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. 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 table. Members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such records to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. And I want to thank the Sergeants for putting the heat on. It's freezing in here. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be

1 recognized. I think many of you have done that. when
2 you are recognized, you will have three minutes to
3 speak on today's oversight hearing which is, as you
4 know, legal services for immigrant New Yorkers or on
5 Resolution 1014. If you need a written statement or
6 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
7 the record, provide a copy to the Sergeant at Arms.
8 You may also email written testimony to
9 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of the
10 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
11 will not be accepted. For in-person, please come up
12 to the table once your name has been called, and we
13 will soon call the witnesses. Rosa Cohen-Cruz, come
14 on up. Christine Clarke, please come up. Shawn
15 Blumberg, please join us, and Deborah Lee. And
16 whomever would like to start, go right ahead.

18 ROSA COHEN-CRUZ: Good morning. My name
19 is Rosa Cohen-Cruz. I'm the director-- or good
20 afternoon now. I'm the Director of Immigration Policy
21 at the Bronx Defenders. Thank you to Council Member
22 Brewer, Chair Avilés, and the committee members.
23 Thank you for holding the hearing today to address
24 issue of legal services for immigrant communities at
25 a critical time where ICE is already targeting New

1
2 Yorkers and preparing to escalate their presence in
3 our communities. I want to begin by recognizing and
4 sincerely thanking City Council for its tremendous
5 commitment to increasing legal services for detained
6 immigrants through NYFUP funding. Thanks to the
7 increase, NYFUP funding. Thanks to the increase,
8 NYFUP is more equipped to meet the moment and provide
9 critical representation to New Yorkers in ICE
10 detention. NYFUP ensures that the people we
11 represent, our neighbors, family members and
12 community, are not forced to navigate deportation
13 proceedings from detention. It's an extraordinary--
14 alone. It's an extraordinary model and a testament
15 to New York's leadership, but it cannot meet the full
16 scale of complexity of today's challenges alone.
17 Despite these investments, the need continues to grow
18 and evolve. At the Bronx Defenders, we regularly
19 receive calls from people seeking representation for
20 ICE check-ins, naturalization and other applications
21 for status, non-detained cases, post-conviction
22 relief, or federal representation. We are proud to
23 offer our community intake project to serve walk-in
24 Bronx residents, and this program has expanded to
25 serve more people seeking help in the Bronx, a

historically under-resourced borough. However, the cases coming in through this work are increasingly complicated, often involving individuals in imminent risk of detention. They require time, specialized expertise and sustained representation to keep families together and protect people's rights. We have built out community intake capacity with the funding we currently have, but we are still stretched to the limit. We regularly have to turn people away who are trying to access our services, and our staff face difficult choices about who we can represent. Too often, we are forced to prioritize only those at the highest risk of detention and deportation, leaving many others unserved despite their urgent need for help. The complexity of these matters is increasing as immigration law become harsher, immigration judges replaced with less-experienced decision-makers, and access to bond is more restrictive than ever. For many clients, the real fight is now in federal court where expertise and swift action can mean the difference between deportation and safety. Many of these cases are deeply complex and cannot be adequately handled through brief consultations or limited scope

1 services. What our communities need is full-scope
2 representation, full-scope long-term representation.
3 We urge the City Council to consider expanding
4 funding for full-scope representation, investing in
5 staffing experts and travel resources to meet the
6 growing need for intensive time-sensitive advocacy
7 and strengthen support of community-based walk-in
8 immigration services, particularly in under-resourced
9 areas of the city. The last point I'll make is the
10 Bronx Defenders of course supports Resolution 1014
11 condemning the Trump administration's use of
12 federalized National Guard to repress free speech,
13 militarize American cities, and carry out the anti-
14 immigrant agenda. Thank you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. If
17 you could think of one-- I don't know that that's
18 possible-- whether it's obviously funding, but in
19 terms of the funding complications or travel or we
20 heard earlier people who have Louisiana or Texas
21 opportunities in terms of being able to practice in
22 those states, is there something that you would add
23 to the earlier conversation about what's needed?

24 ROSA COHEN-CRUZ: Yeah, I think that's a
25 great question for this panel. I know we're all the

1
2 NYFUP providers. I think, you know, we do need the
3 increase in funding to be able to meet some of those
4 needs, but what it really is is the long-term
5 sustained funding, because these cases-- especially
6 when we succeed in getting people released or are
7 working with people who are non-detained, these cases
8 can last a decade. I've been practicing over a decade
9 and I have some of my original clients still. And
10 so, I think we are all focusing a lot on enforcement
11 and prevention and that's important, but we must
12 remember that this a long haul fight, and you know,
13 we need to make sure that we're able to continue to
14 meet the need over what may be a decade of
15 representation.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Next.

17 SHAWN BLUMBERG: Good afternoon. My name
18 is Shawn Blumberg, and I am the Associate Director of
19 the Immigrant Community Action Project at Brooklyn
20 Defender Services. Thank you, Council Member Brewer,
21 Chair Avilés and the Committee on Immigration for
22 inviting us to testify today. BDS' immigration
23 practices protect the rights of immigrant New Yorkers
24 by defending against ICE detention and deportation,
25 minimizing the adverse immigration consequences of

1 criminal and family court cases for non-citizens and
2 representing people and applications for immigration
3 benefits. The gravity of this situation for
4 immigrants in New York City is almost beyond
5 comprehension. People are being snatched off the
6 streets by masked, plain clothes ICE agents.
7 Teenagers are being detained at the very courthouses
8 they're appearing at to do the right thing as part of
9 the legal system, and due process is dangerously
10 becoming a thing of the past. We are grateful to the
11 Council for your investment in immigration legal
12 services, including expanding funding for NYFUP to
13 ensure more New Yorkers facing deportation are
14 represented. We're also grateful for your support
15 for a new school-based immigrant rapid-response to
16 legal access initiative to ensure more immigrant
17 families and students have access to legal
18 information and support. Today, I am here to speak
19 about clients we aren't able to serve. We specialize
20 in working with people who have complex immigration
21 cases, including Criminal and Family Court
22 involvement, but in our current funding and staffing
23 levels, we are unable to meet the demand for
24 immigration legal services coming from our other
25

1 practices, and yet as a result of this hyper-
2 enforcement, we not only have more cases, but often
3 need to begin our representation much earlier. The
4 risks encountered by non-citizens seeking relief
5 affirmatively before USCIS or in court have never
6 been higher. It used to be relatively rare that
7 people checking in with ICE in a wide variety of
8 legal postures were detained. Now, it is commonplace
9 and happens even to people who have some forms of
10 relief granted or who otherwise would have recently
11 have been considered very low risk. People simply
12 trying to appear in-person in their own removal
13 proceedings are detained constantly by ICE agents
14 waiting in the hallways of 26 Federal Plaza. USCIS
15 has new enforcement authority and a policy of placing
16 as many non-citizens in removal proceedings as it
17 can. Also, the risk of detention and what previously
18 would have been low-risk USCIS interviews has
19 dramatically increased. Asking for continuances pro
20 se in Immigration Court is no longer straightforward
21 or safe. We need to do complicated screening and
22 risk analysis at every stage of every encounter with
23 EOAR [sic], USCIS, or ICE. Investing in existing
24 legal services organizations which have the
25

1 expertise, experience, structures, and supervisors to
2 on-board and expand staffing is the quickest way for
3 the City to meet this urgent need. With additional
4 funding we could efficiently hire and on-board
5 immigration attorneys, DOJ-accredited representatives
6 and social workers to meet the growing demand for
7 immigration representation. Thank you for your time
8 and I welcome any questions.

9
10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

11 DEBORAH LEE: My name is Deborah Lee and
12 I'm the attorney in charge of the Immigration Law
13 Unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you, Council
14 Member Brewer, Chair Avilés, and this committee for
15 this opportunity. As my colleagues at BXD and BDS
16 have testified, we thank you for your generous
17 support of the New York Immigrant Family Unity
18 Project which provides legal representation to non-
19 citizen New Yorkers detained by the federal
20 government and separated from their families here.
21 We're also grateful for the funding for unaccompanied
22 minors and families initiative and other innovative
23 programs. These investments reflect the Council's
24 unwavering commitment to justice for all New Yorkers.
25 The prospect for detained non-citizens is dire.

After detention, families may go days without knowing where their loved one is or how to reach them.

Individuals may be held at 26 Federal Plaza, then transferred across the region or even the country.

Beyond poor conditions and lack of access to counsel, the greatest threat detained non-citizens face today is the near elimination of bond. What this means is

that non-citizens who are detained will very likely remain detained until they can either win or retain their immigration status which will most likely

require one or two levels of appeals. This could take many, many months with no prescribed time period for resolution. DHS is aggressively appealing grants of status and blocking release at every turn,

essentially coercing many into accepting deportation in the meantime simply to escape the prospect of

indefinite detention. For many, the only practical

option for potential release back to their family and community is through habeas petitions before a

federal district court. Immigration representation

remains essential, and a robust habeas practice is

now a critical, distinct tool to defend against

removal. Legal Aid is proud to have a federal

litigation team for this, but we are limited in the

face of overwhelming need and are working hard to expand our capacity. We are at a growing flashpoint. Detentions at court and ICE check-ins are increasing, raids are happening blocks from here, and our federal government continues to threaten what amounts to martial law in this city. In the face of this, we applaud Council Member Cabán's Resolution 1014 which condemns the use of a federalized National Guard to advance an anti-immigrant and anti-democratic agenda. Let us unite together against this erosion of our civil liberties. Thank you again for your commitment to justice.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

CHRISTINE CLARKE: Good afternoon. My name is Christine Clarke. I'm the Chief of Litigation and advocacy at Legal Services NYC. We are not a NYFUP provider, but we do provide immigration legal services to many thousands of people through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative known as IOI. I think you know what I'm going to say about IOI which is the funding isn't sufficient and it's insufficiently flexible. Although, I will thank the Council for being very involved in this grant and helping to increase the pot of money, particularly

recently, including for filing fees. But I will also talk a little bit about some of the questions that Council Member Avilés asked earlier. You know, IOI pays about \$3,300 per full-representation case. For most cases, that comes out to less than minimum wage in terms of the hourly work required by our attorneys. We obviously pay our staff more than minimum wage, and that money has to come from somewhere else. As you all know, funding for this work is drying up at the federal level. It's being threatened and it's disappearing entirely. Also, you know, like Ms. Lee said, we follow our clients wherever they go, whatever happens to them. So, if our asylum client from 10 or 20 years ago gets detained, we will file their habeas case for them. We'll go to emergency court for them. If they get moved to Florida, we'll follow them to Florida, but that money-- that representation is entirely unfunded. We accompany all of our clients to every check-in because the only way to win an emergency federal habeas case is to know what procedural irregularities happened at the detention, and the only way to know that is to go, and you spend three, four, six, eight hours there, starting at 6:00 a.m.

1 on a Saturday or whenever. All of that work is fully
2 unfunded at the moment. When our clients-- when New
3 York City residents are moved out of state, there is--
4 - there's no one else who can help them. So, we had
5 a client who was moved to so-called Alligator
6 Alcatraz, and if you look at the docket of the
7 [inaudible] district of Florida, there is not one
8 habeas case for an immigration detainee that was
9 filed by counsel. There just-- there's no one
10 nationally to help New York City residents. We have
11 to do it, and we need to be funded to do that. Thank
12 you.

13
14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
15 much. Thank you. Next panel. Pooja Asnani,
16 Sanctuary for Families, Sierra Kraft, Celina Munoz,
17 and Marilia Richards. Whomever would like to start,
18 go right ahead.

19 SIERRA KRAFT: Hi, good afternoon. My
20 name is Sierra Kraft and I'm the Executive Director
21 of ICARE Coalition. We're a coalition of legal
22 service providers dedicated to providing free legal
23 services to unaccompanied immigrant children in New
24 York City. In the past 10 years, we have served over
25 14,000 children and families, and with the Council's

1 historic \$16.5 million investment in immigrant youth,
2 we've been able to expand our centralized legal
3 referral process to include immigrant youth under the
4 age of 21 residing in New York City. So, this
5 additional investment has kept the doors open when
6 federal funding and protections were pulled back and
7 kids were left to figure out deportation proceedings
8 on their own. So, your leadership quite literally
9 stopped children from disappearing into the system.
10 But I also need to be honest about what we're up
11 against right now. Children who have crossed the
12 borders to stay alive are being treated like
13 enforcement targets. The federal government is
14 offering \$2,500 to voluntarily deport and almost no
15 time to decide, and their cases are being rushed
16 before they have time to find an attorney, and this
17 is pressurizing traumatized kids to walk away from
18 their rights. At the same time, dockets for
19 immigrant children are being fast-tracked and
20 continuances are getting shorter for kids without
21 counsel. Sponsors are now afraid that stepping
22 forward could expose them to detention, and children
23 are sitting in federal custody for months instead of
24 weeks, some cases taking more than 200 days, isolated

1 in facilities instead of in safe homes and schools
2 while watching children who have approved SIJ get
3 funneled toward deportation instead of protection.
4 This is not who we are as a city. The Council has
5 already stepped up, but we need to go further. As
6 you've heard from the panel this morning and from
7 advocates that we need multi-year funding for
8 immigrant youth defense. One-year funding keeps
9 programs in triage and we need stability so we can
10 plan, hire, and stay with kids throughout the long
11 arc of their case, and we need funding for full-scope
12 representation. Additionally, we need to support the
13 full ecosystem, not just the lawyers but court
14 preparation, in-court navigation, language access,
15 and mental health support. Children are walking into
16 high-stakes hearings alone and we have to meet them
17 there. Additionally, we're all responding in state
18 of emergency. I would also inquire how we can
19 consider how to unlock additional resources knowing
20 that we're living in a crisis and this is an
21 emergency, and that calls for emergency resources.
22 Thank you for your partnership and refusing to look
23 away. We need to keep fighting with everything we
24 have, but we need you alongside us with funding,
25

advocacy and an unwavering commitment to protect immigrant children. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

POOJA ASNANI: Good morning. Good afternoon, rather. Good afternoon, Chair Brewer and the rest of the committee and the members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Pooja Asnani and I'm the Senior Director of the Immigration Intervention Project of Sanctuary for Families, New York City's largest provider of comprehensive services for survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, and related forms of gender-based violence. We are so grateful for the opportunity to testify today. Almost exactly two years ago, in October of 2023, I testified before this committee about the surge of asylum-seekers arriving in New York City and Sanctuary's efforts to address the huge need for immigration legal assistance to help these folks. Today, we confront a stark new reality under the Trump administration. The flow of new immigrants has ground to a halt, as everyone here knows, and those who are already here are at the most dire risk of detention and deportation. All but U.S. citizens appear to be at

1 risk, and shockingly, the current level of
2 immigration enforcement even threatens non-white
3 citizens. When I spoke to the committee two years ago
4 we were launching a new gender-based asylum
5 initiative, mustering extensive pro bono support from
6 10 law firms to offer pro se assistance to a high
7 volume of asylum-seekers. These migrants were
8 uprooted from their homes in Venezuela, Ecuador,
9 Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras and other parts
10 of the world due to domestic violence and rape, as
11 well as the failure of law enforcement to protect
12 vulnerable people, especially women and children from
13 violence. Through our asylum initiative, we have
14 helped over 200 clients in the past two years to
15 successfully file and litigate I589 applications.
16 Now, like all of our colleagues in the field, our
17 immigration legal team has been compelled to pivot to
18 face the harsh new environment. Most of our clients
19 now need full representation rather than pro se
20 assistance to have any hope of avoiding deportation.
21 In my own cases, and those of the other lawyers and
22 immigration specialists on my team, I have seen ICE
23 officers wait outside the courtroom for our clients,
24 poised to detain them no matter what the outcome of
25

the hearing, no matter that they came to court in observance of their responsibility within the immigration legal system. In many cases, having an attorney present appears to be the only deterrent to their being snatched away from their families and loved ones. Beyond aggressive immigration enforcement, the Trump administration has made a flurry of changes that make it harder for gender violence survivors to prevail in their cases, let alone avoid expedited removal. They have struck down gender-based violence category of asylum claim. They have terminated humanitarian parole for people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela. They have raised immigration filing fees to unprecedented levels and removed waivers for low-income abuse survivors. For instance, asylum applications previously free-- for as long as asylum has existed here in the United States it's been free-- now require \$100 initial filing fee as well as an additional \$100 annual fee for each year the case is pending. The filing fee for temporary protected status is increased from \$50 to \$500. Sanctuary is one of the very few agencies that covers non-waivable legal filing fees for all of our clients from a combination of public and private

1 funding. And not surprisingly, our resources are
2 stretched to the limit. We are seeing longer wait
3 times for adjudication of humanitarian-related
4 immigration benefits, more mistakes, more erroneous
5 denials, and a sharp increase in requests for
6 evidence even in the most routine cases. Previous
7 directives for ICE agents to refrain from enforcement
8 action against gender violence survivors have been
9 cancelled. There are no longer any such protections.
10 Likewise, previous sensitive locations such as
11 schools, churches, hospitals, and courts that were
12 off-limit to ICE officers are now regular hunting
13 grounds. There is more use of expedited removal in
14 efforts to enlist and deputize other local and state
15 law enforcement officers in enforcement efforts,
16 including in jurisdictions where we practice such as
17 Long Island and outside of New York City. The list
18 goes on and on and it is a daily challenge to keep up
19 with the flood of adverse new rulings and new
20 enforcement tactics.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Can you
23 summarize? Can you summarize? Can you wrap up?

24 POOJA ASNANI: Yes, of course, I can.
25 Yes. At Sanctuary our team has been doing as much as

1 we can. You know, my main point here is that we are
2 increasingly forced to take on cases for full
3 representation simply just be able to protect this
4 person from deportation. As an example, we go
5 through our list of pro se asylum cases, and we are
6 trying our best to enter full notices of
7 representation E28s to be able to accompany them to
8 court or prevent their having to appear in court so
9 that they'll avoid deportation. What that means is
10 our team of about 20-something people is now taxed
11 with more cases than we've ever handled and more than
12 we're able to handle. And we would like assistance
13 as all of my colleagues here are stating to you. We
14 continue to provide high-quality legal services to as
15 many abuse survivors as we can, and we offer a range
16 of holistic services to sanctuary families. We are
17 so pleased to hear about the City's expanded funding
18 for immigration legal services, and it is critical
19 that a substantial portion of that funding be
20 earmarked for service providers, like Sanctuary for
21 Families who are in the trenches fighting alongside
22 New York City's most vulnerable legal immigrant
23 residents. With more money we would be able to staff
24 up and serve more clients and we applaud the efforts
25

of the Immigration Committee to ensure that immigrant gender violence survivors get the help they need to attain safety. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very, very much.

CELINA MUNOZ: Good afternoon. My name is Celina Munoz and I'm a paralegal and DOJ-accredited representative with The Door's Legal Services--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Kelsey [sic], yes.

CELINA MUNOZ: Legal Services Center.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We love Kelsey just so you know.

CELINA MUNOZ: The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization. Our legal services center specializes in serving young people in their immigration matters. Recent immigrants in our city, especially children and young adults, are in extremely vulnerable positions. Multiple Door members have been violently arrested Immigration Court and ICE check-ins. In June, Mohammad [sp?] who entered the United States alone at 18 years old appeared virtually at his master

calendar hearing. The Immigration Judge ordered him to appear in-person. Mohammad did just that. His case was dismissed, and he was immediately arrested by ICE. He remains detained in Brooklyn. In August, Door member Muktar [sp?] was also arrested at Immigration Court following a routine master calendar hearing. He was quickly moved away from his New York community to a detention center in Pennsylvania. He is also still detained. Just last week, 16-year-old Joelle Camas [sp?] was detained and arrested at a mandatory ICE check-in. Mere weeks earlier, his mother had made extremely-- made the extremely difficult decision to self-deport to try to protect Joelle. Despite this, and the fact that he has approved SIJ, ICE chose to rip him away from his community by arresting and detaining him. MOIA testified that they had reached out to Flores [sic] counsel about our client Joelle, and we want to note that they did not reach out to the Door about our client. As the experiences of Mohammad, Moktar, and Joelle demonstrate ICE arrests and detentions are devastating for both the impacted individuals and their communities. ICE presence and increased arrests create panic, fear, and anxiety in our

1 communities regardless of status. As a Sanctuary
2 City, New York has a proud legacy of protecting its
3 immigrant population so they have access to critical
4 service and a chance to thrive. Now, this legacy is
5 under attack and vulnerable young people are
6 suffering the most. We urge the City Council to
7 take decisive action to reaffirm and strengthen New
8 York City's sanctuary policies, protect immigrant
9 youth from harmful displacement and systematic
10 barriers. By doing so, the city can continue to
11 uphold its values of inclusion, equity and humanity
12 so that immigrant youth can build secure fulfilling
13 lives and contribute to the vibrant fabric of New
14 York City. Thank you.

15
16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
17 much. You're on. You're on.

18 MARILIA RICHARDS: Good afternoon,
19 Council Member Brewer, Chair Avilés, and members of
20 the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to
21 provide testimony--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Pull
23 it towards you just a little bit more, yeah.

24 MARILIA RICHARDS: on behalf of Kids in
25 Need of Defense, also known as KIND. My name is

1 Marilia Richards, and I am the Managing Director of
2 the New York City office at KIND. KIND provides free
3 legal service and social services for unaccompanied
4 children and youth who arrive in the United States.
5 KIND envision a world in which every unaccompanied
6 child on the move has access to legal counsel and has
7 their rights and wellbeing protected as they migrate
8 alone in the United States in search of safety.
9 Since opening our doors in 2009, KIND's New York City
10 office has provided free legal representation to more
11 than 2,000 unaccompanied children across the city.
12 Most unaccompanied children are released from federal
13 custody to family members and sponsors in the
14 community. New York City alone is a top destination
15 nationally for unaccompanied children. In the last
16 two years, more than 4,000 unaccompanied children
17 were released to sponsors in New York City. Funding
18 from New York City Council allows us to provide
19 critical services to children like Omar. Omar is a
20 15-year-old child from El Salvador who was abandoned
21 and neglected by his father. Before leaving El
22 Salvador, Omar complained to his father about
23 persistent pain throughout his body, but he was never
24 taken to a see a doctor. After arriving in the
25

1 United States and while still in the care of the
2 Office of Refugee Resettlement, Omar was taken to a
3 doctor and diagnosed with cancer, which had been the
4 undiagnosed source of his pain. Now, reunited with
5 his mom in New York, he has completed chemotherapy
6 treatments and is on the path to recovery. His pro
7 bono legal team is assisting him with applying for
8 special immigrant juvenile status in order to remain
9 safely in the United States and continue his
10 recovery. He is working hard in school and he
11 undergoes treatment and is looking forward to
12 studying computer science in college. At a time of
13 profound uncertainty, funding for immigrants legal
14 services provided by the city have enabled KIND to
15 continue providing robust, life-saving legal services
16 to children and young people in our community. Thank
17 you for your ongoing commitment to ensuring that
18 unaccompanied children in New York City has access to
19 legal representation that allows them to pursue
20 protection and reach their full potential. And
21 again, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very,
24 very much all of you. The next panel. Jorge Paz
25 Reyes, Desiree Hernandez Sanchez, Raluca Oncioiu, and

Lauren Miglcaccio. Whomever would like to begin, go right ahead.

RALUCA ONCIOIU: Good afternoon, Chair Brewer and members of the City Council Committee on Immigration. My name is Raluca Oncioiu. I'm the Managing Attorney at the Immigration Unit at Catholic Migration Services. CMS is a small but mighty legal providers with decades of experience, and I'm here today-- first of all, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I'm going to actually start backwards, and instead of sharing all the issues that have been confronting us, I'm going to talk about our proposals for how City Council can continue to support immigration legal services program. And first, I'd like to actually acknowledge the fact that the city and City Council has responded to this critical moment and made a significant investment in immigration legal services programs in this year's budget. In particular, CMS would like to recognize the fact that after losing city funding for our pro se services, City Council was able to step in and fund us as part of the pro se [inaudible] initiative. More on that later. Here are just a couple of things that were mentioned before. In

2024, Mayor Adams announced the cost of living adjustment to provide three percent annual increase for human services workers as a response to advocacy efforts by the city's nonprofit service sector. This increase, however, has not trickled down to subcontractors who work in coalitions that contract directly with the city. This has left agencies like CMS without access to this three percent COLA to meet rising personnel costs that have increased sharply over the last few years. For smaller nonprofits like CMS, the only way to contract with the city is through collaborations with other organizations to facilitate the contract and reporting management of large grants. We seek the Council support in ensuring that all city nonprofits obtain this important three percent COLA in all baseline contracts to benefit its hard-working staff.

Something else that hasn't been mentioned is that the Trump administration has slashed federal funding for naturalization programs at a time where not by-- by coincidence actually, the federal policy changes that have been introduced are posting new barriers to naturalization. The stricter good moral character criteria and more complex N648 medical certification

1 for disability exceptions to the civics and English
2 language test. The combined impact of all these
3 policy changes is to make it more difficult for legal
4 permanent residents to become U.S. citizens and for
5 immigration legal service providers to assist them in
6 the process. As a result, assessing eligibility for
7 naturalization has become more resource-intensive and
8 time consuming, but our funding has been slashed. CMS
9 has lost funding that it had for over a decade, and
10 cuts in this program have resulted in the loss of an
11 accredited or representative position, and given the
12 staffing loss and the amounting administrative
13 barriers to-- and legal barriers to naturalization,
14 CMS expects to file 60 to 70 fewer naturalization
15 applications this year at a time when our wait for
16 naturalization is mounting.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Go ahead. You can
19 sum up. Go ahead.

20 RALUCA ONCIOIU: Okay. One of the things
21 that my colleagues have said and I agree with them
22 100 percent is that full representation needs to be
23 funded. That is the gold standard in today's
24 increasingly complex and hostile immigration
25 landscape. However, right now, and probably for some

time in the future, the demand for qualified immigration attorneys and accredited representative far exceeds the available supply. So, in this situation, I think it's imperative that funders continue to invest in and expand support for pro se legal assistance programs as well, because they play a critical role in bridging the gap and ensuring access to justice for vulnerable immigrants. Just to give you an example, there are fewer-- almost no one coming through the border, so we're not filing pro se asylum applications through our pro se program. However, we pivoted to actually provide other kinds of services to reach out to the people we supported in the past and bring them in and prepare them for their immigration hearing, to prepare their evidence packets and submit them on their behalf to work on their declarations with them. We're still doing this pro se, because we can do more. We can touch more people that way than with full legal representation. So, thank you so much for your vision to continue funding these services alongside full representation. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Who would like to go next?

DESIREE HERNANDEZ SANCHEZ: Good morning.

Sorry, good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Desiree Hernandez Sanchez and I serve as the Director of Legal Services at Catholic Charities Community Services. I would like to start by expressing our deep gratitude to the Council and the city for your leadership in standing with immigrants and robustly funding legal services this year. This year has been extraordinarily difficult. We face unprecedented losses in federal funding for immigration legal services which created a deep instability for both our staff and our clients. In the midst of that uncertainty, the city support has been a lifeline. Your commitment has helped us to cushion the impact of federal cuts and counter the harm caused by increased federal enforcement. Because of the city's support, we were not only able to sustain but expand our most critical services for vulnerable immigrants. We've retained our experienced staff. Immigrant New Yorkers in removal proceedings did not lose their attorneys in the middle of their cases. Children appearing before immigration judges were not left to face immigration court alone, and our hot line

continues to provide critical information to thousands of immigrant New Yorkers and their families. Looking ahead, we respectfully ask that the New York City Council consider the following priorities to ensure that the City's investment remains effective and sustainable, and it's going to sound very familiar to all of you. The first one is to provide multi-year commitments to allow long-term planning and stability for both our clients and our staff. Announce earlier warn [sic] notifications to avoid any interruption of our services so programs can avoid layoffs and maintain continuity of services between fiscal years. Please grant regular funding increases, like Raluca just mentioned, to keep pace with the rising cost of living and providing quality legal services. And finally, make timely contract payments to prevent operational disruptions that can jeopardize staffing and client support. New York City has long been a national model for compassion and justice. Your continued partnership ensures that immigrant New Yorkers are not left to navigate an increasingly punitive federal system alone. On behalf of Catholic Charities, thank you for your leadership and your commitment to ensuring that all immigrants

in our city have access to justice and a chance to thrive. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

JORGE PAZ REYES: Dear Chair Brewer, my name is Jorje Paz Reyes, and I'm the community organizer at Unlocal. Thank you for this space and for the continual commitment to immigrant communities in New York City. Unlocal is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving New York City immigrant communities through immigration legal services and community education. Unlocal robust team of lawyers and advocates provide free legal advice and representation to immigrants' communities through New York State on immigration related matters. Our team provides legal representation to individuals interacting in the immigration system at all stages of the process. Just in the past year, our Rapid Response Legal Collaborative team has supported hundreds of individuals facing deportation, combined with our pro se+ [sic], LGBTQIA+, DACA eligible, and other clients [inaudible] hundreds of community members seeking support and assistance. Today, we're here to voice our support-- our strong support for

Resolution 1014 2025 and to emphasize the continued necessity of investing in legal community-based support for our immigrant neighbors. At Unlocal we've had to adapt rapidly to the changing and hostile immigration climate. Our workshops now prepare individuals for the realities they might face during court hearings or ICE check-ins, from what to bring and what to wear, to setting up power of attorney, and making sure that loved ones know where they are. as law enforcement presence and profiling have increased, we also expand our education to include all community members, including U.S. citizens, ensuring everyone knows their rights and how to stay safe. The actions of the federal immigration agents don't just harm individual families, they tear the fabric of our city. They drain our economy, our communities and the very values that make New York a place for safety. For instance, our client Pablo, a member of the LGBTQ community seeking asylum, has spent more than a year in a detention center in Florida navigating fear of deportation, solitary confinement and isolation. He speaks about the power of having organizations like Unlocal be present at every step of someone's

1 immigration process. With our support, Pablo is
2 still fighting for the right to call the United
3 States home where he can be free to be himself and
4 using his experiences to facilitate difficult
5 conversations about race and survival coping
6 mechanisms with all the LGBTQ communities. We also
7 would like to thank MOIA and City Council for the
8 ongoing support to our immigrant youth as we have
9 been chosen to host the dreamer center [sic] to
10 provide support to immigrants who want to-- work
11 development force training as well as assistance in
12 applying to college through the New York State Dream
13 App [sic]. With continued support, organizations
14 like Unlocal remain committed to meeting the moment.
15 We believe it's realistic, holistic, and community
16 [inaudible] approach to legal advocacy. Legal
17 services are essential, but they must be paired with
18 timely education, trust building and mutual support
19 if we're truly here to protect our communities. We
20 thank Council for the support for immigrant legal
21 services, social workers, advocates, and organizers.
22 Thank you so much for your time.

23
24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
25 much. Next.

LAUREN MIGLICACCIO: Thank you, Council Member Brewer and to Chair Avilés. My name is Lauren Miglcaccio. I'm the Training and Legal Technical Assistance Director at the Immigrant Justice Corps. The Immigrant Justice Corps is the nation's first immigration fellowship program and Immigrant Justice Corps is proud to say that we have 45 active fellows still in the field here in New York City. This was born out of the Katzman [sic] study from Immigration Services, and Immigrant Justice Corps focuses on reducing the justice gap for immigrant families and enhancing access to social and economic opportunities. IJC supports the resolution condemning the Trump administration's militarization of cities and repression of free speech. The deployment of federalized National Guard troops threatens constitutional rights and due process protections. Immigration enforcement has seen a 50 percent increase under this administration of detained immigrants. Policies have included aggressive removal tactics, mandatory detention expansion, and the near obliteration of bond, and expansion of expedited removal. The legal environment for non-citizens in this country has

become increasingly hostile with significant enforcement actions and policy changes. ICE detains approximately 60,000 individuals daily with many arrests occurring near courthouses and other places that have previously been safe locations. The Trump administration has actively targeted sanctuary cities including New York and seeks to enforce for immigrants on a daily basis. New policies aim to suspend federal funding for jurisdictions with sanctuary policies. The National Guard and troops being deployed into other cities have given us a glimpse as to what could happen here in our homes and to our neighbors. The demand for legal services for immigrants is at an all-time high, necessitating increased access to representation. As of September 2025, there were 3.4 million pending immigration cases with only 21 percent of cases initiated in fiscal year 2024 having representation. Many immigrants lack access to legal services risking unrepresented and underserved populations. Non-lawyer advocates can provide essential support allowing attorneys the opportunity to focus on complex cases and improving overall access to justice. The Immigrant Justic Corps is proudly part of MOIA's

1 legal technical mentorship and support, and what IJC
2 has done to support the legal service centers is
3 provide new court corners [sic], trainings on special
4 immigrant juvenile status, and has provided other
5 legal technical mentorship to the legal service
6 centers.
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.
9 Perfect timing. Thank you very much. And 3.4 is New
10 York City? 3.4 million cases is New York City?

11 LAUREN MIGLICACCIO: Is the national.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's the
13 national. That's what I wanted-- and 21 percent the
14 national. Okay. Thank you all very much for
15 everything that you're doing. Thank you. Margarita
16 Guzman, Jeehae Fischer, Yasmeen Hamza, and Hamra
17 Ahmad. I think there's one person missing. So, Paula
18 Inhargue from United Neighborhood Houses. Can you--
19 are you here? Alright. Just go ahead you all, and
20 then we'll go to the next panel. Whoever would like
21 to start first.

22 MARGARITA GUZMAN: Thank you. Good
23 afternoon, Chair Avilés and the rest of the
24 Committee. My name is Margarita Guzman. I'm the
25 Executive Director at the Violence Intervention

1 Program, the only organization in New York City led
2 by and for Latina survivors of domestic and sexual
3 violence. All of our offices are located in
4 communities that are immigrant-dense, low-income, and
5 largely Latin-American in heritage. We provide
6 holistic services, providing everything from
7 emergency domestic violence shelter and crisis
8 counseling to long-term economic stability supporting
9 survivors to build small businesses and seek their way
10 out here in the United States. The majority of the
11 people that we are working with are immigrant
12 mothers. All of them are survivors of domestic or
13 sexual violence, and all of them are low-income. I
14 want to talk about two of them today. Change names
15 for the sake of their privacy. When Gloria came to
16 VIP earlier this year we referred her to Legal
17 Services which is one service that we do not provide
18 on-site yet to pursue both an asylum claim and an
19 application for U-Visa. While she was waiting for
20 legal services, a long wait, she received a hearing
21 at-- she had a hearing date at Immigration Court that
22 she missed. 10 days later she got her removal order,
23 and very shortly after that we lost all contact with
24 her. In the meantime, we were safety planning with
25

her so that she can plan for both her safety within a violent relationship and the threat of deportation.

After many calls, eventually the line went silent and the phone was disconnected. We have no idea what happened to her or how her children are doing.

Another survivor, Katerina, secured an attorney for her VOWA petition after we referred her for help.

Last month, she was detained by ICE, but unlike Gloria, she had a lawyer she could call. We knew that she had been transferred from a detention in Elizabeth, New Jersey to Louisiana, and she was able to communicate with her attorney that entire time.

We learned that her mental health was deteriorating, and she asked if she could continue her VOWA

application from her home country of Chile instead of remaining in the detention center. She ultimately

decided to self-deport back to Chile and pursue her VOWA claim from there. Nobody wanted that outcome,

but in this case, because she had legal counsel, she had some agency in the decision-making about what was

going to happen and still has hopes to actualize her VOWA claim from Chile. There are hundreds more

survivors that we have referred to the legal services that currently have status, work permits, green

1 cards, and naturalized citizenship because they were
2 able to receive those important legal services. As
3 you know, for survivors of domestic and sexual
4 violence there are sometimes more options because of
5 humanitarian legislation that has been passed to give
6 them pathways to citizenship, but that doesn't matter
7 if there are no legal services available for them to
8 pursue those pathways with informed legal advice.
9 The remarkable difference between having an attorney
10 or reliable legal advice, or even just accurate legal
11 information can very much be the difference between
12 having a path to remain in the United States or
13 disappearing without a trace as what happened to our
14 survivor Glori. Thank you so much for your
15 investment to help shift the tide in immigrant-- for
16 immigrant survivors, and thank you for standing with
17 immigrants and using your power to expand the
18 services available to them here.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

20 YASMEEN HAMZA: Good afternoon, Chair
21 Avilés and Council Member Brewer and the remaining
22 Council Members. My name is Yasmeen Hamza and I'm
23 the CEO at Womankind. Thank you for the opportunity
24 to speak today and to encourage the Council to
25

continue investing in Immigration Legal Services for survivors of gender-based violence, especially now when the need is greater than ever. Womankind is an AAPI-serving gender-based violence organization that works with survivors to rise above trauma and build a path to healing. We serve over 2,600 survivors and their family members at any given time throughout the year. Womankind is also a member of the Collective, a coalition of culturally-specific gender-based violence organizations serving communities of color and immigrant communities throughout NYC. Survivors in our community are facing an unprecedented barrier due to the current federal administration's policies and practices. Our legal program is seeing significant delays in the processing of work authorizations, increased requests for evidence that ask for additional information about a survivor's trauma, and prolonged timelines for all forms of immigration relief. These delays are not just bureaucratic, they are life-altering. They prevent survivors from accessing employment, housing and safety. They create barriers for them to actually be able to leave a harmful relationship and continue to stay in systems of control. In addition to the

administrative delays, the increased presence of ICE in our communities has created a climate of fear and re-traumatization for survivors of gender-based violence. The threat of detention or deportation discourages them from seeking help, reporting or accessing critical services. This systematic violence not only undermines their safety but also erodes trust in institutions meant to protect them. Survivors deserve to heal in environments free from intimidation and harm, not to be retraumatized by the very systems that should be offering support. Womankind's legal program was built from the ground up over 14 years ago to meet the unique needs of our community, particularly with immigration relief. Despite our proven track record, Womankind was not renewed for federal funding this year and our federal funds that do allow us to provide legal services have a new clause of unallowable costs for immigration legal support. This loss is devastating, not just for our organization, but for the survivors who rely on us for legal support. We are now at a critical juncture. Without sustained investment from local government, we're risking losing a vital lifeline that we've had for 14 years to be able to support

some of our city's most vulnerable residents. We thank the council and continue to urge them to prioritize funding for immigration legal services, particularly for survivors of gender-based violence and to be able to invest in organizations such as Womankind that's deeply rooted in community, that centers survivors' voices and fight every day for justice and healing. Your support can help ensure that survivors have the tools, the resources, and legal protections to be able to rebuild their lives. Thank you so much.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

HAMRA AHMAD: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Avilés, Council Member Brewer and the committee members on Immigration, for the opportunity to testify today and for your ongoing support and oversight and support for our immigrant community. My name is Hamra Ahmad. I am the head of Legal Programs and Policy at Her Justice, a nonprofit organization that has advocated with and for women living in poverty in New York City for over 30 years. Through our pro bono first model, Her Justice serves thousands of clients each year. Since 1993 we have

served 45,000 women and children. We train thousands of lawyers every year who represents our clients pro bono. We know that our clients deserve trained attorneys to represent them in what often takes years for relief. In addition, we engage in policy reform, advocacy and research to address the systemic barriers our clients face. As you well know, the incredible unmet need for competent immigration legal services in New York City is greater than ever. Since 2005, Her Justice has built a specialized immigration practice representing undocumented survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, labor trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence. Our attorneys represent survivors across a broad range of remedies under the Violence Against Women Act, U and T Visas and citizenship applications. We are seeing an increased demand for our services with both new clients seeking assistance and former and existing clients seeking new kinds of support, as even what once felt like secure legal status is now under threat. In 2024, Her Justice had 1,280 active immigration matters, serving 624 individual women. Many of these women had multiple immigration matters involving themselves or their

1 family members. In response, we are stepping up to
2 meet the needs of those clients through bold
3 advocacy, expanding outreach, and ensuring immigrant
4 New Yorkers can access the protections and stability
5 they deserve. We are reaching vulnerable immigrants
6 in our communities. To do that, we are partnering
7 with trusted community-based organizations and
8 district offices to host Know Your Rights events, and
9 legal clinics tailored to the language and cultural
10 needs of each community. We strengthened our online
11 resources and social media outreach to share reliable
12 information, shifting from a basic Know Your Rights
13 curriculum to a rights versus reality. Our immigrant
14 survivor employment access project provides direct
15 legal services, community outreach, and capacity
16 building for partner organizations to help our mutual
17 clients apply for work authorization. In response to
18 the increasingly urgent needs of survivors, we seek
19 to further expand capacity to provide undocumented
20 survivors with a clear pathway to access the
21 transformative legal services to ensure their safety,
22 stability and freedom. There are over three million
23 immigrants in New York City, and immigrant women make
24 up more than half of Her Justice's clients. When
25

immigrant women are lifted, their families and communities rise with them. We thank you for your continued partnership and support. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

PAULA INHARGUE: Hi. Thank you, Council Member Brewer, Chair Avilés and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration for convening today's hearing. My name is Paula Inhargue. I'm policy analyst at United Neighborhood Houses. UNH is a policy and social change organizations representing neighborhood Settlement Houses. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public housing, promote strong organizations, and other practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. The Settlement House model of providing multiple supports under one roof is time-tested, effective, and continues to help the newest New Yorkers. As the federal administration rapidly targets immigrants across the country, following through on the presidents commitment to mass deportation, immigrant communities are increasingly vulnerable and Settlement Houses play a crucial role

in providing these communities with the support and protection they need. We're very thankful to City Council for securing historic \$50 million investment in immigrant legal services. This funding is crucial as immigrant communities rely on these programs to understand their rights and navigate a system that is becoming increasingly more complex. UNH urges the Council to allocate this funding quickly and ensure that it reaches immigrant communities in a trusted way through Settlement Houses and other community-based organizations. Settlement Houses are already trusted anchors in their neighborhoods, providing holistic wrap around support that meets families where they are. This approach ensures that immigrant New Yorkers receive not only the legal help they need, but also the practical and emotional supports that help them build a life in their new homes. Currently, 13 UNH member Settlement Houses are providing immigrants and refugee legal services to over 13,000 people every year with eight of them expanding or launching new legal services since 2022 to meet the needs of newly arrived immigrants. Despite their best efforts, demand continues to far outpace available resources. Increased funding would

1 allow Settlement Houses to expand the services and
2 reach even more families in need, many of whom would
3 otherwise go unserved. By strengthening and
4 expanding free community-based legal services, the
5 Council can ensure that our city remains a place
6 where all New Yorkers regardless of where they come
7 from can belong and thrive. Thank you for your time
8 and for your continued commitment to supporting
9 immigrant New Yorkers and for working to assure this
10 funding is allocated quickly to urgent community
11 needs.
12

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I have
14 a quick question, because I know a lot about trying
15 to find housing, because it's very great to have the
16 services, but if you can't find a place to get away
17 from the abuser, it's really hard. So, are you able
18 to do that? it's hard in general, but particularly
19 for some of these women. How the hell do you find
20 housing?

21 PAULA INHARGUE: So, one of the
22 strategies that has been the most successful has been
23 the rapid rehousing and transitional housing programs
24 that we have had. That has been funded by HUD. The
25 new RFP for the coming year has not been released. It

usually comes out in August. We have no expectation that it's going to be anywhere near as robust. It looks like they are cutting down to about 30 percent of those services. So, if it was hard before, it's about to get much, much harder.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Next panel. Thank you for that. Brandon Lloyd, Carlyn Cowen-- I know Carlyn-- Navdeep Bains, and Lisa Zhen. Yeah, you can-- absolutely. Bring him in. Whomever would like to start, go ahead.

BRANDON LLOYD: I'll go ahead and start. Good afternoon, Chair Avilés, Council Member Brewer, and the rest of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony for the generous designation of \$200,000 towards Urban Resource Institute's Immigration Legal Services for survivors of violence and gender-based harm in the fiscal year 2026, September Transparency Resolution. My name is Brandon Lloyd, and I'm the Director of Government Affairs at the Urban Resource Institute, also known as URI. URI is the largest provider of domestic violence shelter services in the nation, including immigrant survivors and a leading provider of transitional housing for families experiencing

homelessness in New York City. This funding will directly serve the newest New Yorkers who are survivors seeking legal services, and every day URI creates pathways to safety, stability and healing for survivors of domestic violence and families in crisis. Nearly 20 years ago in 2006, URI established a domestic violence Legal Education and Advocacy Program, also known as LEAP, with the intention of providing trauma-informed care and legal services for survivors of all backgrounds. Due to their status, undocumented survivors are hesitant to have contact with the legal system and can remain in harmful situations because of a lack of access to legal services or concern about eligibility due to immigration status. The continued shutdown of government programs is causing a ripple effect mirroring the effects of COVID when survivors may remain in abusive partnerships because of the scarcity of available services, shelters and safe havens. Programs like LEAP bridge the gap between immigrant survivors and access to legal services which can provide a pathway to safety away from harm by providing support with child custody, visitation, divorce, orders of protection, debt issues, and

immigrant petitions. URI greatly applauds the efforts of New York City Council to act as a stop-gap to the federal budget cuts through funding initiatives such as the Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence and Gender-based Harm initiative. As the City of New York braces for a potential increase of immigration and customs enforcement and the presence of the National Guard, we applaud the city's effort to mobilize legal service providers with the intention of protecting immigrant New Yorkers and encourage the Council to continue expanding funding streams for immigration legal service providers. The Urban Resource Institute stands ready to continue to partner with the City of New York in support of survivors. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Next.

CARLYN COWEN: Good afternoon, Council Member Brewer, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Carlyn Cowen. My pronouns are they/them. I'm the Chief Policy and Public Affairs Officer at CPC, the Chinese-American Planning Council, the nation's

largest Asian-American social services agency. While CPC has long been providing legal referrals and other support services, we have not actually had our own in-house legal services program, but our planning at the end of last year led us to hire a staff attorney and stand up a legal services program starting in January. In addition to that, we also increased the number of Know Your Rights trainings, built out family safety and emergency planning resources for individuals, and began to do legal clinics. We had done this all unfunded until we had been awarded \$125,000 through the City Council as part of the wise [sic] group of AAPI community-based organizations, and that funding has been absolutely critical. Because I think everybody in this room is really aware of the challenges our community is facing and why we desperately need this legal services funding, what I actually want to share is a couple of stories of what legal services funding does for community members when we actually have access to it as providers. We had a community member that came to us because his routine ICE check-in for his asylum case was going to be the same day that his wife was due to give birth to their third child, and his private

1 lawyer had refused to help try to reschedule it. So,
2 he came into one of CPC's clinics, and our lawyer was
3 able to write a letter and persuade ICE to reschedule
4 the check-in for eight months later, allowing him to
5 participate in the birth of his child. That's what
6 legal services funding does. We had a community
7 member that was the-- that is the father of a six-
8 year-old in our daycare program that missed his
9 appointment for a routine check-in because he was hit
10 by a car while doing bike deliveries which was his
11 job. And because of that, federal agents came to his
12 home and detained him. Despite the fact that his
13 wife had gone to his check-in to explain that he was
14 injured. We were able to, through that process,
15 translate and connect him with a lawyer through
16 NYFUP. Another community member was detained while
17 in the park with his friends. Agents in an unmarked
18 van came out and demanded ID, showed no warrant, and
19 arrested him. We was brought to the Elizabeth, New
20 Jersey Detention Center and was told that he was
21 going to be deported the next day. We were able to
22 go to the detention center, help him file a pro se
23 habeas, and a New Jersey judge stopped the
24 deportation and assigned him an attorney for his
25

case. That is why legal services funding is so critical, because it helps our community members every day, and that's why we are fighting to make sure that all community members have access to both services. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Next.

LISA ZHEN: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Lisa Zhen. My name's Lisa Zhen. I'm the Director of Social Services at Homecrest Community Services. Thank you for-- so much for giving me a chance to speak today. Homecrest provides a community-based, multi-social services to low-income older adults and families in immigrant communities in our four center [inaudible]. None of-- most of our members are Asian Americans. Every day, we have clients apply for property assistance, health care, affordable housing, and citizenship all in the [inaudible] languages. We are here today testify alongside our partners at Asian American Federation, AAF, and also [inaudible] immigration support empowerment [inaudible] network, a creation of nearly 20 Asian-led an Asian-serving organizations that provide immigration legal support to New Yorkers.

1 Last week, Homecrest conducted a community survey
2 ahead of the general elections. Nearly half of
3 respondents said language or translation were among
4 the biggest challenges, second only to safety.
5 Barriers to language and digital access make it
6 difficult for older adults and immigrants to navigate
7 complex systems and also to get help as well. Beyond
8 the data we continue to hear fears about ICE
9 activities, confusion over changing immigration
10 rules, and even hesitation to apply for health care.
11 Other concern it effect immigration status. It's
12 clear the community members rely on organizations
13 like Homecrest to navigate systems, [inaudible]
14 counsel, and language gaps. Connecting to legal
15 services and also most importantly to feel supported.
16 We thank the committee for its leadership and offer
17 two recommendations. One, protect and expand funding
18 for community organizations, providing immigration
19 legal services and case management for AAPI
20 communities. Second, establish a regular
21 communication channel with AAPI Rise [sic] Network to
22 share how immigration enforcement is affecting our
23 community. Together, we can do better to protect the
24
25

safety and wellbeing of Asian New Yorkers. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Next?

RIYA ORTIZ: Thank you, Chair Avilés, Council Member Gale Brewr, and Council Member Cabán for holding this hearing and for providing us the opportunity to testify. Also, happy Filipino American History Month. I'm Riya Ortiz, Executive Director at Damayan Migrant Worker's Association and we serve, empower, and give life-saving services to low-wage Filipino workers in New York City, mainly in Woodside, Elmhurst, Sunnyside, and neighboring areas. Today, I'm testifying with our partners from the RISE Network, a coalition of about 20-Asian led and Asian serving organizations, offering immigration case management and legal services to New Yorkers. last year, Damayan helped Claire, a trafficked Filipino domestic worker, mother, who escaped from her traffickers who brought her from Taiwan to work as a domestic worker in the Upper East Side. She signed a contract thinking that she would work for a better future for her five children back home. Instead of working for 40 hours a week, she'll from 5:00 a.m. to

10:00 p.m., seven days a week. Instead of getting paid minimum wage, she was working \$3.57 an hour. Instead of following her dream, her life turned into a living nightmare. Afraid and alone, Claire sought Damayan's help. When Claire needed help to escape from her traffickers, Damayan helped her create an escape plan. When Claire became undocumented because her immigration status is tied to her trafficker, Damayan connected her to an immigration attorney who is helping her apply for a T-Visa so she can be documented again. Since the beginning of the current administration, many domestic workers like Claire have worked as live-in domestic workers, because they're afraid to interact with ICE while traveling to work. They work longer hours for little pay with no overtime and remain vulnerable to abuse. In the past few months, we have helped a couple of trafficking survivors escape their traffickers. Claire is one of the many trafficked domestic workers that Damayan has helped. Damayan assists trafficking survivors in creating escape plans, refers them to shelters and counseling to help them manage post-traumatic stress, and arranges medical care for injuries due to trafficking, and connects them to

other social services. We also help them receive financial assistance through TDAP. Additionally, we help file civil cases against their traffickers. Since our founding, we have helped more than 80 trafficking survivors become documented again, and 40 of those survivors have been reunited with their families. We have also recovered more than \$2 million in stolen wages. None of this would have been possible if not for the support of the New York City Council and groups like the Rise network. Damayan joins the Rise Network to help us respond more quickly and effectively the immigration challenges facing vulnerable Asian New Yorkers. CBOs are essential as successful immigration services depend on deep community ties and multi-lingual capacity. Direct funding to Asian-led CBOs accelerates immediate immigration supports. We believe we respectfully ask the New York City Council to protect and expand funding for following initiatives included in the City Council September Transparency Resolution, including legal services for day laborers and domestic workers, prioritize supporting small and mid-size CBOs serving Asian immigrant communities, and prioritize removing

contracting barriers so CBOs receive funding quickly for crucial services. Thank you for allowing us to testify, and we look forward to working with you to make sure Asian-serving communities get the support that they deserve.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

RIYA ORTIZ: Thank you.

NAVDEEP BAINS: Okay. Thank you, Council Member Brewer, Council Member Cabán, Chair Alexa Avilés, and members of the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and for providing us the opportunity to testify. My name is Navdeep Bains. I'm the Associate Director of Advocacy and Policy at the Asian American Federation where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member organizations. I'm honored to testify alongside our partners here of the Rapid Immigration Support and Empowerment Network, also known as the RISE Network, as well as one of our colleagues from AALDEF who will be testifying right after us. And this is a network of nearly 20 Asian-led and Asian-serving nonprofits providing immigration case management and legal services support. The current presidential

administration has brought drastic policy changes, arrests of immigrants from Asian countries including China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and India have increased significantly in New York City compared to last year. According to a recent analysis by the news publication, The City, there's been an over 1000 percent rise in arrests of Chinese immigrants and a 1000 percent increase in arrests of Bangladeshi immigrants in this last year. This trend coupled with the severe increase in immigration fees had resulted in a heightened need for immigration legal services at a time when immigrants are also in fear of even seeking out these services. This is where our CBOs play a vital role in building community trust and bringing cultural and linguistic barriers that mainstream organizations are unable to provide. Funding our CBOs directly is an effective way to provide immigration support to the Asian community. Past funding for AAF's rapid response work under the first Trump administration allowed our network to serve over 8,000 Asian New Yorkers with immigration legal services in over 12 different languages. We are incredibly grateful for the fiscal year 26 City Council funding provided to our RISE Network to

support in-language, culturally competent immigration legal services and case management. But this work has just begun, as we've seen from last week's ICE raid in Chinatown. We make the following recommendations to City Council to sustain and support our work.

Number one, protect and expand funding for CBOs providing immigration legal services and case management. This includes the initiatives that City Council put forth in its September transparency resolution which is legal services for AAPI communities, legal services for day laborers and domestic workers, and immigration legal services for survivors of violence and gender-based harm. Number two, work with the RISE network, our organizations, to establish clear lines of communication so our CBOs have a regular opportunity to share how immigration enforcement is impacting the AAPI community across the five boroughs. Number three, prioritize funding small and mid-sized CBOs serving emerging immigrant communities, because our CBOs are trusted partners with deep relationships with vulnerable community members who are less likely to interact with mainstream organizations and government systems in this current environment. I'll wrap up. And number

four, prioritize addressing contracting issues that puts barriers for CBOs. We applaud City Council's leadership in doing this work and the Speaker for putting initiatives out to improve contracting processes, and we just ask that Council continue to hold the Mayor's Office accountable for streamlining this process so our culturally competent CBOs get the funding they need to deliver critical services. And last but not least, we thank you for your leadership in supporting New York for All, and I encourage City Council to continue calling on our legislature and our governor to support the New York For All Act. Thank you to the Committee on Immigration for all your support, for your leadership. We see you showing up in the streets and representing our communities, and that continues to drive advocates to also come out. So, thank you for that partnership.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Jane Shim, Yesenia Mata, Devashish Basnet, and Airenakhue Omoragbon from the African Communities Together. Whomever would like to go ahead, go right ahead.

JANE SHIM: Members of the Committee, my name is Jane Shim, and I'm the Director of the Anti-

Asian Violence Program at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. I submit this testimony on AALDEF's behalf and thank the committee for the opportunity to testify. AALDEF is a national legal organizations headquartered in NYC that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans through litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing. AALDEF was founded more than 50 years by Asian American law students and activists who recognized that Chinatown residents did not have the same access to legal services as other communities. Throughout our 50 years, AALDEF has worked with Asian immigrants to provide direct legal services, immigrant clinics--immigration clinics, excuse me, community education and systemic advocacy. Through this work we've observed that the same gaps that drove our funding have only grown more urgent. We have a forthcoming report about the invisible unmet need for legal services among Asian immigrants. Our testimony today draws from that research to highlight gaps in legal services for Asian New Yorkers and our recommendations on how to address them. In the past 50 years, the Asian American population of the United States has multiplied exponentially from just over

1.5 million to nearly 25 million Asian Americans nationwide. Yet, the Legal Services Corporation, the nation's largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income individuals recently reported that only two percent of its clients identified as Asian and Pacific Islanders and a mere 1.3 speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language. The same is true in New York. Asians are the fastest growing demographic in New York City, making up 17 percent of the population and over a quarter of the city's three million immigrants. I'm going to skip ahead. Despite New York City's reputation as one of the best resourced jurisdictions for immigration representation, Asian immigrants remain persistently at the margins. They constitute 25 percent of the city's undocumented population. For example, Chinese immigrants are the second-largest undocumented group and are the single largest nationality in removal proceedings. Although Asian people are largely portrayed as economically successful, approximately one in four Asian New Yorkers live in poverty, nearly double the rate of white New Yorkers. RISE Network funding allows us to provide legal representation to our community partners. However, there's still a need for more

1 legal support. We've identified the following
2 barriers to legal services for Asian immigrants in
3 New York. Language access gaps-- according to 2020
4 census data, nearly six out of 10 New Yorkers who
5 speak an Asian language have limited English
6 proficiency, yet many legal service provider hotlines
7 do not offer an Asian language option. So Asian
8 clients are shut out from the start. If they do make
9 their way in, few legal service providers employ
10 Asian language speakers. Instead, they use
11 commercial interpretation vendors that are costly and
12 insufficient to build client trust. Capacity gaps--
13 heavy caseloads limit legal service providers from
14 doing outreach, leaving many Asian Americans unaware
15 that free representation is even available. And then
16 I will also just highlight in the absence of visible,
17 culturally, and linguistically accessible nonprofit
18 legal services, community members instead rely on
19 word-of-mouth referrals for private attorneys. Many
20 of these low-income New Yorkers are charged high
21 upfront costs, and predatory attorneys threaten to
22 stop working on their cases without additional
23 payment. Some private attorneys provide quality
24 representations, but others do bad work or no work
25

altogether. Thank you for your support and for your attention to ensuring that immigrant New Yorkers have access to competent immigration legal services, and we look forward to working with the Council.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Thank you for all AALDEF's work.

AIRENAKHUE OMORAGBON: Okay, yes, this is on. Okay. So, good afternoon, Chair Avilés and members of the Committee on Immigration. Thank you for holding today's important hearing. My name is Airenakhue Omoragbon. I'm the daughter of immigrants from Trinidad and Nigeria, and I also serve as the New York Policy Manager at African Communities Together. You know, since launching as an organization, we built a base of tens of thousands of African immigrant contacts, connected thousands of African immigrants to direct services, and championed a couple, you know, legal cases on behalf of low-income and working-class African immigrants living here in New York. Many of our members come from countries like Sudan, Liberia, Mali, etcetera, and we strongly align with, you know, other black-led organizations and communities as part of the broader, you know, immigrant rights movement. We provide

immigrants with free and high-quality legal services such as assistance with applications for naturalization, TPS, etcetera, and you know, what makes our provision of legal services outstanding is we have this expertise around language access, diversity of our staff, and you know, we were able to create a safe space for many people who are running from, you know, heinous persecution. So, from January 2025 to present there's been a horrendous increase in immigration enforcement activity. We all saw what happened in Canal Street just about a week ago. About nine African immigrants were kind of kidnapped on Canal Street as part of this raid of street vendors. In listening to accounts like these, I think it's very easy to feel like hopeless and just kind of want to give up, but ACT's perspective-- now is the time, more than ever to not only increase New York immigrants' access to legal representation, but also ensure that Black immigrants from West Africa, from the Caribbean, and you know, other parts of the African diaspora are prioritized in that reform. For many Black immigrants there's a strong pipeline between anti-Black policing, criminalization, mass incarceration, and deportation that is sped up by

1 these barriers to language access, anti-Black and
2 anti-immigrant sentiments. So, you know, as I just
3 speed up a little bit, you know, in the past ACT has
4 received legal funding through, you know, Action NYC
5 and pro se+ projects, etcetera. However, this year
6 we received one year worth of funding with no chance
7 of, you know, renewal. ACT's so grateful to the City
8 Council because, you know, in this time you all
9 stepped up, stepped in, and provided organizations
10 like ours with additional \$500,000 to continue this
11 much-needed work. But you know, even though the
12 numbers of new arrivals has sharply diminished, most
13 of these recent arrivals still have pending
14 immigration matters. We ask you to continue to
15 prioritize legal services for immigrant New Yorkers
16 so we can bring pro se asylum-seekers and other
17 applicants, many of which filed their initial
18 applications with the City's asylum application help
19 center successfully to the conclusion of their case.
20 So, thank you, everyone.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
23 much.

24 YESENIA MATA: Thank you, Councilwoman
25 Avilés and thank you to all the Council Members for

allowing us to testify today. My name is Yesenia Mata and I am the Executive Director of La Colmena, an immigrant rights organization based in Staten Island. Our mission is to empower the immigrant workers through education, culture, organizing, and economic development. Hearings like this are essential. They give us the opportunity to share what is truly happening on the ground in Staten Island where we witnessed firsthand the challenges and fears facing our immigrant communities. Unlike other boroughs, Staten Island does not receive the same level of visible support from our own Staten Island elected officials when it comes to standing up for immigrants. However, through leadership of this council and the solidarity of the many organizations here today, we are reminded that we're not alone and that there's a strong network of allies who stand with us. That is why we launched the welcoming Staten Island initiative, a coalition made up of union, schools, businesses, nonprofits, and grassroots groups from across the island. Together, we show our immigrant neighbors that they have allied ready to defend and uplift them. Additionally, through the support of the New York Immigration

Coalition, La Colmena has been able to expand access to legal services and become DOJ recognized. But the need continues to far exceed the available resources. Additionally, under the Welcoming Staten Island initiative we created the Staten Island ICE Response Network so that when there are ICE operations or raids, our allies can respond collectively and effectively. However, one major gap remains. We lack adequate legal representation. Because if someone is detained, we need attorneys to support us in that capacity. Therefore, we are currently seeking to partner with pro bono attorneys so that no family stands alone in these moments of crisis, because we are overwhelmed as La Colmena with many of the other services we provide which is not just legal. Please count on La Colmena to continue being present and deeply committed to this work alongside all of you. Lastly, as the Executive Director of La Colmena and here as well on my own capacity as a Captain in the United States Army Reserves Civil Affairs Officer, I want to express my strong support for Council Member Cabán's Resolution 1014, because my commitment will always be to my community. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, and congratulations.

DEVASHISH BASNET: Good afternoon to Chair Avilés and to Council Member Brewer and Council Member Cabán, and also Happy National Immigrant Day today, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify on the state of New York City's immigration legal services ecosystem and the critical steps that we need to take to improve services, support service providers and scale up to adequately respond to the urgency of this moment. My name is Dave or Devashish Basnet and I'm the Senior Immigration Rights Policy Manager at the New York Immigration Coalition, and on behalf of the NYIC, we're grateful to our continued partnership on multiple fronts with the Council. The NYIC is a statewide network of more than 200 organizations that supports immigrants and refugees across New York State. We commend the committee and the Council for recognizing the immigrants who reside in New York City are facing unprecedented risk. Today, I'll briefly highlight and follow-up with written testimony as well about the challenges that are present that were brought up in today's earlier

questioning about the Immigration Legal Services gridlocks and in infrastructure, and articulate the immediate need for one, increased interagency coordination and a de-siloed approach to legal services to two, developing a support fund to assist individuals and families of New York City residents that are impacted by deportation and detention, and three, the expansion of NYFUP funding to cover out-of-state ICE transfers to ensure that no New York City resident is left behind as tactics of ICE enforcement changes. For 267,000 immigrants in New York City with pending immigration cases life goes on with the daily uncertainty of not knowing whether they'll return home, and when they go to court while they navigate a legal service system that is increasingly fragmented and under-resourced. Despite historic levels of funding by the Council, legal services remain neither sufficient, nor widely accessible. Service providers across the city are at or near capacity, and the lack of coordination between agencies and the lack of a centralized body facilitating the variety of immigration legal services provided by the city and its contracted partners has created a bifurcated implementation

nightmare, duplicative services with inefficient overlap and gaps in services. Moreover, in addition to the immigrant New Yorkers and their families who are covered by our existing services, individuals and their families are facing the ripple effects of out-of-state ICE transfers. While this hearing is an important step, we would like to see tangible steps to follow. The NYIC recommends that first the Council administration in consultation with impacted communities and legal service provider and community-based organizations decisively rebuild a legal services ecosystem that connects disparate LSPs and their efforts to limit duplication and find out where these missed opportunities are. Due to the emphasis on speed and volume of filings rather than quality and substance of filings, notwithstanding the specialized expertise that certain filings would require, the need for centralized coordination and de-siloed services is increasingly evident. I want to reaffirm that we must expand the interpretation of legal services funding should provide to be more holistic and call for that new family support fund to assist families and individuals impacted by deportation and detention. And lastly, just to reup

1
2 that ask of increasing funding to expand NYFUP's
3 capacity so that any detained New Yorker regardless
4 of where they're transferred to can be supported by
5 our services. Thank you again to the committee and
6 thank you to the Chairwoman.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
8 much. Congratulations to everybody. And don't
9 worry, Staten Island, we'll take care of you.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. We appreciate
11 it.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alejandra Aragon,
13 Adama Bah, Mr. Power Malu-- I know them-- Candace
14 [inaudible]. Candace is not here. I think we--

15 UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] No, Candace
16 is not here.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We know where
18 Candace is. Jeehae Fischer from the Collective? No.
19 go ahead with-- and then we'll go to the next panel.
20 Go ahead whomever wants to start.

21 ALEJANDRA ARAGON: Thank you. Good
22 afternoon, Council Members. Thank you for the
23 opportunity to testify today. My name is Alejandra
24 Aragon, and I am a community advocate at Mixteca, a
25 community-based organization in Sunset Park that has

served the immigrant community for over two decades.

I am here along with my companions [sic] from La

Colmena and NICE to represent a perspective of a

small-sized community-based organization. At

Mixteca, we offer a range of social and legal support

services to immigrant families. Today, I'm here to

speak on behalf of the immigrant we serve,

individuals and families navigating incredibly

complex and stressful legal processes. Many of them

have a common court hearings, ICE check-ins, and

pending USCIS applications, and they urgently need

access to quality legal representation, especially

under the current administration when fear and

uncertainty has grown. Since January 2025, our small

but dedicated team has assisted approximately 700

community members seeking help with asylum

applications, work permit, change of [inaudible] and

address, and motions related to internet-based [sic]

hearings. Yet, in our Immigration Department, there

are only two staff members including myself working

tirelessly to meet this immense demand. Our

community's needs are growing every day, and we

continue to do everything we can with the limited

resources available to ensure that no one faces this

1 life-changing process alone. I would like to share
2 the successful stories that our community members
3 shared with us and how our services being free of no
4 cost has impacted their lives. Excellent services
5 and unconditional support. I want to express my
6 sincere gratitude to the Mixteca organization for
7 their invaluable help and support throughout my
8 asylum application process, work permit and legal
9 advice. From the moment I first contacted, they
10 provide me with personalized and professional
11 attention that made me feel safe and supported. I
12 sought other places, but they were asking me to pay
13 hundreds of dollars just to get assistance.
14 Mixteca's teams was very efficient and dedicated in
15 guiding me through every step of the process, clearly
16 explaining the requirements and procedures at no
17 cost. Their knowledge and experience in asylum and
18 human rights are truly impressive. Thanks for their
19 help. Thank you for your time and your commitment to
20 justice.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
23 much.

24 ADAMA BAH: Thank you so much,
25 Councilwoman, for having me. My name is Adama Bah.

I'm the Executive Director of Afrikana. Right now, New York City is failing our immigrant communities when it comes to access to legal services. There are no attorneys taking new cases. The system is completely overwhelmed. Families are walking into our office terrified because immigration raids are happening when they're going looking for work. And for Black migrants we serve, this crisis cuts even deeper. Many have already survived war, violence, and displacement. They come here hoping for safety and stability only to find themselves navigating a legal maze alone and feeling abandoned with no free legal aid available. They're being forced to pay thousands of dollars to private lawyers, money they simply don't have, and for those who can pay, the reality is even harsher. They're left to figure this out on their own. At Afrikana, we see the fear firsthand, mothers with newborns, fathers separated from their families. Young people trying to update their asylum paperwork, all of them asking the same question: who can help me? The answer right now is no one. Afrikana receives no funding for our legal work despite us seeing hundreds weekly. This lack of legal support doesn't just impact individuals, it

1 impacts an entire ecosystem of care. Our staff are
2 stretched beyond capacity trying to fill a gap that
3 should not exist. We can provide food, diapers and
4 housing support, but when ICE knocks, we can't offer
5 legal defense. This is heartbreaking truth. Black
6 migrants are being left behind in the system that was
7 never built for them. They're being criminalized for
8 seeking safety, and until the city invests in real
9 accessible and culturally competent legal services
10 for our communities, this crisis will continue, and
11 so will our fight to make sure no one is left to
12 figure this out alone. Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

15 POWER MALU: Thank you, City Council.
16 You've been on the side of the people. You continue
17 to show up for our people and continue to have the
18 back of those of us on the front lines, continuing to
19 fight for our newest New Yorkers and the entire
20 undocumented community. Happy National Immigrants
21 Day. Our organization continues to be on the front
22 line and be proactive when it comes to finding
23 solutions in real time, and consistently pivot to
24 address new challenges and be the bridge to help
25 provide necessary services to our undocumented

1 neighbors. For example, when the AAHC was shutting
2 down the asylum application help center, we knew
3 there would be hundreds of youth left in limbo and we
4 took action to raise private funds to hire two staff
5 members that are experts in special immigrant
6 juvenile status, and we continue to lead the way to
7 advise on cases that have to do with the youth that
8 are candidates for SIJ. We are still fighting for
9 [inaudible] Contreras, New York City's first high
10 school student detained on May 21st after his
11 immigration hearing. He has been detained for over
12 five months and is in the prison in Pennsylvania.
13 They said they were going after criminals and so-
14 called public safety threats, but that has not been
15 the case. It's been proven that they are entering
16 Immigration Court buildings to abduct non-criminals
17 that are following their legal procedures. The
18 public safety threats and national security threats
19 are not the hard-working, law-abiding immigrants, but
20 rather the masked ICE cowards terrorizing our
21 communities and tearing families apart. We need more
22 funding for legal orgs and orgs working directly with
23 legal service providers to help our neighbors that
24 are being targeted by this administration. We need
25

to not only increase funding for representation, but also to expand the reach of these new organizations to be able to support people that have been strategically sent to detention centers outside of New York. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: thank you very much. In Harlem, in particularly, because that's somewhat we're you're working. There isn't any place that can take any of your clients, customers?

ADAMA BAH: No, no one-- there's no one accepting new applications or to new clients.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Alright. That's a big problem. [inaudible]

POWER MALU: that's part of why there needs to be some vetting as to organizations that have gotten funding so we can see exactly where those gaps are.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right. Oh, just expand the funding. I mean, it seems to be that you should have funding [inaudible] That's something to work on immediately. You very--

UNIDENTIFIED: [interposing] Thank you.

ADAMA BAH: Thank you.

POWER MALU: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

Amadou Ly, Workers Justice Project, Ms. Guallpa, William Medina, and looks like Claudia Wang-- that's not a Claudia. Chia [sp?] Wang. It's hard to read your writing. Madam Wang? Go ahead. You can start.

AMADOU LY: Hi. My name is Amadou Ly.

I'm the Founder of the Amadou Ly Foundation, a nonprofit that supports immigrant families, especially immigrant-- African immigrants with legal aid, education, and humanitarian services. I came to New York City from Senegal at 13. I didn't speak English. I was undocumented, and I faced homelessness and uncertainty. I eventually met Amy Messenson [sp?] from the Legal Aid Society who stepped in, believed in me and fought tirelessly on my behalf. Because of her, I was granted a student visa and that opportunity changed the course of my life. I went on to acting in Twilight, Breaking Dawn, and mentor students in robotics, but I never forgot the struggle of African immigrant youth like myself. That's why when the Canal Street raid happened on October 21st, I stepped in personally. I went directly to the affected detainees, encouraged them, providing commissary funds, connecting them with attorneys, at

1 least some of them, and helped some file habeas
2 petitions. Many of these young people were
3 sacrificing food just to pay legal fees, and I
4 witnessed firsthand the fear, hunger, and anxiety
5 that they endure. Many of the Canal Street vendors
6 continued to work long hours because some have
7 contracts with attorneys that they must obey. This
8 leaves them little time for school, English classes,
9 and other programs that could help them qualify for
10 formal employment. They are caught between survival
11 and legal obligations, and some even go hungry just
12 so they can pay their attorneys. Your support as
13 Council Members could-- makes a real difference in
14 reducing that burden, giving these families more
15 opportunities for stability and a future. Our
16 foundation also helped more than 450 workers whom we
17 will not name personally by creating resumes,
18 providing transportation, and I personally walked
19 them to companies, ensuring that they're supported
20 and safe. These were people who had lost hope, and
21 together, we restored some control over their lives.
22 We recently launched a new program called From Street
23 Vendors to Barbers, designed to provide immigrant
24 youth, particularly street vendors, with training,

mentorship, and employee opportunities in barbering and related trades. This program helps them move from unstable and former work [inaudible] steady careers, and we are seeking support from the Council to expand this program so more people can gain skills, independence, and a pathway out of exploitation or survival-only work. I want to acknowledge that the Amadou Ly Foundation has not yet received any funding from the City Council, but we deeply appreciate that the Council has been supporting immigrant communities. That support matters, because many immigrants remain unrepresented, work tirelessly every day to navigate a complex legal system alone. Your continued investment in legal representation can make a real difference in their lives. I invite the Council to meet with the Amadou Ly Foundation, learn more about our work, and consider supporting immigrants such as the ones that were affected on October 21st. Together, we can ensure that no one faces this system alone. Thank you for your time and commitment. Appreciate it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Next.

WILLIAM MEDINA: Good afternoon, Council Member Brewer and Chairwoman Avilés, and all members of New York City Council. My name is William Medina. I'm the leader of Los Deliveristas Unidos, the movement of more than 80,000 app delivery workers who keep New York City running every day. We risk our lives biking through traffic, storms, and unsafe streets to delivery food [inaudible]. Together we complete 2.77 million resident delivery every week according to the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. Right now, our communities are under attack like never before. President Trump anti-immigrant agenda and citywide rule change like the 15 mile speed limit are putting our livelihoods and our families at risk, but deportation over the past year the city has wrote policies that target us instead of protecting us. This month, the New York PD has been empowered to issue criminal summonses for [inaudible] traffic violations, and with the new 15 mile-per-hour e-bike speed limit which went into effect last Friday, police are making our job to make deliveries on time a crime. Each summons drag us into the criminal system and increases our risk of immigration enforcement. We have gone from being

called essential workers to being treated like criminals. Every day, I go out to deliver food. I risk not just my safety, but my freedom. When the rules changes are [inaudible] the name of public safety and safe streets, the reality on the ground is much different. The over policing of delivery work is about control and criminalizing immigrants who deliver your meals, groceries, and [inaudible] workers during the hardest times. Every ticket, every stop, every court appearance pushes us closer to deportation. The rise in criminal summonses and the 15 mph speed limit are playing into ICE hands. I see it every day. Delivery worker have to balance providing for themselves and family fear an arrest in some case of deportations. Our city delivery workers deserve better. We're not asking for pity. We're demanding protection for the people who deliver your food in the rain, cold, and heat every single day. Right now, we are highest risk of being [inaudible] immigration rights just like what's happening in Chicago and D.C. where deliveristas have become ICE main targets under the guise of public safety. I'm here today asking New York City Council to stand with us and prioritize our demands. Pass Intro 1332,

1 [inaudible] law that will allow us to work safely,
2 ride safely and stay home during an ICE raid without
3 fear and being deactivated or fired without cause.
4 Fund our \$500,000 budget proposal to provide support
5 and case management for immigrant deliveristas facing
6 criminal summonses and abuse so they can fight back
7 and continue providing essential services to New
8 Yorkers. We're not the enemies of this city. We
9 care for this city. We defend for New Yorkers. We
10 need right protections and justice, not
11 criminalization. Thank you.

12
13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
14 much. We're big supporters, as you know. Thank you.

15 WILLIAM MEDINA: Thank you so much.

16 CHIA-CHIA WANG: Thank you. Thank you so
17 much for being here for five hours, and--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] It's
19 our honor. So go ahead. Our honor.

20 CHIA-CHIA WANG: Yes, yes. So, my name
21 is Chia-Chia Wang. I am the New York Site Director
22 for Church World Service. I'm also a proud resident
23 of Queens for the past 24 years. CWS is a global
24 humanitarian organization dedicated to transforming
25 communities around the world through just sustainable

response to hunger, poverty, and displacement. Since 1946 our work has reflected our vision of a world where everyone has a voice and a safe place to call home. Church World Service New York was formally established just two and a half years ago in early 2023 to meet the growing needs of rising human migration and the need for family reunification. In our full year, the first year, we served over 1,200 unaccompanied children, Ukrainians, Cuban, Haitians, as well as African humanitarian parolees. Every day we heard from clients asking what their future is going to be the next day, so we worry about them. We're really thrilled that the City Council has approved significantly increased funding to support legal needs of immigrants and migrants and strengthened their ability to remain in New York City. The city cannot thrive without our migrant brothers and sisters. The recent attack on migrant children and family have demonstrated how critical known federal legal services funding is, both to defend immigrant rights and their dignity and to keep families united. As one of my wonderful colleagues who's sitting next to me and who said this so well, our work is not limited to identifying which remedies

1 they're eligible for, but it also includes managing
2 each case appropriately and supporting every
3 opportunity they need to grow up safely and with
4 dignity, and that's our unaccompanied children
5 project. It is really important to broaden the scope
6 of this funding to include all legal related services
7 such as interpretation, Know Your Rights workshops,
8 and perhaps case management as well. It is also
9 essential to ensure and open grant making process so
10 as many legal services as possible can apply. Our
11 experience, I guess, is a negative one derived from
12 the UCP, the Unaccompanied Children Program, funding
13 that was just finalized a couple of months ago. The
14 funding was quadrupled a lot and we applaud-- we were
15 in support of that, but that funding was only given
16 to existing grantees which means that the rest of the
17 unaccompanied children legal services were left alone
18 to fight for their own, I guess, fight with the
19 federal government. So, I want to turn it over
20 quickly to Roberto.

22 ROBERTO JEAN FRANCOIS: Thank you for
23 hosting this hearing today. I'm just going to focus
24 on one of my experiences as paralegal. We are not
25 only helping unaccompanied minors, but a lot of these

minors come from countries Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mexico, and they not only speak Spanish. Sometimes speak languages such as Kechi [sic], ketchi kel [sp?], Mam [sp?], Guadani [sp?], Charua [sp?], Imara [sp?]. So, for them, navigating through the complex immigration system in America is even more difficult, because in their own communities they were discriminated and now they come to New York [inaudible] and they're facing these challenges, because they're very vulnerable. Many of these minors are escaping from cartels. Even one of the minors I spoke with him like two months ago, he was telling me that they were basically waiting for them out of the schools so they can join these cartels, cartel Sinaloa and Jalisco [inaudible] cartels in Mexico. And if they return under these conditions, they basically have to result [sic] or to [inaudible] or they're in the cartel or they basically are going to [inaudible] or murder. Our situations are the-- the girls that are in our communities they know-- in their communities, they basically-- it's normal to be married under 12 or 13 years old, and they're desensitized. So, we are providing these legal services. We have to make sure, like, we give them

1 the emotional support and let them know that this
2 situation is not normal. It's not okay. So, we more
3 than ever we need these resources, because without
4 this help, these minors are going to be alone in this
5 country without help, with no support, and with no
6 parents because they're unaccompanied minors. Thank
7 you.

8
9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
10 much. Next. She's my hero.

11 LIGIA GUALLPA: Thank you so much,
12 Council Members of the Immigration Committee. My
13 name is Ligia Guallpa. I'm the Executive Director of
14 the Workers Justice Project and Los Deliveristas
15 Unidos. As an organization that represents gig
16 workers and essential workers for the City of New
17 York, particularly app delivery workers. There's
18 80,000 app delivery workers who work for Instacart,
19 Uber, Grub Hub, and Door Dash. These workers are
20 facing unprecedented attack across the country. We
21 saw it in Chicago. We're seeing it in D.C. how the
22 federal government is deploying ICE to particularly
23 target workers who are working on the streets. And
24 here in New York, we recently saw what-- example of
25 that when we had ICE particularly target street

1 vendors. So, delivery workers, street vendors, are
2 facing enormous amount of risks in our street. Why?
3 Because their workplace happens to be the streets,
4 but also they're facing lack of protections. There
5 is a street vending reform that we're urging City
6 Council to prioritize, but also there is an essential
7 bill that I know Council Member Gale and others have
8 already strongly supported which is Intro 1332.
9 We're urging Council to pass 1332 which is a just
10 cause protection that would ensure delivery workers
11 prioritizing staying at home in case of an ICE raid
12 or if they want to drive safely, will ensure that
13 they're not punished with deactivation which is a
14 form of firing. We're also calling on City Council
15 to allocate some of the recently approved immigration
16 legal service funding towards legal and case
17 management service for thousands of delivery workers
18 who have been contacting us for assistance with
19 deactivation, criminal and civil traffic violations,
20 wage theft, and more. With the recent ICE raids
21 targeting street vendors and deliveristas, it is more
22 important than ever that deliveristas have the access
23 to critical legal help. WJP advocates for case
24 managers who are directly supporting them and
25

1 connecting them with DCWP, public defenders, Attorney
2 Generals in making sure that they have the
3 protections they deserve. No workers should have to
4 lose their jobs for factors beyond their control,
5 whether it's taking unnecessary risks, whether they
6 choose to stay at home in case of ICE raids. We're
7 really hoping to count-- with the council to do two
8 things. One, passing 1332 before the year ends to
9 ensure that deliveristas have the rights they deserve
10 when President Trump decides to attack directly the
11 most essential workers. And the other one is
12 prioritizing groups like ours, making sure that we
13 have the resources to provide, because at the end of
14 the day we will be the front-line worker centers
15 responding to the needs of essential workers. I know
16 that when there is an ICE raid, when they're facing
17 immigration, we'll be in the front lines supporting
18 them throughout the way. So, we're hoping that the
19 Council will prioritize funding Workers Justice
20 Project and Los Deliveristas Unidos. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
22 much, all of you. Incredible. Thank you. Madam
23 Colon? Where is she? Is she here? I don't know
24 where she is. Coyote from NICE and Lucero from NICE.
25

Three people from NICE. Very nice event you had. It was fabulous, fabulous. I got to go.

NILBIA COYOTE: You're so welcome next time.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I never go to Queens. I've never been to Queens.

NILBIA COYOTE: But that's Astoria. Maybe that's why you came.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I loved it. It was fabulous. Go ahead.

NILBIA COYOTE: Madam Colon is not here, but we're here on her behalf.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's fine.

NILBIA COYOTE: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, City Council Member Brewer and members of the council. My name is Nilbia Coyote, Executive Director at NICE, New Immigrant Community Empowerment, the largest community-based organization in Jackson Heights Queens, serving over 15,000 community members per year. I am testifying on behalf of hundreds of immigrant New Yorkers who are members of NICE, but cannot share their identities or speak publicly today due to fear in this extremely hostile environment. For over 35 years NICE has inspired,

empowered, and organized immigrant New Yorkers who are workers and job seekers to thrive in life and at work. We stand alongside our members in time of crisis, equipping them with the tools to reach their full potential and ensuring that immigrant workers can support their families and strengthen their communities through a powerful innovative workforce and life skill [inaudible] program. But as Council Member Brewer knows well, we're not primarily a legal service provider. However, over the past years we have added this component in response to the critical needs of our community-- of our immigrant community needs we cannot ignore. Currently, NICE received \$21,600 from MOIA with an additional \$50,000 for fiscal year 26 for Know Your Rights programs for which we are extremely grateful. Yet, to meet the overwhelming demand for legal services, we have leverage over almost half a million from private foundations to build a legal service division which provides both immigration and labor right support. And I have here very proudly my team of legal division Nadya, Angel, and Rosa. Our members regularly seek Know Your Rights workshops on ICE interactions, child custody and asset protection,

one-on-one support with asylum applications, appeals, mock interviews,-- appeals, sorry-- mock interviews and contingency planning, family-based legal preparation including powers of attorney and guardianship documents, language access support to prevent legal errors for those with limited English proficiency. Through limited scope legal services via a pro se model, workshops [inaudible] assistance in drafting legal documents, we empower the individuals to understand how immigration and labor systems affect their lives and their rights. Our goal is to give every community member the tools to take informed actions. Despite the slow learning in new arrivals, thousand of immigrants still face urgent legal needs. Many are at risk of a dismissal or a deportation due to [inaudible] rush or mishandled filings, case of legal abuse or fraud. With expanded support from the City Council, NICE legal services division can focus on universal representation, legal litigation and community empowerment, ensuring immigrants not only receive due process but are also prepared for whatever their legal journey brings, but also ensuring that NICE can continue providing rapid response and presence in our

neighborhoods. Just last Thursday at 8:00 p.m., we received the alarm on a massive ICE raid in Jackson Heights that mobilized all of us, community-based organizations, and elected officials. We respectfully urge the City Council to increase funding and resources for immigrant legal service so CBOs like NICE who cater low-wage immigrants holistically can meet the critical needs and protect the rights and futures of thousands of immigrant New Yorkers. Thank you so much.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much for everything.

NILBIA COYOTE: Thank you.

NADYA LUCERO: Okay. Good afternoon, City Council Members. My name is Nadya Lucero. I am an immigration paralegal at the New Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE. This is a large organization-- it's a large community-based organization in Jackson Heights, Queens that provides pro se legal service to immigrant families among many years of service to empower immigrant New Yorkers. Let me be clear in this. Our work depends city funding. These funds allow us to run our legal program where we guide our members with a limit legal

1 service so they can feel out their own immigration
2 force [sic]. [inaudible] limit our work is
3 effectively. We guide them to the TPS as well as all
4 process in asylum such as a change of address, motion
5 to change venue, and employee authorization. Without
6 city funds, thousands of immigrants will lose access
7 to real legal service. The need for our service
8 keeps growing, but our resources have not. Our
9 biggest challenge is to the lack of capacity to
10 provide service to everyone that comes to our center
11 inquiring about immigration service. Without more
12 support, hundreds of immigration New Yorkers will be
13 left to face and a complex and a stressful system on
14 their own. Every day we meet people who are trying
15 to rebuild their lives after escaping violence, rape,
16 and dangers in their home country. Many of them face
17 difficult legal steps like applying asylum, applying
18 work permits, or answer immigrations [inaudible].
19 Recently, our team has focused in helping people in
20 crisis. Many people are afraid to go to the court
21 because the ICE [inaudible] presence. To protect
22 them, we have submit request to remote hearing to
23 provide a safe environment to all people. Even
24 though our resources are limit, we have been able to
25

1 give emergency legal advice to families whose loved
2 ones have been detained, guiding them on what is the
3 next steps to follow. We also see how misinformation
4 and the money problems have complicates people's
5 process for a legal status. In my experience, during
6 the intake process we have been instance where it has
7 been [inaudible] that the application they believe to
8 have been submitted into the USCIS is actually a
9 fraud. There is also several instance where members
10 have paid a third-party to fill out their asylum
11 applications whether or not the third-party fill out
12 the application with malicious intent to realize the
13 application are incomplete or incorrect which
14 jeopardize the members at their hearing. These
15 examples show a lack of clear information about
16 immigration application process, cost and deadlines.
17 To fill this gap, we provide empowering legal
18 consultation and basic education, brining Know Your
19 Rights for the people which can make the difference
20 between denial on their cases or receive an approval
21 on their case. At the time, when the federal
22 government is putting more pressure on immigrant
23 communities, New York City must continue to live with
24 compassion and action, supporting illegal--
25

supporting legal service for immigrants is not only the law, it's about safety, dignity and opportunity for our neighbors. Thank you for the time and standing out with immigration New Yorkers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I would just add it's the future of our country without-- has to have immigrants. So, thank you very much, both of you.

NILBIA COYOTE: Absolutely.

NADYA LUCERO: Thank you.

NILBIA COYOTE: Thanks for your patience.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Say hi to Ms. Hildalyn Colon. Thank you. Mr. Johnson? Yeah, I do want to leave, so go ahead.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: So, let's do this quickly. I know you want to get out of here. Thank you, Chair Brewer, Chair Avilés. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm here to-- so, I want to make this clear that we need-- I think that the City Council need to jump on Intro 1332 to stop the unfair deactivation of deliveristas. I'm calling on the City Council to really push for the street vendor reform package in the City Council. I don't know why that these two bills and packages are not able to be

1 in the hearing tomorrow for Stated-- Stated
2
3 Wednesday. I believe that this should be on the
4 floor tomorrow. The Speaker's blocking it. I wonder
5 what's going on. They should not be out there
6 tomorrow at 11:30 marching all over City Hall to get
7 this bill onto the floor. These two-- one bill and
8 one reform package need to be supported. I'm calling
9 on the City Council allocate funding, the proper
10 funds to both the Worker Justice Project and the
11 Street Vendor Project which is [inaudible]. They
12 need to dedicate millions of dollars to install in-
13 house case manager workers and in-house legal counsel
14 for both the Worker Justice Project and the Street
15 Vendor Project. I'm calling the City Council to
16 really put this bill on the floor. These two-- the
17 packages for the Street Vendor Project and the bill
18 Intro 1332 on the floor tomorrow. They should be on
19 the floor tomorrow. It should not be wait-- it should
20 not be dead at the end, because we have a speaker
21 that's funded by Door Dash and all the apps, and I
22 believe that's what's going on here. This speaker is
23 funded by the apps and a lot of these Council
24 Members, they sneak out of their primary because of
25 the apps and what they trying to do is make sure that

1 apps don't run against them again when they try to
2 run for state assembly, state senate, because a lot
3 them be termed out. So, I'm calling the City Council
4 to really push the-- put the street vendor reform
5 package onto the floor tomorrow and the Intro 1332 on
6 the floor. And I'm going to say this right here that
7 I have a big feeling that-- and I need to call the
8 City Council to have a big press conference or a
9 press release to say that Jessica Tisch, our
10 Commissioner, should not be reappointed as
11 Commissioner next year when the new-- new mayor come
12 in because we-- as she's the Commissioner, she's
13 working with ICE. She's working with federal
14 agencies to harass these deliveristas, and the street
15 vendors, now I'm opposed to the 15 mile-per-hour rule
16 and I'm opposed to any criminalization of the
17 deliveristas and street vendors. So, I'll end this
18 here. Got 30 seconds left. Put Intro 1332 on the
19 floor. Put the street vendor package on the floor
20 tomorrow on the Stated, and I'm saying this right now
21 that we need more-- the City Council, I think since
22 you're oversight chair, need to start auditing these
23 nonprofits that actually get the money for the legal
24 defense and why they're not-- why they're not really
25

1 helping these new guys and gals, whoever's coming
2 over to the country if they need the help. So thank
3 you so much, and enjoy your day.

4
5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [inaudible] We
6 will now turn to virtual panelists. For virtual
7 panelists, once your name is called, a member of our
8 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will
9 set the timer and give you the go-ahead to begin.
10 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may
11 begin before delivering your testimony. Our first
12 virtual panelists, and I think our only virtual
13 panelist is Jodi Ziesemer from NYLAG.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

15 JODI ZIESEMER: I thank you so much for
16 allowing me to testify. I am Jodi Ziesemer. I am
17 the-- in a new role here at NYLAG as a Policy
18 Director. So, I'm just going to briefly address some
19 of the points that the Commissioner made and that
20 MOIA discussed. One of the things I want to just
21 bring to this committee's attention is that in the
22 reconfiguration of the Action NYC program to the
23 legal support centers, they have eliminated the
24 services to hospitals, libraries and schools. Each
25 of these programs served thousands of immigrants,

some of the most vulnerable immigrants, people facing terminal illnesses, people-- children in schools and people accessing services through our city libraries. I think this is a really detrimental reconfiguration of this program. It's going to make legal services much more challenging to access for very vulnerable and isolated communities. Additionally, the Commissioner spoke about MOIA's support for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative. I would just like to emphasize that that is a very small portion of the support that this program receives. It's less than half a million dollars annually split between three organizations. City Council and the State Office of New Americans provides the vast majority of programmatic and financial support for this collaborative. And then finally, I'll just end with-- you know, as my colleagues have emphasized, we really do need multi-year stable legal services funding so that we can grow and expand our programming, staffing, supervision, and infrastructure to provide ongoing support and representation for immigrants. We also need a chance for innovative program development, and what I think this could like is a competitive bid to allow legal

services organizations, community-based organizations to develop programming that is responsive to the ever-shifting and ongoing needs that we're seeing in the community and be able to develop programming that adequately responds not only to this moment but anticipates what the legal services needs are going to be in the future. We've seen this. The ICARE program, Rapid Response, the Pro Se Plus project, all of which were talked about by my colleagues today, are all programs that really arose out of legal service providers coming together, developing programming and then pitching this to the City Council and to the city in order to fund and support. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very, very much for all of NYLAG, all forms. Thank you. Really appreciate it. We've now heard from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify in-person, please visit the Sergeant's table and complete a slip. If we inadvertently missed anyone who'd like to testify virtually, please use the raise hand function in Zoom and we will call on you in order of hands raised. I will now read the names of those who

1 registered to testify but have not yet filled out a
2 slip or appeared on Zoom, and they include Rosa
3 Jerez, Demitri Daniel Glinsky [sp?], Hyman Yang
4 [sp?], Mohammad Razvi, Joshua Epstein [sp?], Jeehae
5 Fischer, and Alex Stein. Seeing no one else, I would
6 like to note again that written testimony-- is there
7 anybody up there, okay-- which will be reviewed in
8 full by committee staff may be submitted to the
9 record up to 72 hours after the close of the hearing
10 by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. and now
11 this hearing has concluded. Thank you all for your
12 testimony.
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14 [gavel]
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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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C E R T I F I C A T E

We'dd 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 November 6, 2025