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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
THE COMMITTEE ON AGING  
CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY  
WITH THE COMMITTEE ON AGING

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February 10, 2021  
Start: 10:03 a.m.  
Recess: 2:09 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 3)

B E F O R E: Carlos Menchaca,  
Chairperson for Committee on  
Immigration  
  
Margaret S. Chin,  
Chairperson for Committee on Aging

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Daniel Dromm  
Mathieu Eugene  
Francisco P. Moya  
R. Diaz, Sr.  
Diana Ayala  
Chaim M. Deutsch  
Mark Treyger  
Paul Vallone

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez  
Commissioner for the New York City Department for  
the Aging

Nick Gulotta  
Director of Outreach and Organizing at the  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Christian Gonzalez-Rivera  
Director of Strategic Policy Initiatives at the  
Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging

Kevin Jones  
Associate State Director of Advocacy at AARP New  
York

Nicole Rojas  
Community Organizer at Mixteca Organization

Janet Perez  
Director of Programs at Mixteca

Jo-Ann Yoo  
Executive Director of the Asian American  
Federation

Lorena Kourousias  
Mixteca

Margaret Garrett  
Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society

Pia Scarfo

Sharanya Pillai  
India Home

Felicia Singh  
Taxi Worker Alliance

Jasleen Garr[SP?]  
Taxi Worker Alliance

Binta Touray  
Intern at LiveOn New York

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Jean Rene B. Tannis  
Medallion owner

William Ritziu  
Member of Taxi Worker Alliance

Bhair Desnai  
Executive Director of the New York Taxi Workers  
Alliance

Joseph JA Joute  
Member of the New York City Taxi Worker Alliance

Mostapha Alabsy  
Medallion owner

Gerson Fernandes  
Medallion Driver/Owner

Basia Osowski  
Medallion Driver/Owner

Dorothy Leconte  
Medallion Driver/Owner

Harbans Singh  
Medallion Driver/Owner

Ajit Bharth  
Medallion Driver/Owner

Ajit Bharth's son  
Speaking on behalf of father

Ricardo Lopez  
Medallion Driver/Owner

Vito Lanza  
Medallion Driver/Owner

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SERGEANT SADOWSKY: PC recording is started.

3

SERGEANT POLITE: Recording to the cloud all set.

4

SERGEANT PEREZ: Backup is rolling.

5

6

SERGEANT JONES: Okay and Sergeant Polite, would you start with the opening statement.

7

8

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SERGEANT POLITE: Thank you. Good morning and welcome to the Remote Hearing on the Committee on Aging jointly with the Committee on Immigration.

10

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12

13

Will Council members and staff please turn on their video at this time. Once again, will Council Members and staff please turn on their video at this time. Thank you.

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To minimize disruption, please place all cellphones and electronics to vibrate. You may send your testimony at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Once again, that's [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Chair Menchaca, we are ready to begin.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Buenos Dias. I am Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration and we are joined today by Committee on Aging, Chaired by my colleague Council Member and Chair for today Margaret Chin.

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1  
2 I would like to acknowledge that we have been  
3 joined by Council Members Dromm and Vallone and  
4 Ayala. And as Council Members come in, I will and/or  
5 Chair Chin will acknowledge them.

6 Today, the Committees will be conducting  
7 oversight on city programs, services and outreach  
8 conducted for older immigrant New Yorkers. For older  
9 immigrant New Yorkers. According to the Center for  
10 Urban Future, the older adult population aged 65 and  
11 older is the fastest growing segment of New York  
12 State Population. In the city, it's the older  
13 immigrant population that's growing fastest. 42  
14 percent over the past decade.

15 Aging in New York City comes with a host of  
16 unique issues. Not the least of which is the cost of  
17 living. New York City continues to rank as one of  
18 the most expensive places to live in the United  
19 States and older adults often do not have a source of  
20 income that keeps pace with the rising costs of  
21 living. This is especially true for older immigrant  
22 adults as they are twice as likely to live in poverty  
23 and tend to receive far less government assistance  
24 through wages, social security benefits, private  
25

1 retirement accounts and other income sources, if they  
2 receive them at all.

3  
4 Many older immigrants remain ineligible for these  
5 benefits due to their status or because they have not  
6 worked in the United States for long enough to draw  
7 down on benefits. Older immigrants also face  
8 significant challenges with regard to language  
9 access. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs has  
10 reported that 37 percent of older immigrant adults  
11 live in households that are linguistically isolated.  
12 Meaning they have no one in the home above 14-years-  
13 of age who speaks English well.

14 This makes it incredibly difficult for older  
15 immigrant adults to access city services due to  
16 language barriers and we have only seen this  
17 exacerbated during the pandemic. With many seniors  
18 lacking English proficiency and digital literacy,  
19 even communicating basic information about the virus  
20 has been a challenge.

21 And social isolation and language barriers only  
22 further exacerbate food insecurity during this  
23 pandemic. With food insecurity doubling amongst  
24 older New Yorkers. These are critical and pressing  
25 issues facing our older New Yorkers and especially

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1  
2 our older immigrant New Yorkers as we, as a city,  
3 must come up with solutions on how to best address  
4 them.

5 Thank you to the Administration for joining us  
6 today. I can't wait to hear about the work that MOIA  
7 and DFTA are spearheading along with the Department  
8 for the Aging DFTA, to ensure that our older  
9 immigrant New Yorkers are not forgotten. More than  
10 ever we must prioritize resources to ensure  
11 population, leaders in our communities who have  
12 devoted lives to us, to their children and to our  
13 communities. That they are treated with dignity and  
14 honor. We have much more room for improvement and it  
15 must start with accessible COVID-19 vaccines for all.  
16 It must not end there. It must not end there.

17 I want to thank the Administration and service  
18 providers for testifying today as well as the staff  
19 who have been working really hard behind the scenes  
20 to ensure that the online hearing runs smoothly. I  
21 would like to thank Immigration Committee Counsel  
22 Staff for their work. Committee Counsel Harbani  
23 Ahuja, Policy Analyst Elizabeth Kronk and my staff as  
24 well, Chief of Staff Lorena Lucero, Legislative  
25

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1  
2 Director Cesar Vargas and Communications Director  
3 Tony Chiarito.

4 And with that, I want to turn it over to my Co-  
5 Chair Council Member Chair Chin, passionate leader  
6 who does everything, every single day to support the  
7 voices and the power of our older immigrant New  
8 Yorkers. Chair Chin.

9 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you. Uh, thank you to  
10 Chair Menchaca. We are also joined by Council Member  
11 Diaz, Sr.

12 Good morning, I am Council Member Margaret Chin,  
13 Chair of the Committee on Aging and I would like to  
14 welcome you to today's joint oversight hearing on  
15 older immigrant adults. I would like to thank Chair  
16 Menchaca of the Immigration Committee for Co-hosting  
17 this important hearing with me. It is not news that  
18 New York City's older adult population is growing.  
19 Older adults are the fastest growing group in the  
20 entire state. However, something that is often  
21 overlooked is that within that larger group, older  
22 immigrants in particular are growing rapidly.

23 Over the last ten years, within New York State,  
24 the number of older immigrants have nearly doubled  
25 the rate of those within the U.S. In New York City



1  
2 alone, the older immigrant population has grown over  
3 42 percent in the past decade. About 3.2 million  
4 immigrants, almost 20 percent are 65 and older. This  
5 makes older immigrants a group that we cannot ignore.  
6 While all older adults face age related challenges,  
7 such as health ailments, mobility issues, affordable  
8 housing, food insecurity and poverty, often these  
9 issues are seen at a higher rate in the older  
10 immigrant population.

11       Within the older adult population for example,  
12 older immigrants are 50 percent more likely to live  
13 in poverty. According to the center for an Urban  
14 Future, immigrant seniors in New York City have a  
15 median income of only \$9,900 compared to 18,300 of  
16 Native Born seniors. This is partly because older  
17 immigrants tend to receive significantly less than  
18 their Native born counterparts from wages, Social  
19 Security, private retirement account and other income  
20 sources.

21       Older immigrants are often under enrolled in  
22 programs like Social Security, SNAP and Medicare  
23 Medicaid. And many older immigrants do not qualify  
24 for these programs at all.

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1  
2 As my Co-Chair has already mentioned, another  
3 challenge for older immigrants is difficulty in  
4 accessing important information and essential  
5 services due to language barrier. Over 3 out of  
6 every 5 older immigrant in New York City, identify as  
7 limited English proficient and more than one-third of  
8 them live in a household where nobody over the age of  
9 14 speaks English at all.

10 As a result, many immigrant seniors are unable to  
11 find interpretation for important information. This  
12 can leave older immigrants isolated and make it  
13 difficult for them to be connected to an often  
14 confusing and complicated system. Even when we do  
15 serve our city's seniors, we often forget to take the  
16 unique needs of immigrant seniors into account. For  
17 example, the City does not always make all  
18 information available in a variety of languages and  
19 frequently fall short on providing culturally  
20 competent foods and programming.

21 Many of these issues have been worsened by the  
22 corona pandemic. For example, COVID-19 has increased  
23 food insecurity among all seniors but especially  
24 among older immigrants. Many of our COVID-19 health  
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1 resources and information are located online. When  
2 older immigrants disproportionately suffer from lack  
3 of access to the internet. And what we have heard  
4 from advocates and community that some things as  
5 simple and important as vaccine and testing  
6 information, it is not available in multiple  
7 languages.  
8

9 This is not acceptable. We cannot leave older  
10 immigrants out of the conversation or out of the  
11 system. As older adults are the population most  
12 vulnerable COVID-19. We must take extra steps to  
13 ensure older immigrants are connected to the city's  
14 resources and services. We must make sure immigrant  
15 seniors have access to proper culturally competent  
16 meals, to technology, to remain socially engaged to  
17 healthcare and to critical information available in  
18 their language.

19 At this hearing, the Committee want to hear from  
20 DFTA and MOIA about what they are doing to help serve  
21 the unique needs of our immigrant seniors. We want  
22 to see how the two agencies work together with  
23 services and resources they provide to the city's  
24 older immigrant population. And how they have  
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reached out to this population in particular during the pandemic. The Committee especially want to hear about how the agency and the city are working to vaccinate older immigrants. How are they having to reach out to? What rates are being vaccinated at? What must make sure our older immigrant community is not left out of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and that they are connected to important resources and services at this difficult time.

Finally, to our seniors watching this hearing, remember if you are over the age of 65 and live within New York City, you are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccinations are free and available to all seniors 65 and older regardless of immigration status. You can go to the website [www.vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](http://www.vaccinefinder.nyc.gov) to find a location near you and schedule your appointment for a vaccination online.

You can also call to make an appointment at 1-877-829-4692. It might take awhile but be persistent. You must make an appointment to receive the vaccine and as I said, you got to be persistent because it is not easy and if you need further

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1 assistance scheduling an appointment to receive a  
2 free COVID-19 vaccine, you can call the senior center  
3 that you go to or other senior center that you know  
4 of or other DFTA program and let's make sure that you  
5 get vaccinated and stay healthy.  
6

7 I would like to thank the Committee Staff for  
8 their help in putting together this hearing. Our  
9 Committee Counsel Nuzhat Chowdhury, Policy Analyst  
10 Kalima Johnson, Finance Analyst Daniel Kroop and  
11 Finance Unit Head Sodina Supora[SP?] and I would also  
12 like to thank my Director of Legislation and  
13 Communication Conner Irvine[SP?] and I would like to  
14 thank the other members of the Committee who have  
15 joined us today.

16 Now, I am going to turn it back to Chair  
17 Menchaca. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much Chair  
19 Chin and it is something that is important that both  
20 of these committee's are looking at something that  
21 just becomes invisible for so many of us. And so, we  
22 are looking forward to our testimony from the  
23 Administration and I will hand it to, I will just  
24 hand it right now over to Harbani to administer the  
25 oath.

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1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chairs. My name is  
3 Harbani Ahuja and I am Counsel to the Committee on  
4 Immigration for the New York City Council. Before we  
5 begin, I want to remind everyone that you will be  
6 mute until you are called on to testify, when you  
7 will unmuted by the host.

8 I will be calling on panelists to testify.  
9 Please listen for your name to be called and I will  
10 be periodically announcing who the next panelist will  
11 be. For everyone testifying today, please note that  
12 there may be a few seconds of delay before you are  
13 unmuted and we thank you in advance for your  
14 patience.

15 All hearing participants should submit written  
16 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). At today's  
17 hearing, the first panelist to give testimony will be  
18 representatives from the Administration followed by  
19 Council Member questions and then members of the  
20 public will testify.

21 Council Members who have questions for a  
22 particular panelist should use the Zoom raise hand  
23 function and I will call on you after the panelists  
24 have completed their testimony. I will now call on  
25 members of the Administration to testify. Testimony

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1  
2 will be provided by DFTA Commissioner Lorraine  
3 Cortés-Vázquez. Additionally, the following  
4 representatives will be available for answering  
5 questions. Nick Gulotta from the Director of  
6 Outreach and Organizing at the Mayor's Office of  
7 Immigrant Affairs.

8 Before we begin, I will administer the oath.  
9 Commissioner Cortés-Vázquez and Nick Gulotta, I will  
10 call on you each individually for a response. Please  
11 raise your right hands.

12 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth  
13 and nothing but the truth in your testimony before  
14 this Committee and to respond honestly to Council  
15 Member questions? Commissioner Cortés-Vázquez?

16 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Nick Gulotta?

18 NICK GULOTTA: Yes.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Commissioner, you  
20 may begin when you are ready.

21 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Great, thank you so  
22 much. Good morning. First of all, it is a good  
23 morning, I want to take this opportunity to say an  
24 early happy Lunar New Year to all my colleagues. It  
25 is this Friday and I did not want to forget, which is

1 something that I do a lot lately. So, anyway,  
2 everyone have a last year's Lunar New Year was  
3 interesting Chairwoman Chin. It was the beginning of  
4 the pandemic. There was a fire and so, we want this  
5 Lunar New Year to be not as eventful but as joyful.  
6 So, thank you Chairwoman Chin, Chairperson Menchaca  
7 and the members of the Committees on Aging and the  
8 Committee on Immigration.  
9

10 I am as you know, Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez and the  
11 Commissioner for the New York City Department for the  
12 Aging. Again, I am joined today by my colleague who  
13 I have the greatest respect for and admiration Nick  
14 Gulotta, who is the Director of Outreach and  
15 Organizing at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
16 Affairs.

17 I appreciate the opportunity to testify before  
18 you today as someone from this effected community. I  
19 look forward to sharing information about our  
20 services themselves, as well as some of the personal  
21 stories of immigrant older adults who have benefited  
22 from the services offered by our vast network of  
23 agencies in the Aging network.  
24  
25



1  
2       These stories are small highlights of the impact  
3 of the work that our communities do. I want to give  
4 both of you cited some population information and I  
5 want to just dove into that a little deeper.  
6 According to the American Community Survey of 2019,  
7 there were over 1.7 million older adults living in  
8 New York. Accounting for roughly 21 percent of the  
9 City's population. I want to just say that again.  
10 Older adults represent 21 percent of the city's  
11 population and that number is expected to grow in the  
12 future.

13       Despite the onslaught of federal rule changes  
14 over the last four years which we all had to suffer  
15 through, many of them targeted immigrants. New York  
16 City remained a destination where many immigrants,  
17 particularly older adults were safe and it was a  
18 harder city. In 2019, New York City had 3 million  
19 foreign born residents, down about less than 1  
20 percent from 2010. Yet, despite this small decrease  
21 in the overall population, foreign-born residents  
22 over the age of 60 increased by 33 percent between  
23 2010 and 2019 over close to 1 million people. It was  
24 about 875,000 people. And the most popular countries  
25

1 of origin are now China, the Dominican Republic and  
2 Puerto Rico.  
3

4 With the rise in immigrant older New Yorkers,  
5 there is great diversities in languages spoken at  
6 home as well. For older New Yorkers, just over 47  
7 percent speak a language other than English at home.  
8 That is almost close to half the older population  
9 speaks another language. This is an increase of 2.6  
10 from the earlier survey done in 2010. It is also  
11 interesting to note which of these languages have  
12 changed.

13 From 2010 to 2019, older adults who spoke Spanish  
14 at home increased by 33 percent, while those who  
15 speak Chinese, Mandarin and other Asian Korean other  
16 Asian Pacific Islander languages increased by nearly  
17 54 percent. 33 percent for Spanish, Pan Asian  
18 languages 54 percent. Additional languages, other  
19 than Indo-European also increased by almost 49  
20 percent.

21 Within those who speak a language other than  
22 English at home, almost 32 percent indicate that they  
23 speak English less than very well, which is a slight  
24 decrease from 2010, which basically talks about the  
25 new immigration status. The population of immigrant

1  
2 older adults are usually not new immigrants and  
3 that's one thing that I think we all need to remind  
4 ourselves. But residents who are choosing to age in  
5 place in New York City, who immigrated between 1990  
6 and 1999 and then there was a slight decrease in 2000  
7 by 47 percent and 44 percent respectively. While  
8 those who entered prior to 1990 increased by 17.1  
9 percent, which means that people are aging in place.

10 Given the length of stay in the country, it makes  
11 sense that any overwhelming number of foreign-born  
12 older adults are also being naturalized citizens. In  
13 2019, roughly 78 percent of foreign-born older adults  
14 were naturalized citizens; up from 74 percent in  
15 2010.

16 For the remaining 22 percent that are not  
17 citizens, many face challenges accessing benefits  
18 such as Federal Medicaid, for which they are not  
19 eligible and you and I know that if you have an  
20 immigrant status and you have been working with a  
21 Social Security number that is one benefit you will  
22 never realize. So, you have been contributing and  
23 will never draw down on those benefits.

24 Reduced access to health benefits was exacerbated  
25 by the recent federal changes to the public charge

1 rule, which added further restrictions for many non-  
2 citizens who might otherwise access public benefits  
3 while also creating a chilling effect for others who  
4 are not subject to the rule but fear consequences if  
5 they apply. Historically, the public charge rule had  
6 been used in the green card application process to  
7 assess whether that person would be dependent on cash  
8 assistance from government funded programs to  
9 survive.  
10

11 In 2018, the federal administration proposed  
12 changes to expand which benefits would be used to  
13 evaluate public charge status to be included non-  
14 emergency Federal Medicaid, SNAP Supplemental  
15 Nutrition Assistance, which is needed by many  
16 families, public housing, Section 8 housing vouchers  
17 and Medicaid Part D Low-Income Subsidy.

18 While using these programs does not necessarily  
19 preclude someone from changing their visa status or  
20 getting a green card, they can be used as factors.  
21 The rule is currently tied up in the courts and it is  
22 currently under review by the Biden Administration,  
23 but it is still currently in effect and it will  
24 likely take a while for it to be reversed. Despite  
25 Federal policies again, the de Blasio Administration,

1  
2 the City of New York has made it a priority to ensure  
3 the city provides critical services to everyone  
4 including immigrants.

5 Some of these services include NYC Care, which  
6 provides free healthcare to all eligible individuals  
7 regardless of their immigration status and mental  
8 health services through Thrive NYC. And during this  
9 pandemic, and food hubs through GetFoodNYC. It also  
10 offers legal assistance including immigration related  
11 services through MOIA's ActionNYC and tenant  
12 representation through the Human Resources  
13 Administration.

14 New York City remains a sanctuary city, full of  
15 accessible supports for those who need it regardless  
16 of immigration status. We are optimistic about the  
17 changes in the federal landscape and look forward to  
18 a new pathway forward to all immigrants.

19 Much more can be done and much needs to be done  
20 to alleviate some of the fears. New York City offers  
21 a wide range of services for older adults over the  
22 age of 60 regardless of status. These services  
23 remain available and open to all New Yorkers  
24 throughout the COVID-19. In fact the documentation  
25 question, the status question is not raised by any

1  
2 program at the Department for the Aging. All  
3 services follow the local guidance from Local Law 30  
4 of 2017 regarding language access. This ensures that  
5 all written communication is provided in at least 10  
6 languages and in addition to onsite translation, we  
7 have the telephone translation which offers 240  
8 languages. And those, our services have access to  
9 that also.

10       Additionally, all services are provided in a  
11 culturally competent manner. That is our goal, that  
12 is what we strive for. New York City Aging staff  
13 receive Cultural Competency training in order to best  
14 meet the needs of the diverse group of older adults  
15 that we serve. Many of our programs use their  
16 cultural competence skills to engage, establish  
17 trusting relationships and to assist older adults and  
18 their caregivers access services that they would  
19 otherwise refuse or have access to for fear of  
20 providing personal information to the government  
21 organizations. We need trusted voices and we need  
22 trusted partners and that's what we tried to  
23 inculcate in our agencies.

24       The fear is also often due to their social  
25 political backgrounds and distrust in governments and

1  
2 organizations from their native countries of origin  
3 and fear of being reported for not having adjusted  
4 their immigration status and that was really  
5 increased during the last four years. Case  
6 management is a great help to many immigrants and  
7 non-immigrants alike. Through this service, older  
8 adults receive help signing up for public benefits  
9 for which they are eligible, including Medicare and  
10 Medicaid, SNAP, Senior Citizen Rent Increase  
11 Exemption and Home Energy Assistance.

12 Referrals for other services are provided, such  
13 as assistance with house chores, shopping and  
14 grocery. There has been particularly in-demand  
15 service during the pandemic, as older adults have  
16 been encouraged to stay at home as much as possible.  
17 So, we have seen an increase in our need for shopping  
18 assistance as well as in home services.

19 Additionally, New York City Aging supports older  
20 adults seeking new or different employment. Through  
21 this program, older adults have access to employment  
22 services, training and career counseling. This is the  
23 only program unfortunately which we have to ask an  
24 immigration status because it is a federal mandate  
25 that we do so. Other services include Elder Justice,

1  
2 Geriatric Mental Health, Health Insurance, our ICAP  
3 program Health Insurance Counseling and Assistance  
4 Program, and our Grandparent Resource center.

5       During this pandemic, one of the issue areas that  
6 we have focused a lot of attention on is social  
7 isolation because you know the social isolation has a  
8 devastating effect on all of us and it has for the  
9 last nine months. It has a particular negative and  
10 health impact on older adults. So, we have included  
11 several programs to combat social isolation including  
12 Friendly Visiting and Friendly Voices. All of these  
13 programs are now done during the pandemic, done  
14 through virtual visits and telephonically.

15       Additionally, Friendly Voices has been very  
16 active. Through this, older adults are partnered  
17 with a volunteer who checks with them via phone or  
18 video weekly and it has been expanded to include  
19 socialization groups on phone or video after hearing  
20 that culturally many were not responsive to the one-  
21 on-one model. Matches were made based on language  
22 preference.

23       In addition to Friendly Voices, the New York City  
24 Aging staff have been providing an average of 10,000  
25 wellness calls. When I say New York City Aging



1 staff, I am talking about the vast network of 300 or  
2 more providers who represent the wide arrange of  
3 communities in this city. Provide over 10,000 calls  
4 a day to older adults during this pandemic to reduce  
5 social isolation. These calls are made in several  
6 languages. One of these clients is an immigrant from  
7 Jamaica from whom staff was able to establish a  
8 strong, trusting relationship. The older adult was  
9 living in a room in the basement of a house in  
10 Brooklyn under unsafe conditions without heat. She  
11 had just tried, without success, to apply for senior  
12 housing. New York City Aging staff was able to reach  
13 out to DOROT, a local nonprofit organization,  
14 Homelessness Prevention Program and ask if they would  
15 interview the older adult for eligibility for their  
16 privately funded shelter. This unique program has  
17 agreements with two highly quality assistant living  
18 facilities to accept referrals for their shelter when  
19 they have openings.  
20

21 At first, the older adult was hesitant to  
22 consider permanent placement in an assisted living  
23 facility as she did not see herself as being frail  
24 and had concerns about being confined to a facility.  
25 Nevertheless, she agreed to be interviewed by the

1  
2 shelter staff and was accepted. The older adult  
3 decided to accept DOROT's offer and moved into the  
4 shelter on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. That is one of the success  
5 stories, I wish we had more and more of those on  
6 daily basis.

7 New York City remains a vital resource for many  
8 of our older New Yorkers seeking assistance, whether  
9 it is finding better housing accommodations to a  
10 variety of other services the department offers.

11 Over the years older adults are also eligible to  
12 receive free meals, access to free meals through our  
13 Home Delivered program as well as through our local  
14 senior centers. And for years we have tried and  
15 have succeeded to make sure that religious, cultural  
16 preferences are being attended to for the populations  
17 that we have. For these meals, there is a wide range  
18 of meals option, including vegetarian, halal, kosher,  
19 Spanish, Pan-Asian, which seeks to deal with the  
20 dietary needs and the preferences of older adults.  
21 You know that is one of those issues that we can  
22 always move more and grow as the population keeps  
23 changing, our services will keep changing. And that  
24 is why we look for the opportunities to create new -

1  
2 to look at the senior center of the future, so that  
3 we could really move in that direction.

4       These meals are essential and during the  
5 pandemic, we found ourselves with many more older  
6 adults finding themselves food insecure and we are  
7 really looking forward to rollout a reengineering of  
8 senior centers to provide food in a variety of ways  
9 directly to clients. And yes, Councilwoman Chin, we  
10 are working diligently to bring back the senior  
11 center, the food delivery process during this  
12 pandemic and I think that we may have real good news  
13 in a maybe a week. So, I am looking forward with  
14 that much more anxiously I think than you are. Even  
15 with this meal options, immigrant older adults  
16 sometimes experience difficulty navigating assistance  
17 in order to access food. We know that.

18       Recently a resident of Coney Island contacted  
19 Council member Treyger regarding their elderly non-  
20 English speaking neighbor who they uh, excuse me -  
21 who they thought was frail and alone and in need of  
22 food. They didn't have any contact information. The  
23 Council Member Treyger reached out to the local  
24 senior center, who then reached out to NYC Aging to  
25 help identify who that person was. Through New York

1  
2 City Aging's STARS program, the database, two adults  
3 were identified and contacted. It was confirmed that  
4 there was a woman who did not speak English living  
5 alone as her husband had passed away. New York City  
6 Aging reached back, that's the new way that we are  
7 saying DFTA Councilwoman Chin and Council Member  
8 Menchaca, it confuses me to. New York City Aging  
9 reached back to the senior center who had a custodian  
10 deliver shelf-stable food to the older adult. That  
11 is the connection between the Council Member and that  
12 wonderful neighbor who identified this English  
13 speaking neighbor of theirs who as living in  
14 isolation and recently widowed.

15 She was thankful for meals but was afraid to  
16 leave her home because of COVID. She said she did  
17 not need anything other than food. The program added  
18 the older adult to the meal delivery list and she  
19 began to receive food through GetFoodNYC Emergency  
20 Home Food System.

21 In addition to meals and case management, New  
22 York City's Aging's network of senior centers also  
23 provides a wide range of educational – oh my God, I  
24 said that really weird, a wide range of educational  
25 and enrichment options. Some examples of these

1  
2 activities include nutrition education, creative  
3 writing classes, intergenerational programs,  
4 assistance with unemployment benefits and housing  
5 supports. Now all of those programs are done  
6 virtually or telephonically. Many of the programs  
7 offers are rooted in other cultures. For example,  
8 Salsa classes, African drumming, Chinese art, Tai  
9 Chi, yoga, they have all become staples at many  
10 centers. Many of these programs are being offered in  
11 languages other than English and if you go to - there  
12 is a program in Brooklyn that is, I call it the  
13 United Nations, they have Asian Latino, East Asians,  
14 Indians, Russians and Italian, all cohabiting in  
15 these floors dancing and it is quite a site to see.  
16 So, I invite everyone to go to EMICO at least once.  
17 It is a treat and there are specific offerings in a  
18 variety of centers you know, and the goal is to do  
19 more and more EMICO's because as the population  
20 changes, they will no longer be a one program that  
21 can address one population. There will be multiple  
22 populations in a particular center.

23 We also understand that many seniors are now  
24 living in a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community,  
25 commonly known NORCs across the city. Our goal is

1 obviously to increase those NORCs overtime. New York  
2 City Aging funds services for 28 NORCs and there are  
3 an additional 32 NORCs that are funded directly by  
4 the State or discretionary funding by New York City  
5 Council Members, so we thank you for that. On  
6 average, just under 49 percent of older adults were  
7 born in another country. However, out of the New  
8 York City Aging funded programs, 52 percent of them  
9 are in communities where the percentage of foreign-  
10 born older adults exceeds that of the city average.

11  
12 So, our NORCs and the ones funded by the  
13 Department for the aging are in multicultural  
14 communities and immigrant communities, which we are  
15 very proud of. Of those that are funded by State or  
16 discretionary funds, 63 percent of those NORCs are  
17 also in districts that have a higher-than-average  
18 concentrations of immigrant older adults. These  
19 supports the earlier mentioned data shows there is a  
20 trend for immigrants aging in place. And so that is  
21 something that we are looking to in the future to  
22 make sure that we can program. Which is soon, I will  
23 be talking to Chairwoman Chin about something called  
24 Community Cares, which is to address the needs of  
25 people who are aging in place.

1  
2 Many of our immigrant older adults are caregivers  
3 or have a caregiving and I know that personally and I  
4 know some of you also know that personally. It is  
5 quite a task to be a caregiver. Zoraida and her  
6 husband are among them. Zoraida acts as a secondary  
7 caregiver to her husband who is suffering from cancer  
8 and diabetes and then she and her husband entered the  
9 country in 2017 from the Dominican Republic and have  
10 since exceeded their time allowed on a Visa, a  
11 visitor's visa.

12 Access to paying jobs is challenging due to the  
13 immigration status and medical needs so they really  
14 suffer from a lot of financial instability, which is  
15 not uncommon. In addition to caring for her husband,  
16 Zoraida assists with childcare in exchange for room  
17 and board for the living room in which they both  
18 live.

19 Zoraida was able to contact PSS Circle of Care  
20 Caregiver's, which is one of our caregiving programs  
21 funded by the New York City Department for the Aging,  
22 New York City Aging, through which supportive  
23 services are provided to caregivers. Through this  
24 program, the family was able to receive an air  
25 conditioner, medications, medical supplies, metro

1 cards and a new mattress. Additionally, they have  
2 been provided with resources for immigrants,  
3 supportive counseling and individual respite care.  
4 Zoraida now has the time to have some respite for  
5 herself from here daily caregiving. And in Zoraida's  
6 words, these are here words.  
7

8 "The assistance we have received has had a very  
9 positive impact. This program has been a helping hand  
10 during these difficult times. Due to our legal  
11 status, we are limited in the amount of help we can  
12 get. Every time we have a need, Circle of Care has  
13 been there. They provided an air conditioner, saved  
14 our lives during a time of extreme heat. Incontinent  
15 supplies have been a great relief for me and for my  
16 financial burden. I could go on and on about the  
17 number of things that they have helped us with but  
18 all services have been of great value. Thank you."

19 There are also an unknown number of unrecognized  
20 caregivers, we know that. Most caregivers do not  
21 even consider themselves caregivers in an immigrant  
22 family. They feel that it is there responsibility  
23 and for a variety of reasons, they understand that  
24 the role they are playing is just a norm in our  
25 culture. And so New York City Aging continues to



1  
2 educate our providers and clients and encourage  
3 caretakers to identify themselves as such.

4       With such an understanding, caretakers are then  
5 able to find the supports they need to help them  
6 navigate through this very complex process of  
7 benefits. And they also are able to give you some  
8 respite care. Every caregiver needs one day to just  
9 take time for themselves.

10       New York City Aging partners with community-based  
11 organization, help provide on-the-ground support  
12 services. Another example is the Hamilton Madison  
13 House Citywide Caregiver program is one of those such  
14 partners. They serve caregivers and older adults who  
15 speak Chinese, Korean and Japanese.

16       Olivia Ahn, Director of Hamilton Madison House  
17 Citywide Caregiver program says, "For many  
18 immigrants, whether undocumented or not, we're able  
19 to be the safety net. We have been able to connect  
20 many of our clients with vouchers through the New  
21 York City's Office of Immigrant Affairs in emergency  
22 relief funding and some funding in emergency response  
23 grants due to life circumstances. We also help  
24 immigrant clients find other community-based  
25 organizations to join and help support networks as

1 well as social networks. This allows them to find a  
2 place to potentially exchange and engage in  
3 organizing and advocacy within the community beyond  
4 themselves.”

6 So, in conclusion, I am saying that these are  
7 just a few examples of how New York City Aging, in  
8 partnership with our providers and sister agencies,  
9 such as MOIA, connect with immigrant older adults to  
10 services that they need. New York City Aging is  
11 pleased to be able to provide culturally competent  
12 services. Can we do better? Should we be doing  
13 more? Absolutely, but we are doing, given the  
14 resources and the limitations that we have, we are  
15 doing everything possible and making sure that we  
16 provide the cultural competency training, so that we  
17 can expand those services. I am incredibly grateful  
18 to Chairman Chin and the entire Aging Committee for  
19 your continued advocacy and partnership in support  
20 for this important community, for these immigrant  
21 communities and for older New Yorkers as a whole.  
22 Thank you very much.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Commissioner for  
24 your testimony. I am now going to turn it over to  
25 questions from Chair Menchaca followed by Chair Chin.

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
THE COMMITTEE ON AGING

35

1  
2 Panelists, please stay unmuted if possible during the  
3 question and answer period. Thank you. Chair  
4 Menchaca, please begin.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, thank you so much  
6 Harbani and thank you Commissioner for being here and  
7 for sharing the stories. I think it was really  
8 important for us to remember what it felt like when  
9 senior centers were open when we were in full  
10 throttle in the experiences. I remember just going  
11 and dancing and singing and just being in community  
12 and how much I want to go back to that space. And I  
13 think that just makes this hearing even more  
14 important because all that is gone. In so many ways,  
15 all that important infrastructure is what we are  
16 talking about here in services and I think those are  
17 beginning to shift and change.

18 I also just want to note that we are not joined  
19 by the Commissioner of MOIA and I am always  
20 disappointed when I cannot have the Commissioner here  
21 before the City Council's Committee on Immigration.  
22 We are really excited that Nick is here and I have  
23 questions for him and I hope that he can answer the  
24 questions that we have and if not, we will ask you to  
25

1  
2 get someone on the line to be able to answer them.  
3 Because this is really critical as we prepare for the  
4 budget and for other legislative agenda items. And  
5 so, Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez, I am going to  
6 actually hand it over to Chair Chin, so that she can  
7 ask you as the appropriate agency, since you did  
8 testify and I will come back with my MOIA questions.  
9 Thank you so much.

10 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Great, thank you so  
11 much. I hope to dance through another senior center  
12 also. We all hope.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think we all hope to do  
14 that.

15 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We are all hoping for  
16 that. Get vaccinated.

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Well, we got to make sure all  
18 our seniors get vaccinated and that's what we told to  
19 the Mayor and the Vaccine Command Center. Open up  
20 our senior centers. Do the vaccination there, right.  
21 Do it at our 202 buildings, do it at our NORCs. The  
22 infrastructure is there. I know we don't have enough  
23 vaccine but let's get ready. When the vaccine comes,  
24 we are ready. So, we want to work with you to make  
25

1  
2 sure that is easy for our seniors because right now,  
3 it is so difficult. It is ridiculous. You get on  
4 the website, you can't navigate. You get on the  
5 phone it takes hours and that's the complaint that we  
6 have been getting from our seniors, that they are so  
7 frustrated and we just heard that the state is going  
8 to give some - you know, to different community and  
9 it's like, we all need it, especially for our  
10 seniors.

11 Commissioner, it is always great to see you.

12 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: You are looking well, so we  
14 got a lot of work to do. I mean, in your testimony  
15 you talk about you know the growing number of seniors  
16 but then when you compare the budget right, seniors  
17 are over 20 percent of the city's population?

18 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: 21 percent, will soon  
19 be almost 25 percent.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Okay and how much is the DFTA  
21 budget? It is still less than half a percent okay  
22 and that's a shame. And that's why we need to  
23 continue to fight for more funding. We didn't get  
24 the \$10 million that was promised to support our  
25 senior center in the last budget. So, we are going

1  
2 to have to make sure we get that money and more. I  
3 mean, the senior center that you gave examples to,  
4 they are great and we need more of those. And  
5 especially for our immigrant population. I know that  
6 there is ten senior centers that are serving  
7 immigrant population that are funded by City Council  
8 discretionary funding.

9       So, my first question is, how is DFTA working  
10 with these centers before the pandemic and during the  
11 pandemic and how do you see really incorporating them  
12 into DFTA's portfolio so they are contract the  
13 center. I know that there is a new RFP that you are  
14 working on and so, how are you going to sort of make  
15 sure that they have a chance to become a funded  
16 senior center?

17       LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: If you recall when I  
18 first became Commissioner, two minutes after I became  
19 Commissioner, maybe two days, I had a hearing and I  
20 had to present and it was one of the first things  
21 that you and Council Member Danny Dromm drilled me  
22 about. It was about the investment that the Council  
23 made in the immigrant senior centers and so, and my  
24 commitment at that time was to make sure that they  
25

1  
2 were growing and receive services and had capacity  
3 building training and we have been doing all of that  
4 and most of that in preparation for this RFP that we  
5 will be releasing, to make sure that they can  
6 compete. And we have also identified areas as you  
7 know, we have been doing some mapping of older adults  
8 throughout New York and looking at where we have  
9 service deserts and it is interesting. Well, it is  
10 not interesting, it's not surprising that a lot of  
11 the service deserts are where there is some immigrant  
12 communities. And so, that we do have the opportunity  
13 for growth in those communities but our commitment to  
14 make sure that those were not seen as separate and  
15 apart, that an integral part of the NYC Aging was  
16 important to me but it was also important to you and  
17 we made sure that we did that.

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, during the pandemic, were  
19 you in contact with them to make sure that they are  
20 also you know, calling uhm, the seniors and also  
21 providing the program.

22 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: They are considered  
23 part of the portfolio. They are not – they are not  
24 distinct from you know, we don't see federal funding,  
25

1  
2 state funding, City Council funding. We see aging  
3 service providers and so, they are incorporated into  
4 all of the initiatives that New York City HD and if  
5 there is not, then I need you to let me know who has  
6 not but I doubt it very seriously.

7 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I think it's the same issue  
8 with some of the NORC program that is funded by  
9 discretionary money from the City Council. Because  
10 even in the last budget we started some new NORCs in  
11 Staten Island and Far Rockaway.

12 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And although we don't  
13 have budget oversight, when it comes to program and  
14 services we do and we are also very grateful to your  
15 support for all the NORCs to receive the nursing  
16 services. And so, you know, that has continued.

17 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, we will - yeah, definitely  
18 we will continue to do that during the budget time.  
19 Uhm and you were talking about uhm, all the programs  
20 that's doing by phone calls and by virtual. Uhm, not  
21 all seniors are tech savvy.

22 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I know, we know.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: So, how is DFTA working with  
24 you know getting equipment? Some of the seniors  
25 don't have the equipment and they need training.



1  
2 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, so, so, so, the  
3 good thing is that we have – we had the NYCHA program  
4 you know that despite some of the – it was a success  
5 where 10,000 older adults were able to get – 10,000  
6 older adults were able to get tablets in all of the  
7 NYCHA programs. And that in addition to the 22  
8 programs that we support to get technology training  
9 through OATs, you know, so that just augmented that  
10 program. All those services.

11 What we have done as a result of that, is working  
12 with the CTO City's Technology, Chief Technology  
13 Officer to make sure that we can try to replicate the  
14 NYCHA program. And what we are looking to do is to  
15 do just that. You know, create an infrastructure so  
16 that more and more people can have the tablets and  
17 the training, the companion training with those  
18 tablets because what good is a tablet if you don't  
19 know how to fully utilize it.

20 So, to have the companion training and for us, it  
21 has been you know we will look at it as we rollout  
22 new initiatives you know and together, we will make  
23 sure that those kind of things are possible. But  
24 that is the way of the future and we know that that's  
25 the direction that we have to go into.

1  
2 It has been amazing. When we started this  
3 pandemic, there were only 31 programs Councilwoman  
4 Chin who did virtual programming. Right now we have  
5 upwards of 200 and they are doing very creative  
6 things. And what we have done is create a library,  
7 so that they could use each other's programs and  
8 services or brings you - you know, state of the art  
9 kind of programming at the local senior centers.

10 So, lots to do and not enough time to do it.

11 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Not just enough time, not  
12 enough money. So, we got to make sure we get our  
13 fair share especially and we got to make that loud  
14 and clear to the Administration that the senior  
15 population cannot be ignored and the immigrant  
16 population cannot be ignored.

17 This budget, we are hopeful that there will more  
18 support from the federal government and Commissioner,  
19 we are behind you and I am really happy to hear that  
20 there will be some good news coming in a week or so  
21 about our senior centers and so -

22 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes, about them getting  
23 involved in the food security and we don't lose - you  
24 know and as you know, you know, from the very  
25

1  
2 beginning we have been working very closely with the  
3 Vaccine Command Center. We established this work  
4 group, you heard about the work group at the last  
5 hearing. You know, if we meet with them regularly,  
6 weekly to make sure that we get real time feedback on  
7 what improvements are necessary and our colleagues at  
8 the Vaccine Command Center have been very responsive  
9 and uhm and making things accessible and we are very  
10 - you know it is never off the table that senior  
11 centers could be a site. It's just how is it that we  
12 meet the demands of the vaccine as well as all of the  
13 conditions that are required for that.

14 So, nothing is off the table, it is still all  
15 part of the process and uhm, and I must say, the  
16 Vaccine Command Center is really being responsive to  
17 the needs of older adults and I am sure that Nick  
18 will also amplify to the language access and all of  
19 the issues for immigrant communities also.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, I mean, we talked to the  
21 staff at the Vaccine Command Center and we keep  
22 saying the same thing over and over again.  
23 Infrastructures are there and I know that in our last  
24 hearing, it did talk about that they did surveys of  
25 the senior centers. That 100's are possible. So, we

1  
2 say, well, where are they? We just want to make sure  
3 that it is easy for our seniors.

4 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: But we have made some  
5 good movement in that arena. We have the NYCHA  
6 senior centers that are also serving as vaccine pods  
7 which is a great, a great movement forward. We also  
8 have you know JASA has been selected to be – you know  
9 through the state. JASA, some of the housing  
10 projects as well as in other JASA program has served  
11 as a pod. So, we have models that we can build on  
12 and use as examples. RAIN, just this weekend you  
13 know was able to serve as a pod, just for a weekend  
14 as a test and they were able to do 270 vaccines.

15 So, uhm, you know, there are examples and we are  
16 moving forward and you know, we will see where the  
17 demand is and we are also very fortunate with Yankee  
18 Stadium, for the Bronx that is, you know so.

19 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I know.

20 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: As a Bronxite, I had  
21 to throw that one in and as a Yankee fan.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I know I mean, that's why  
23 there are examples out there. I mean the issues is  
24 making sure that we get the vaccine and also better  
25 coordination with the state.

1  
2       So, it's like, sometimes it's all confusing. The  
3 state is saying something or the state is doing  
4 something and the city is - so I think we really need  
5 better coordination with the Mayor and the Governor.

6       LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: When we - I want to  
7 just put things in perspective also. When we were  
8 rolling out the plan for the vaccine, we were rolling  
9 out a plan for 75 plus and so, with the Vaccine  
10 Command Center and the entire city, we were looking  
11 at a population of about 300,000. Alright, a little  
12 bit over 300,000, 350,000 more or less.

13       And then you know within hours, it went to 65. I  
14 don't think it was hours, I think it was one hour.  
15 And so then that meant that the demand was over 1  
16 million people. And so that, you know, if you are  
17 planning for a third of the population and now you  
18 are planning for the whole, it will tax systems. In  
19 addition to taxing the systems, you know we have the  
20 supply demand competition. You know, we demand it  
21 there. People are more and more interested as we do  
22 more education. Fear gets dissipated but yet you  
23 know we have a supply issue and so, that's why I keep  
24 saying, I wish it were better. It could be better

1  
2 but it is a demand issue and I want us to be  
3 persistent so that we can get vaccinated.

4 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, no, we agree with you.  
5 We know that it is a demand issue and we don't have  
6 enough supply but the thing is, that we want to make  
7 sure that there is a plan in place as infrastructure  
8 in place. So, when we do get the supply that we are  
9 ready to roll it out as quickly as possible and  
10 that's what the coordination of you know, working  
11 with DFTA, MOIA, making sure that our immigrant  
12 population, our immigrant seniors are protected.  
13 That they know because they are the ones that's  
14 having the most difficulty.

15 I mean our office has been getting calls, like,  
16 they don't speak English, they can't get on the  
17 website. They can't get an appointment. So, that's  
18 why we need to have these programs, these pods in  
19 immigrant communities that makes it easier for them  
20 to be able to access.

21 So, I guess the other thing that I wanted to talk  
22 with you about is the coordination and work with  
23 other agencies. I mean, we have a lot of immigrant  
24 older workers who are getting you know, exploited and  
25 they are having problems and then we have the

1  
2 Department of Consumer Affair Worker Protection. Is  
3 MOIA and DFTA working with them? Are there any  
4 communications between the agency to make sure that  
5 resources are available to older immigrant workers?

6 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We are working very  
7 closely with the respective parties, particularly  
8 around exploiting individuals. So, that is a key  
9 issue for us. An older worker, financial security of  
10 all older New Yorkers is key to us. And I will – so  
11 we work very, very closely with the authorities to  
12 deal with the exploiting issue and I can have Nick  
13 address some of the things in particular that we may  
14 be doing jointly. But MOIA works very closely with  
15 the network of agencies. With all of the senior  
16 center agencies to make sure that they get all of the  
17 information about immigration and all of the  
18 supports.

19 So, Nick, I will turn that over to you, if you  
20 want to add anything. Nick?

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Are you on mute?

22 NICK GULOTTA: Can you hear me?

23 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Hi.  
24  
25

1  
2           NICK GULOTTA: Wonderful. Uh, good morning Chair  
3 Chin and Chair Menchaca and I just want to say, for  
4 us at MOIA, immigrant seniors are an extremely  
5 important population both personally as immigrants  
6 and the children of immigrants as many of us are but  
7 also, as the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.  
8 Just yesterday to be directly responsive to your  
9 question Chair Chin. We were in touch with the  
10 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection,  
11 particularly about wage theft and exploitation and  
12 making sure undocumented workers or undocumented  
13 seniors also have a way to be reached through this  
14 effort.

15           So, it is something we are in daily communication  
16 with, with the Vaccine Command Center, with our  
17 colleagues with the Department of Health. We are  
18 coordinating across agencies to bring resources and  
19 expertise to reach these populations.

20           We are also advising a lot on the outreach  
21 materials, languages. We are making sure that  
22 virtual outreach also has a phone component for  
23 populations who don't have internet. We are going to  
24 be standing up and have a number of them scheduled.



1  
2 Vaccine information Town Halls with multiple agencies  
3 coming together partnering with community-based  
4 organizations. Many of them DFTA providers to reach  
5 populations like the ones we are discussing now.

6 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah and Chairwoman  
7 Chin, just yesterday, we met with a professor at NYU,  
8 Dr. Ernst Gonzales to really look at our senior  
9 employment program. To help us come up with an  
10 intake process and processes that are more inclusive  
11 and are not barriers to employment and also to look  
12 at new employer populations that we should be working  
13 with.

14 So, there is this constant rethinking and  
15 relooking at all of our services and this is the  
16 first time and I would say maybe, I started at the  
17 Department for the Aging in the employment unit and I  
18 think this is the first time we are saying it is time  
19 for a refresh. And so, we are really pleased with  
20 this partnership at NYU to do just that.

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Great and I think lastly  
22 before I turn it back to Chair Menchaca is that uhm,  
23 does DFTA have I guess working with you know the 202  
24 building and NORC building, I know at one of the

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other hearings that we had when we are talking about you know getting technology to the seniors, do you have data in terms of like some of the senior buildings and the NORC building, what the immigrant population in there?

LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON CHIN: And the other thing is that are you working to really look at how to get the whole building connected to the internet? So, it is not the individual senior but the whole building. Because we have an example from one of the senior provider that she was able to get a very reasonable price for the whole building. So, now the whole building is connected.

So, the seniors will have the opportunity to use the — you know to participate in these virtual programs.

LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: The big issue and I think you are right because I know some of the buildings when they were first developed had a dedicated company that wired the building and so therefore the choice for older adults is limited. And so that's something that I think that we should

1  
2 be addressing. But I think what the biggest issue  
3 for all of us as New Yorkers is broadband, accessible  
4 broadband and expanding that.

5 That ends up being one of the biggest barriers  
6 for every technology program that we may come up with  
7 and that you and I want and that everyone in the city  
8 wants, is the cost of the monthly cost of the  
9 program.

10 So, it is one of the things that we are looking  
11 at with the Chief Technology Officer. How can we  
12 mitigate that? How can we make some arrangements  
13 with some of the companies? And those are a variety  
14 of the things that we are looking at but I am very  
15 concerned when a building was already wired with a  
16 particular company which then means the senior  
17 doesn't have many options. But if we had universal  
18 broadband, in many of our communities which is one  
19 thing I think I want all of us to keep you know  
20 persisting. I know that the Administration is  
21 working on that. That would help mitigate some of  
22 those concerns and that cost.

23 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, so we really look  
24 forward to working on that and Commissioner, we have  
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1  
2 a lot of work to do to make sure that we get the  
3 resources. And this is the budget year that we got  
4 to make sure that our immigrant seniors, our seniors  
5 are all taken care of.

6 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Absolutely, I can't  
7 thank you enough for that partnership and this is  
8 also the time to put a little crack in status quo and  
9 start revisioning our centers of the future.

10 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: That's right.

11 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So, I thank you so  
12 much.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: No, we thank you for your  
14 partnership. So, I am going to turn it back to Chair  
15 Menchaca.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much Chair  
17 Chin and I just concur with everything that was  
18 discussed in terms of the partnership and the budget  
19 and what it needs to do to reflect the needs of our  
20 communities, especially those impacted by COVID that  
21 are taking the brunt of so much of what we are  
22 experiencing and seeing first hand with data.

23 This isn't an anecdote; we know this is real and  
24 we have been joined as well by a few other Council  
25 Members and I want to say thank you for joining us

1  
2 today for our joint hearing. Council Member Eugene,  
3 Treyger, Deutsch. Thank you so much for being here  
4 today and I will begin then with question for the  
5 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and Nick, thanks  
6 again for joining us today.

7 In MOIA's annual report, there is a description  
8 of the older immigrant population disaggregated by  
9 immigration status. Does MOIA have additional data  
10 on where older immigrant New Yorkers live within the  
11 five boroughs?

12 NICK GULOTTA: Thank you for the question Council  
13 Member. Can you hear me?

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes, I got you.

15 NICK GULOTTA: Fantastic. We definitely do have  
16 that data. I will say a lot of the data is based off  
17 of by where languages are spoken. So, I would be  
18 happy to circle to back with specifics from that. I  
19 will say that we can get it to you right after this  
20 hearing.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, or - okay, well,  
22 let's see how the rest of the questions go. Does  
23 MOIA have country of origin data or top language or  
24 languages spoken for this particular population?

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NICK GULOTTA: Absolutely, so we know about 60 percent of our immigrant seniors don't speak English well. Are considered limited English proficient. We know for example that a significant majority, about 40 percent of our immigrant seniors are from Latin American, the Caribbean. We have data specific to both their citizenship status and then so who isn't as well. 20 percent who are not citizens of that population. Poverty, English proficiency, the number, sort of the top languages spoken as well.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, so I guess I am relating this to the first part of the question that really focuses on older immigrant populations that are disaggregated and so, really what I am trying to find out is and I know that you have the general information we are looking for is country origin, data or top languages for the disaggregated seniors.

NICK GULOTTA: Yeah, Council Member, it is 26 percent we know are from - I can sort of give you the regions. We can say 26 percent we look at from Europe. 46 percent, I am going to correct myself from Latin American, the Caribbean and 23 percent from Asia and Oceania.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay and okay. Well,  
3 let's go back to that because I think we also wanted  
4 a sense of the data that's connected to the locations  
5 of the five boroughs. And so, I am not understanding  
6 how the data is connected in terms of percentages for  
7 boroughs.

8 So, let's come back to that. What does MOIA have  
9 about - what data does MOIA have that speaks to the  
10 unique needs of older immigrant New Yorkers as  
11 distinct from the U.S. born counterparts?

12 NICK GULOTTA: Sure, absolutely. So, we know  
13 that about 50 percent senior immigrants are about 50  
14 percent more likely to be living in poverty than our  
15 native born seniors right. So, from our work, we  
16 know technology is going to be an issue in terms of  
17 access right. We know the needs in terms of benefits  
18 it is going to be stronger. We know that our work is  
19 sort of critical - from that data we know that our  
20 outreach has to be targeted towards our immigrant  
21 communities towards those hardest to reach, those who  
22 are least likely to you know, access benefits and  
23 that's what we do every single day. Our team is on  
24 the ground providing services in communities.  
25 Getting the word out about our programs and services.

1  
2 Throughout the pandemic, I will just say, we  
3 started like many of our sister agencies doing  
4 virtual outreach in March and April, we continue that  
5 to this day. We have done about 360 in language Know  
6 your Rights presentations since the pandemic started.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Nick, if could stop you  
8 there. What I am looking for is very specifically  
9 the older immigrant population. That's what the  
10 hearing is trying to focus on and so, I still feel  
11 like this is a general release of information and  
12 that's what I am looking for.

13 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Council Member  
14 Menchaca, I can give you and Nick, I will support you  
15 in this also. We can give you older adult immigrant  
16 population and we can disaggregate it by borough for  
17 you. So, I will see what we have and give you that.  
18 And I am not sure if we could give you every country  
19 of origin but I will see what data we do have,  
20 alright. And so, we can support you with that  
21 information.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Wonderful and so, back to  
23 the third question, which is really trying to think  
24 about the programs associated with the focus on the  
25 elder immigrant population. Are there any programs



1  
2 that are designed specifically and this is towards  
3 MOIA to really focus their resources. I think we  
4 hear a lot back and forth about how the Council is  
5 supporting the Department for the Aging and what I am  
6 asking MOIA is what about that data that you can pull  
7 out, that you are going to pull out and let us have  
8 are connected to programs for that -

9 NICK GULOTTA: Sure, absolutely. I just want to  
10 say it is a great question and so, from a starting  
11 point, I think it is really important to sort of  
12 convey that. All of our programs, we serve all  
13 immigrant New Yorkers right, regardless of their age.

14 When it comes to the outreach for those programs  
15 and sort of the message, that's where we specialize  
16 specifically in practices and in tactics of what will  
17 reach those populations, right.

18 So, for example, our We Speak NYC program. After  
19 the pandemic began, we quickly transitioned it  
20 virtual. We have classes virtually. There was a  
21 drop, there was a drop in older adults using the -  
22 you know, because of the digital divide.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Nick, a drop for the  
24 elders. Again, all my questions are going to focus

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2 and so I am hoping that you can tailor the answers to  
3 how older – this is part of the problem that we are  
4 facing right now in the city is that elder immigrant  
5 New Yorker get pushed into a space with everybody  
6 else and what this hearing is trying to do is really  
7 pull that population out, study it with data. We are  
8 hoping that you could come with some data today and  
9 really look at programs that do this work. And it  
10 just, it requires a different approach.

11       You just heard from Chair Chin talk a lot about  
12 very specific ways and tools that the Council has  
13 been trying to do with budget to infuse these data,  
14 the programs that respond to data. So, can you tell  
15 us a little bit about what the decrease was for the  
16 program you just mentioned of elder New York  
17 immigrants?

18       NICK GULOTTA: Sure, absolutely. So, we and I  
19 can get you any more specifics after this hearing as  
20 well but what I can tell you today is that we saw an  
21 initial drop from usage across every single  
22 demographic. We surveyed the students. The English  
23 language learners and leaders to understand sort of  
24 what language they speak and for the demographic

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1  
2 information. There was an initial decrease. It has  
3 slowly climbed back up.

4 I would say, we have seen in sort of cycle one,  
5 which was started in April. We saw – we were down  
6 significantly. I am pulling up that data for you  
7 now, excuse me it is in my notes here. Pardon me.  
8 Right now, we are about 2,500 and that is up the  
9 students across the four cycles of We Speak. We  
10 started in April at a decrease and that number was  
11 let's see we were at – I am going to circle back to  
12 you in just a moment as I pull that up but I am happy  
13 –

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And again, we are looking  
15 for a separation of older immigrant New Yorkers that  
16 have been impacted by We Speak and numbers. So,  
17 that's what is going to be necessary for this hearing  
18 to be successful.

19 Let's go to the next question. The Center for  
20 Urban Future has been tracking the population growth  
21 of older adults in New York and noted specific growth  
22 in older immigrant adult populations in New York City  
23 and I think both Chair Chin and I spoke to that in  
24 our openings. How is MOIA tracking this population  
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2 growth? It is geography and matching city service to  
3 meet their growth. This is a little bit more general  
4 but what we are looking for is a real understanding  
5 of how as the data is shifting and changing, how MOIA  
6 is shifting its resources. Not just We Speak but I  
7 am thinking about Legal Services. I am thinking  
8 about a whole bunch of things that MOIA does through  
9 Action NYC etc.

10 NICK GULOTTA: Absolutely. I will say that and  
11 we are definitely conscious of the trends right. Our  
12 data team is through our annual report and also  
13 through our work with advocates. We know certainly  
14 what the trends are. I think the biggest changes  
15 that we will see from our work is a greater  
16 acknowledgement in terms of the outreach. For  
17 example, when we have RFP's, targeting organizations  
18 and communities who previously haven't been reached  
19 and making sure that we don't have gaps in those  
20 services.

21 In addition to that, I would say, you know, as we  
22 know those who have been most disconnected from  
23 services throughout this pandemic, that's where we  
24 have really had to go as deep as possible. So,  
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2 whether that was in testing outreach on the street,  
3 in person – sure absolutely.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can you give an example of  
5 what that might look like?

6 NICK GULOTTA: Sure, sure, absolutely. So, as  
7 you know, we do lot's of in-person outreach. Really  
8 starting from June, we have moved to – to continue  
9 our virtual work because it is so helpful and  
10 successful for folks who need it but also at food  
11 pantry's where we see many seniors lined up in say  
12 [INAUDIBLE 1:19:07] in Queens, even at Good Shepard  
13 in Brooklyn. We have been at those locations handing  
14 out information on programs and services, right. We  
15 know who the most vulnerable New Yorkers are right  
16 and that's who we are targeting our outreach for  
17 every single day.

18 Also, I just want to return to the previous point  
19 about how we try to customize like you know, all of  
20 our virtual events and all of our in-person  
21 engagements to make sure we have language capacity on  
22 site. We have options to access those resources for  
23 folks who don't have internet access for example over  
24 the phone.

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2       So, in everything that we do to reach out for our  
3 programs, this could be you know, putting information  
4 out on We Chat, the handing it out in person and  
5 sending it to Ethnic Press to let folks know that  
6 there is a Town Hall coming up, right. This could be  
7 standing at a food pantry line advertising that Town  
8 Hall as well, to make sure it doesn't just get to  
9 folks over email or through the internet or through  
10 social media.

11       We also know many communities and many immigrant  
12 seniors who may have greater access to sort of  
13 messenger apps such as We Chat and What's Up and Tik  
14 Tok than their native born sort of partners in New  
15 York City. So, we have utilized all of those  
16 platforms and tactics to reach immigrant seniors and  
17 its work that continues every single day and I would  
18 say that for each of our programs, I would also point  
19 out to our - you mentioned specifically for Action  
20 NYC. Many of our partners, many of our contracted  
21 partners are doing in-person outreach for Action NYC  
22 in-person still. Often that is connected to their  
23 sort of provision of services. They have been on the  
24 frontlines of this pandemic, so in their outreach  
25 around food pantries, providing food to communities,

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2 we have seen them also bring in clients for these  
3 programs as well. And they are truly the expert in  
4 you know, in how to make sure that they are reaching  
5 the community members that they serve.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay and again, I  
7 appreciate the kind of general effort that's  
8 happening. We are going to need that data to really  
9 get a sense about what's happening because I think  
10 there is a lot of problems with language access right  
11 now that I think the city is not meeting its own law  
12 that we passed to language access. And so, this is  
13 hard for me to understand without data and  
14 information.

15 So, I am hoping that you can follow up as soon as  
16 possible, so we can make a better sense of how we  
17 move forward with recommendations on policy. Let's  
18 move onto the next question. What guidance does MOIA  
19 give DFTA regarding providing services and conducting  
20 outreach to older immigrant populations? I think you  
21 have laid out a really great review of what you are  
22 doing but how - we are looking at the relationship  
23 and collaboration with Commissioner Cortes-Vasquez  
24 and their team and so, can you walk us through what  
25 MOIA does? How does it to it?

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
THE COMMITTEE ON AGING

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2 NICK GULOTTA: Sure, absolutely. So, it's a  
3 great question and the Commissioner and I are in  
4 touch. I know our leadership speaks regularly with  
5 our senior team at MOIA which I am a part of and  
6 speaks regularly with DFTA's senior team as well. I  
7 will say that we work primarily with DFTA's providers  
8 both on outreach and to provide direct services like  
9 immigration legal services. So, we are constantly in  
10 touch in that way. We have also scheduled many  
11 presentations for staff and share resources and  
12 guidance. For example, with their hotline and when I  
13 say DFTA, I am going to return to NYC Aging to be  
14 clear. So, NYC Aging, it is still hard for me.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah.

16 NICK GULOTTA: We have connected with NYC Aging,  
17 Senior Connect. You know, we will share information  
18 for example about the FASTEN program and other  
19 programs that are available to New Yorkers regardless  
20 of immigration status. We will work together you  
21 know, for example, when we are putting together  
22 graphics and in content to give the share with  
23 immigrant seniors, we will consult DFTA. So, we are  
24 frequently in touch with the seniors.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah and on that point, I  
3 just, I want specifics here. And so, what have you  
4 collaborated for older immigrant adults in New York  
5 City? Very specific. I want a program, an example  
6 of a collaboration that has sprouted from your  
7 communication with NYC Aging.

8 NICK GULOTTA: With NYC Aging, so we have been in  
9 touch to share resources. We have been in touch to  
10 share resources with NYC Aging. Specifically around  
11 Senior Connect. Some of the programs that we're  
12 trying to get the word out to immigrant New Yorkers  
13 about. So, when folks call in their hotline, they  
14 are also sort of in touch with us as well. When  
15 there are questions for example where we can offer  
16 technical assistance or advise, our interagency team,  
17 which has language access under its portfolio who has  
18 also been in touch with DFTA throughout the pandemic.

19 I know our COMS teams are frequently in touch in  
20 terms of making sure our messaging is consistent and  
21 that we are including resources that DFTA offers and  
22 our MOIA messaging that we get out through Know your  
23 Rights Forums, through sharing say graphics over We  
24 Chat and What's Up or talking about them on virtual  
25 and telephonic town halls.

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2       So, we are frequently in touch as a sister  
3 agency. I will definitely, you know, just to be  
4 clear, we also I would say a bulk of our work really  
5 is with providers that DFTA worked with. So, we will  
6 be in touch with senior centers, with programs to  
7 make sure that they are getting the information from  
8 us at that end as well.

9       So, when there is a virtual town hall that we  
10 partner in or our telephonic town hall, the community  
11 at that senior center in language that we are  
12 coordinating to make sure that they are receiving  
13 information about services available regardless of  
14 immigration status.

15       And so, those are all specifics in terms of  
16 outreach activations. I will definitely say you  
17 know, personally, if you are looking for a sort of a  
18 micro example, I would say, I worked with DFTA in  
19 sharing resources about our sort of work for tenants.  
20 Immigrant tenants who are undocumented to the FASTEN  
21 program and sharing goes out. We have also  
22 collaborated directly on graphics and other things  
23 that are specifically for seniors. And that we work  
24 through our outreach teams to get out to seniors.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: What type of calls or  
3 requests does MOIA receive specifically from older  
4 immigrant New Yorkers through your hotline and  
5 information desks?

6 NICK GULOTTA: Thank you. It's a great question.  
7 So, our Ask MOIA hotline 212-788-7654 receives calls  
8 every single day from immigrant New Yorkers. We are  
9 frequently connecting individuals for example  
10 throughout the pandemic. We had about 59 enrollments  
11 specifically on that hotline for the Get Cool program  
12 access or questions for you know about air  
13 conditioners. We have got several and I can get the  
14 exact number for SCRIE enrollment. We have gotten  
15 many questions individually for whether the public  
16 charge and sort of how can I access this benefit and  
17 that benefit.

18 I would say, we've gotten the number is ten  
19 specific for on the Get Cool program and SCRIE tax  
20 abatement. Also, the other really big one that we  
21 have helped with and we have also proactively tried  
22 to reach immigrant seniors who are not necessarily  
23 connected to the senior programs around the Get Food  
24 program. So, our staff has all been trained as  
25 authorized enrollers. We have about 20 strong team

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2 of community organizers at MOIA who speak 17 plus  
3 languages. And so, throughout this process we have  
4 been trying to reach individuals who are not being  
5 reached at the point of you know, service delivery  
6 through senior centers and other places specifically  
7 with the Get Food program. Our community service  
8 line got 59 of those requests and through our  
9 outreach and organizing efforts we fielded many more.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Poverty rates are higher  
11 among older immigrant adults and that's compared to  
12 U.S. born counterparts. How is MOIA able to and  
13 working to address this specific data point?

14 NICK GULOTTA: Absolutely. Uhm, so you know, I  
15 think as noted earlier, the most vulnerable in our  
16 society and amongst the communities we serve are  
17 often our immigrant seniors with limited English  
18 proficiency and we know that and so, when it comes to  
19 our outreach, we are really finetuning it to that  
20 point to get the word out to seniors about programs,  
21 poverty alleviation, benefits access. We have made  
22 many referrals throughout the pandemic, specifically  
23 on SNAP, explaining eligibility for mixed status  
24 families. When they call our constituent service  
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1  
2 line as well as through our outreach and organizing  
3 team and fielding questions from CBO's. I would also  
4 say that NYC Care and NYC Care outreach in-person  
5 started back in August. You know, where there are  
6 seniors who don't qualify for federal programs, that  
7 outreach has continued to connect individuals to the  
8 city's healthcare access program, which is obviously,  
9 you know and have been a major part of is available  
10 to all regardless of immigration status.

11 So, we have really tried to make sure the  
12 outreach front.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: What about senior housing  
14 vouchers? We know that they are historically not  
15 accepted and does MOIA advocate to ensure that there  
16 is universal acceptance to these vouchers to ensure  
17 that housing access happens to our vulnerable  
18 populations?

19 NICK GULOTTA: Sure, I would just say on a  
20 number, if you don't mind just to go through the  
21 different sort of housing pieces here. I would say  
22 we have been in touch to be directly responsive; do  
23 we advocate? Absolutely, that is our role within the  
24 Mayor's Office working with agencies. So, we will

25

1 frequently be in touch with HPD, with the Mayor's  
2 public engagement unit and others to ensure that  
3 outreach is there. That the messaging is clear.  
4 That we are able to sort of aggregate a lot of that  
5 messaging and put it out there for communities in the  
6 languages that they speak directly.

8 So, we have been in touch with HPD throughout the  
9 pandemic to talk about how particularly for  
10 undocumented New Yorkers but also, and especially  
11 seniors can access you know Housing Connect and other  
12 areas, trying to make sure that we are not sort of  
13 solely relying on tech in order to solve these  
14 problems.

15 Aside from that, a lot of the work that we have  
16 done really has been around making sure that people  
17 who are eligible for resources from the city; say it  
18 is a one-shot deal from HRA or privately through the  
19 FASTEN program are able to connect with those  
20 resources and get direct access in the languages that  
21 they speak.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Let's talk about food  
23 security and this is something that's plaguing so  
24 many New Yorkers right now. But when we are pulling  
25 out older immigrant New Yorkers, we also know that

1  
2 cultural relevant food is important as well and that  
3 continues to be a very specific problem that create  
4 more issues in this pandemic. What has MOIA done to  
5 prioritize this kind of food access. Culturally  
6 responsive food to our community, immigrant  
7 communities and what has DFTA done to do that?

8 NICK GULOTTA: Great question. Absolutely and I  
9 just want to say that culturally competent food is  
10 you know, especially critical for seniors. We know  
11 this. This is an area where my team has worked  
12 directly with the Get Food program. You know, when  
13 issues started coming up in terms of the lack of  
14 cultural competency, we did a lot of intentional  
15 outreach to make sure that the RFP's got to vendors  
16 who can serve immigrant communities culturally  
17 competent food.

18 So, we helped with that process. We also listed  
19 up community concerns from CBO's and individuals that  
20 we speak on a day to day basis about quality.  
21 Vendors have been fired. The program has made  
22 incredible strides and improved greatly. A lot of  
23 that has been because of a really close, you know  
24 sort of a lock step partnership with the Get Food  
25

1  
2 team and making sure that we have been able to  
3 advocate internally for culturally competent food.

4 A big part of that also I would just say is, uhm,  
5 you know reporting and making sure communities know  
6 that when there are issues, there are ways to report  
7 them. Our staff takes these concerns extremely  
8 seriously. It is something that we hear everyday  
9 when we speak to communities. And so, on the MOIA  
10 front, we have advocated internally with the Get Food  
11 team. We have been involved in the direct outreach  
12 to make sure that the RFP's went out far and wide but  
13 especially we are reaching vendors who can supply  
14 culturally competent meals. We have lifted up  
15 community feedback to make sure that where there were  
16 issues that they got dealt with and you know, we are  
17 talking about food for our parents. You know, we  
18 take this extremely seriously.

19 So, this is an area that we, I know the city has  
20 made a lot of progress on and there is still a lot  
21 more to do. And I will turn it over to the  
22 Commissioner.

23 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I am sorry, I was  
24 trying to jump in before but I was muted and I want  
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1  
2 to just underscore that they are on a day-to-day  
3 basis Chairman Menchaca, the MOIA team works with you  
4 know the lion share of our network of agencies to  
5 ensure that they have and we have our latest  
6 information. And have been working very closely with  
7 our Aging Connect hotline to make sure that we have  
8 the most accurate information as we are giving out.  
9 But you are absolutely right, the issues confronting  
10 the immigrant population are even more exacerbated in  
11 terms of the housing needs, the food insecurity.

12 I would ask that you for any of the culturally  
13 competent food, I know that Get Food has made some  
14 great strides but I would ask that any questions  
15 about number of contractors and number of food and  
16 distinction in those foods should be directed to Get  
17 Food. It was something that we worked closely with  
18 them. In terms of the older adult, we also have  
19 given them a lot of guidance around a nutritional  
20 value of those foods and the kind of requirements  
21 that we had given the number of food that they were  
22 providing on a weekly basis.

23 So, I mean, it's something that we have worked  
24 closely but I think that they are best positioned to  
25 address those questions directly.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Commissioner, are you uh, measuring success or some kind of response as you move towards culturally responsive food to older immigrant New Yorkers? Is there a way that you are gauging a sense of, we are doing a good job and people are getting the food that they want and need and getting the nutrition that they need. Is that something that you are measuring in any way?

LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Well, yes, we measure it in two ways, right. We measure it in terms of number of meals served versus population. And so, if we start seeing gaps, we redress. Alright, so that's one way that we assess. I wouldn't call it a true measurement but its an assessment that we do.

Another assessment that we do is we look for geographic service deserts. And alright and how is that we can then meet the demands of that and we do that for all older New Yorkers in particular, we are looking at that in communities of color because that's where we see some of the biggest gaps, alright.

And the other way that we are measuring for the first time and we think that we can reveal it soon.

1  
2 We will unroll it, we started a year ago, a  
3 little over a year ago, a work group that was  
4 customer satisfaction because as you know, we all had  
5 - all senior centers had a suggestion box and we used  
6 to laugh and well, first you had to find a key to the  
7 suggestion box to see what the suggestions were. And  
8 so, together with a lot of our network providers is  
9 started thinking about how is it that we can be like  
10 the hotel industry, like the hospitality industry to  
11 get some real time feedback from our customers. You  
12 know, this time being the older adults and make sure  
13 that that is in language.

14 And so, it is one of the workgroups that we have  
15 and hopefully we will have an actual system that we  
16 could put in place. It is one of the legacy projects  
17 that I am hoping we will see in the near future.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, that sounds really  
19 great and just curious about the disaggregating of  
20 data for older immigrant New Yorkers. Is that part  
21 of the way that you are designing the system?

22 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: You know what, we  
23 didn't think of that. I thought it by ethnicity,  
24 culture, language but we could disaggregate it

1  
2 differently but we had not but thank you for the  
3 suggestion.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and this is the  
5 power of this hearing in a lot of ways to really  
6 ensure that some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers  
7 are not kind of lumped into a lot of these data  
8 points that I think we are just seeing over and over  
9 again. So, thank you so much for that partnership on  
10 that front.

11 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: You know what and I  
12 think, I think that is an important part of this.  
13 And although we have gotten aggregate immigration  
14 data, I will go back to the team and start seeing how  
15 can we in our own star system, can we put in  
16 immigration status. No, I don't want to do that.  
17 Immigration, some kind of an indicator for  
18 immigration alright, no status. We don't do status,  
19 trust me. I am against status person other than my  
20 own status.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: There is a lot of  
22 different ways and so, this is where we want to  
23 really work with you all to -  
24  
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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
THE COMMITTEE ON AGING

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1  
2 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: So, we welcome your  
3 input, alright but it is a data point that we may  
4 look at that we don't currently collect.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Commissioner for  
6 that. And I have seen a hand from Council Member  
7 Ayala and I am going to take a break from my  
8 questions, so that I can give her the opportunity  
9 before she may have to leave.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Will you unmute me, oh,  
12 thank you. Here we go. So, I just - One of the  
13 things [INAUDIBLE 1:38:36-1:38:49] sort of a kind of  
14 theatric house and I am sorry, my computer is  
15 horrible, so the sound may not be the best quality  
16 but one of the concerns that I have had in the last  
17 you know, few years is really seeing the number of  
18 older adults who are undocumented. Don't qualify for  
19 Medicaid, don't qualify for Medicare and who are  
20 literally at home with adult children who now have to  
21 work and are forced to leave parents at home that are  
22 suffering from you know, the advanced dementia. And  
23 I haven't been able to identify a single program that  
24 specifically addresses that and I think that this is  
25

1  
2 an issue in the immigrant community as parents  
3 continue to age, right. And  
4 more and more on families because if that family is  
5 not available then it becomes a problem. And so, I  
6 wonder, you know, if you don't even qualify for you  
7 to live in assisted living facility because you know,  
8 those require some sort of medical insurance as well.

9       So, is there an adult daycare program or model  
10 that you know maybe already exists or is this a  
11 conversation that is being had? Because we assume  
12 you know this population continues to grow and I  
13 don't know that we are ready to really help address -

14       LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Well -

15       COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Oh, no, I'm done.

16       LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay, great to see you.  
17 Uhm, I have to tell you that I did not ask you to ask  
18 that question. So, one of the things that we are  
19 looking at really very closely and will be revealing  
20 hopefully in the very near future once we get some  
21 questions answered, is looking at this whole concept  
22 of community living, right and community care. And  
23 the benefit that it would be for the department to  
24 look at that is because we do not have income  
25 requirements and nor do we have status requirements

1  
2 for a lot of our services, whether it is homecare,  
3 home delivered meals. And so, one of the things that  
4 we are looking at is how is it - because right now we  
5 have a homecare program. We have a case management  
6 program; you have a senior center and what is the  
7 connective tissue between those and we are working  
8 very closely with some of our providers and looking  
9 at frankly came out of the thinking of the center of  
10 the future. Because some of the restrictions and  
11 some of the silos are self-imposed. It is by funding  
12 source and so, what we are saying, let's take a leap.  
13 Let's start looking at ways that we can create  
14 connective tissue. Regardless of funding stream and  
15 come up with a continuum of care in the community  
16 because nursing homes are not the answer for  
17 everyone. And 90 percent of older New Yorkers want  
18 to live in their home and in their community.

19 So, why is it that we cannot structurally do that  
20 so that we can have a continuum of care and build  
21 that into family care giving because that person who  
22 is going to work probably still has three quarters of  
23 her mind under mother or the father that she is  
24 leaving at home and hopefully that they won't turn on

1  
2 the stove and all of the other concerns that come  
3 with caregiving.

4 So, that is how we are looking right now at a  
5 community of care. What I call universal aging in  
6 place. Community care continuum. Call it whatever  
7 you want. My thing is stay at home, have quality of  
8 life and dignity in your community, in your language  
9 and surrounded by assistance that supports you. And  
10 that's one of the things that we are looking at right  
11 now. So, I promise you that - I promise everyone I  
12 did not ever ask that question.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Thank you. No, that's  
14 wonderful. I am happy to hear that and if I can be  
15 helpful in any way -

16 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yes you can and I am  
17 going to tell you right after this hearing, you and  
18 Chairwoman Chin, how you can be helpful about that  
19 next step.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: We are happy to do that.  
21 Thank you so much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member  
23 Ayala. I am just going to quickly ask if any other  
24 Council Members have questions. As a reminder, if  
25



1  
2 you would like to ask a question of any of the  
3 panelists, please use the Zoom raise hand function  
4 now and I will call on you in the order in which you  
5 have raised your hands.

6       Seeing no other hands, I am going to turn it back  
7 to Chair Menchaca.

8       CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you  
9 Harbani and let's continue. This is - I believe this  
10 is going to be strictly for MOIA but Commissioner,  
11 don't hesitate to jump in. I am looking for the  
12 percentage of the Mayor's COVID-19 Emergency Relief  
13 Fund and what was allocated specifically to older  
14 immigrant adults.

15       NICK GULOTTA: Thank you Council Member for  
16 question.

17       CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can you just let everyone  
18 know that you have fully disseminated those dollars  
19 and those dollars are in the hands of New Yorkers and  
20 then tell us a little bit about the older immigrant  
21 population.

22       NICK GULOTTA: Yeah, so thank you Council Member  
23 for the question. So, what I can tell you is that we  
24 collect information or we collected information on  
25 the total number of people in each household who are

1  
2 65 plus. That's what providers reported back to MOIA  
3 and to the Open Society Foundation. The number was  
4 about 2,330 total number of seniors who sort of  
5 benefited either directly or as part of that through  
6 the OSF funds. Those funds certainly have been  
7 distributed and are no longer continuing.

8 So, that's where that is now in terms of who was  
9 reached from the senior population.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And so that was you said  
11 200?

12 NICK GULOTTA: 2,330 was the total number.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Total number, 2,300 in  
14 change and 200 of those were older immigrant adults?  
15 How many of them were older immigrant adults?

16 NICK GULOTTA: 2,330 were older immigrant adults.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And then, what was the  
18 total amount of New Yorkers served?

19 NICK GULOTTA: The total number of New Yorkers  
20 served it is in my notes give me one quick moment.  
21 It is 76,000 and I am looking for the second part of  
22 that figure but I know it is 76,000. I can  
23 consciously tell you that now.

24

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. Thank you for that.  
3 For older immigrant adults who continue to work  
4 outside the home throughout the pandemic, what  
5 resources has MOIA provided in their preferred  
6 languages? And we are looking for really the work  
7 that MOIA had done in specific in connection with  
8 DFTA to ensure that individuals are aware of those  
9 rights and specifically when it comes to labor  
10 issues.

11 NICK GULOTTA: Hmm, hmm and I would also just say  
12 as part of an explanation for the number that you  
13 just asked for, I do want to just highlight that the  
14 underlining sort of thinking a part of that work with  
15 the Open Society Foundation is really to reach  
16 workers. So, worker centers were sort of a lot of  
17 times the main partners or other sort of institutions  
18 like that. Reaching folks who are undocumented  
19 workers who you know are part of the informal  
20 economy.

21 So, frequently that number really went to you  
22 know, it is two percent of the adult senior  
23 population is undocumented, right, so when we think  
24 about that number, its sort of in the larger  
25

1 ecosystem of the total demographics include the  
2 eligible and who was distributing the funds.

3  
4 That said, there were many institutions such as  
5 settlement houses and others that were part of that  
6 effort. To be specific and just responsive to your  
7 question about what programs and sort of how we  
8 worked at DFTA. I think it is largely connected to  
9 or broader outreach strategy, partnering with CBO's  
10 to run senior centers who run senior programs as well  
11 as on the ground outreach as well.

12 One resource that we distribute in all of our  
13 sort of outreach engagements is our MOIA on pagers  
14 which is on our website. Currently, I believe it is  
15 in 20 languages. We have efforts underway to  
16 increase that and even include audio and other sort  
17 of resources to reach harder to reach communities who  
18 may have lesser literacy rates and including  
19 indigenous languages and in addition, languages of  
20 lesser diffusion.

21 We are extremely cognizant of the needs in that  
22 department when it comes to outreach. We were  
23 translating through at the height of the pandemic in  
24 25 languages for all of our outreach materials. And

1  
2 so, I just really want to highlight, there is Local  
3 Law 30 but when it comes to outreach, we know that  
4 the communities on the ground speak many more  
5 language than the 10 that are required by local law.

6 So, we frequently distributed information held,  
7 info sessions etc., in those additional languages.

8 The FASTEN program is one that I want to keep  
9 highlighting for undocumented New Yorkers and  
10 certainly, when we are at food pantries trying to  
11 approach folks who are seniors as well with these  
12 services is key to get that information in their  
13 hands physically. So, it's not just a text message  
14 or you know, a website post or on social media.

15 We have also through NYC Care outreach, really  
16 tried to make sure that we are supplementing the work  
17 done by CBO's and trying to get the word out in areas  
18 that were hardest hit by this pandemic. Uhm, I'd day  
19 for a number of our programs We Speak, we have had a  
20 lot of work through that. I would say the connection  
21 larger to the more broadly to city services has been  
22 sort of key for us.

23 So, even if it isn't a program that our teams  
24 directly administer, we have outreach for other city

1  
2 services and you know, those will include SNAP  
3 benefits, one-shot deals, programs through our human  
4 resources administration, DSS, HRA and beyond.

5 So, we try to approach communities with a wide  
6 spread of services. Sometimes these events will be  
7 done in parts, so we are not overwhelming people.  
8 Our Know Your Rights presentations will cover the  
9 latest work with sort of federal and state programs  
10 that are available to New Yorkers regardless of  
11 immigration status.

12 So, I hope that sort of answers the question and  
13 sort of describes the larger ecosystem and how we do  
14 outreach and sort of what we are approaching New  
15 Yorkers with when we are on the ground.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, it does but it is  
17 still a little bit broad and what I think is  
18 important to just respond to the earlier data about  
19 the 2,000 plus New Yorkers that are in your data  
20 point that are connected to being an older immigrant  
21 New Yorker is that it is a really low percentage at  
22 the end of the day for the kind of relief that went -  
23 let alone the amount of relief that went to  
24 immigrants that are not eligible for the federal  
25 programs.

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And so, what I think what we — what I want to say as Chair of the Immigration Committee, is that we also know that older immigrant New Yorkers are working and so, what we are trying to figure out is what the agencies are doing to support them with their rights. Many of them come to our district offices and they ask for support. When they have done that, they are in crisis many times. And so, how do the agencies that touch the immigrant populations in different ways do centers and all of the programs that we have talked about today, how are you all supporting a very specific issue that's about labor?

And maybe I can ask a different question about PPE and ensuring that workspaces that may not be providing PPE are endangering these older immigrant New Yorkers and so, is DFTA or MOIA doing to anything to ensure that they have the protections they need when they go to work because they are working. Older immigrant New Yorkers are working in the City of New York, we know.

NICK GULOTTA: Yeah, I will pass this one to DFTA. I will just say that we work very closely at

1  
2 MOIA with our colleagues at the Department of  
3 Consumer and Worker Protection. Their outreach team  
4 similarly is on the ground every day and we work very  
5 closely to them with outreach to employers. That's  
6 been the key one for us and we will frequently  
7 partner with them to carry their outreach materials  
8 to communities directly. I would say MOIA and the  
9 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, there  
10 is probably no better metaphor than sister agency but  
11 we work really lockstep when it comes to outreach and  
12 are very conscious of the senior population.

13 I will just say, when we talk about 2 percent  
14 particularly of undocumented seniors, uhm, you know  
15 the experience that we all have in senior centers and  
16 when people come up to us at events or on food pantry  
17 lines, that number feels you know maybe misleading.  
18 I think the real stories and the real interactions  
19 with those seniors we build trust with through our  
20 outreach and through our organizing is really, tells  
21 a larger story.

22 So, we do a lot of that direct outreach with our  
23 sister agencies to those workers but absolutely it's  
24 something I think is sort of not the directly within  
25



1  
2 our wheelhouse and I will pass it to the Commissioner  
3 for anything additional.

4 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Sure, thank you. Thank  
5 you for that. Uhm, we have over the course of the 9  
6 mines been delivering PPE to senior centers  
7 throughout the network. Uhm, at incredible clips,  
8 millions and millions of pieces of equipment.

9 Sanitizers, face masks and things of that nature to  
10 all of our network providers on a regular basis.

11 And in that, every site has gotten multiple  
12 versions of whatever product we were giving at a  
13 particular time. But I can say that the struggle for  
14 PPE's that were at the beginning have been dissipated  
15 because we have had the opportunity to keep our  
16 programs well supplied. And many of them have you  
17 know, materials that were not used because senior  
18 centers were then closed.

19 So, I know that they have made every effort to  
20 distribute those within their communities as widely  
21 as possible.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, again, I am seeing a  
23 gap in understanding here and I am going to keep  
24 coming back to this because I think this is the

1  
2 problem that we wanted to highlight today. Is that  
3 when we want to talk about seniors or immigrants,  
4 what we are really talking about are senior  
5 immigrants and trying to figure out those issues and  
6 a very specific measurement of how we are connecting  
7 to them. And on the labor issue and the PPE, I am  
8 not going to be okay with just giving senior centers  
9 PPE. What we need to do is figure out how to really  
10 isolate that or disaggregate that population and  
11 ensure they have what they need to go to work.  
12 Because they have to go to work. They have to pay  
13 their bills and that's what we are looking for right  
14 now.

15 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And you are right. I  
16 can tell you that Department for the Aging, we did  
17 not do that because one, we don't have an older  
18 worker program and we had been looking at it as a  
19 totality, right and so, in that sense, you are  
20 absolutely correct and uhm, and obviously immigrant  
21 workers, whether they are older or not, are not one  
22 of our wheelhouses. So, it's one of the things that  
23 we will look with MOIA and see how we can support  
24 their efforts to make sure that the respective

25

1  
2 agencies are operations that work with immigrant  
3 workers. And particularly, those that are older that  
4 we can have some kind of a collaboration.

5 NICK GULOTTA: Can I just add -

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I mean -

7 NICK GULOTTA: I am sorry, go ahead.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Go ahead Nick, go ahead.

9 NICK GULOTTA: Thank you Council Member. I would  
10 just add just for awareness here, I think that on PPE  
11 distribution, just as MOIA specifically, we have  
12 really tried to fill gaps and so, just to give a few  
13 examples of what that might look like.

14 So, we know for example there are senior programs  
15 that don't work with DFTA. I can name a few in  
16 Queens for example the Himalayan Elders Project or in  
17 Richmond Hill, there has been a number of them that  
18 we have sort of worked with who you know maybe  
19 operate out of a house of worship or uhm, you know,  
20 who aren't necessarily or newer in nature and in  
21 their work and haven't had contracts with the city  
22 before.

23 We have really tried to identify those for PPE  
24 distribution as well. Just intentionally trying to

1 reach out to those and also throughout the pandemic,  
2 have been providing PPE to immigrant serving CBO's,  
3 sort of regardless of who they work for but I think  
4 what you are highlighting is obviously very valuable.  
5

6 And so, as part of that, you know that's the work  
7 that we have been doing is identifying where some of  
8 those gaps might be but certainly want to think more  
9 deeply about how we can be more systematic about  
10 targeting that to the populations you are speaking  
11 and working with our sister agencies to do that.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well and I am going to  
13 offer an idea and a space to do some co-organizing  
14 and co-governing with and that's our deliveristas  
15 that are across multiple immigrant communities who  
16 are delivering food and who are asking for justice  
17 right now. And I have been organizing with them to  
18 really understand what's the need and so many of  
19 these issues are connected to the questions that I  
20 have asked you today about seniors working on an e-  
21 bike delivering. They are working and they are  
22 immigrant and they are older adults in the City of  
23 New York and they are asking for PPE. And they are  
24 asking for understanding their rights and they are  
25 asking for a regulation around their apps.

1  
2       And so, we are working on that, and so, I am  
3 hoping you can help to ensure that the Council does  
4 this as quickly as possible because if we don't have  
5 the administration on board, it makes it harder. Not  
6 impossible, we will do it if we have to but it makes  
7 it harder and so, this is the opportunity I think  
8 that we want to take in this hearing to highlight the  
9 population. Focus and create data points so that we  
10 can measure our success.

11       And my last question is uhm, to both of you as  
12 DFTA and MOIA and in your assisting of the DOHMH work  
13 in the vaccination of New Yorkers. Is MOIA and DFTA  
14 providing expertise on how to do this outreach  
15 specifically to older immigrant New Yorkers? And I  
16 think Chair Chin had some exchange about this but we  
17 are looking for very specific ideas that are  
18 happening and where we can actually support some of  
19 those ideas that are coming through our district  
20 offices as we fill phone calls, emails and doing in  
21 district in-person events.

22       LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Well, I will start by  
23 saying that we worked closely, very closely with the  
24 vaccine on cultural competence, language access,

1  
2 wheelchair access, all kinds of accessibilities when  
3 it comes to older New Yorkers.

4       And as I said, one of the things that we look at  
5 is cultural competence in language and we are looking  
6 at is as communities of color as a whole and not  
7 specifically disaggregating it by immigrant status  
8 and that is my take away from this hearing. Is to  
9 make sure that we disaggregate things so that we can  
10 see how we are targeting specifically for immigrants  
11 differently than maybe communities as a whole. I  
12 know in certain areas; we are maybe not as a whole.

13       So, we are working very, very closely with them  
14 and I must say that they have been rather responsive  
15 and ensuring that the information is available and  
16 there is a language uhm, access staff designated at  
17 any vaccine pod. But as everything, you know, things  
18 happen and should there be any gaps that you know of,  
19 please let us know and let the Vaccine Command Center  
20 staff know because everyone is committed to making  
21 sure that no New Yorker is left behind or  
22 marginalized because of language or culture.

23       Nick, I will turn it over to you.

24

25

1  
2 NICK GULOTTA: It's a great question. I also  
3 want to circle back to your earlier point and offer  
4 Council Member Chair Menchaca, no one has been a  
5 greater advocate on this issue than you and we  
6 absolutely look forward to the opportunity to partner  
7 to reach additional delivery workers I'd say with PPE  
8 and our Know Your Rights presentations. We have  
9 defiantly done a lot of work in this area including  
10 you know, delivering PPE to e-bike shops and to  
11 worker centers etc. but certainly, this is an area  
12 where we care passionately about our immigrant  
13 workers, our delivery workers who are seniors and  
14 beyond.

15 So, certainly we will be in touch and would love  
16 to partner and love the opportunity to partner with  
17 you to reach more people.

18 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And we are really  
19 pleased that the focus of the city field operation is  
20 going to be for delivery workers and target  
21 populations. And so, that is also a big step in that  
22 direction.

23 So, I thank you. I thank you for that. For your  
24 persistence in this and you know, this has been a

1  
2 lifelong mission for me, so I welcome every ally that  
3 we can in this conversation. Mine has not been  
4 immigrants as much as language and culture but – and  
5 it has evolved over time, so thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, thank you both and  
7 please send my regards to Commissioner Mostofi from  
8 MOIA and we look forward to following up on the  
9 questions about the data points. And I am going to  
10 hand it back to Harbani for other questions from the  
11 Council Members and for the rest of the panels.

12 Thank you, be safe.

13 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Thank you.

14 NICK GULOTTA: Thank you Council Member.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I am now  
16 going to turn it back to Chair Chin for additional  
17 questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, thank you. A couple of  
19 other questions is that when we are talking about  
20 older workers, I just want to make sure that we don't  
21 forget the home health aide, the home attendant, the  
22 one that are the caregiver that is taking care of our  
23 seniors. So, we have been advocating with the  
24 Vaccine Command Center that when we you know provide  
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1  
2 the vaccine to the senior, if they are accompanied by  
3 the home health aide, give it to the home health aide  
4 at the same time. So, that this way, both of them  
5 are protected. Because it doesn't make sense just to  
6 take care of the senior and then leave out the person  
7 that accompanied them don't get the vaccine.

8 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, so we made a step  
9 in that direction that the home health aides are not  
10 part of the priority class, so that's been a step in  
11 the right direction and I agree with you. We are  
12 navigating for the same thing. Two for one.

13 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, the other thing  
14 Commissioner is that back in December 2019, a while  
15 back and we were talking about and then I think there  
16 was an assessment that you presented that there is a  
17 need for at least 29 new senior centers and 16 of  
18 them are in high need communities with large  
19 immigrant older adult population. So -

20 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: I think it was a -  
21 Council, I am sorry.

22 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I guess with the new RFP that  
23 is going to come out, how do we make sure that new  
24 senior centers really will be there for the older  
25 immigrant population?

1  
2 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Yeah, so thank you for  
3 that question and I think that we are looking at the  
4 new RFP to look at not only new senior centers but  
5 also NORCs and looking again, going at that continuum  
6 of care that I was talking about earlier that Council  
7 Member Ayala so fortunately gave me the opportunity  
8 to reveal. But it is looking at senior centers,  
9 older adult clubs and NORCs to start looking at where  
10 are they needed and we have identified service gaps.  
11 What we call service deserts and many of them as you  
12 well know are in those high need populated areas.

13 And also in those areas and communities that have  
14 been the most effected by COVID. So, it's all of  
15 that combination that we are looking at and it is one  
16 of our proposals. And working very closely with OMB  
17 and the Deputy Mayor to be in partnership with us, as  
18 they always are around these kind of issues around  
19 the growth and the growing needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I mean that's why the senior  
21 centers, I mean right now they are not open but even  
22 when they were open, a lot of them could be utilized  
23 on the weekend, in the evening. It's a great  
24 resources and I think with the model budget that you  
25 know we fought hard money for and I got to make sure

1 the money that was promised is in the budget.

2 Because did you use that money or that criteria for  
3 cultural competency? Was that included in allocating  
4 the funding from the model budget?  
5

6 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No, that was sperate  
7 and apart but model budget deals with all of the  
8 other, the co-related issues of cultural competency.  
9 The food, you know, the ability to provide those  
10 communities. Not directly but indirectly, yes. But  
11 the \$5 million was in the budget and we have been  
12 addressing some of the emergency needs through some  
13 of the original care package that the Department for  
14 the Aging received them.

15 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: That was for the food.

16 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: That was for food.

17 CHIRPERSON CHIN: That was the food part. The  
18 \$10 million was not there. I keep reminding OMB.

19 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: No, no, no, the \$10  
20 million model food budget -

21 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: The model budget was not  
22 there.

23 LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: We worked very closely  
24 with OMB on this regularly and we were all - you know  
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I wish we could have had a guarantee. We did have a guarantee but then COVID happened and the financial crisis that ensued also happened. And so, we work very, very closely with OMB to make sure that we could keep advocating together and I know that the Administration is committed to this, as we all are.

CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yeah, well make sure that money is back in because it wasn't in the Executive Budget in the last budget and we were so disappointed that it was not. Because senior population and immigrant seniors as we said earlier in the hearing, the population is growing and it's a shame that DFTA's budget is less than half a percent of the city's budget.

So, we got to definitely work on increasing that and thank you Commissioner and thank you Director Nick for being here and we have a lot of work to do and we look forward to continue our partnership. Thank you.

LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: And no one can have a better ally in the aging community than you and so, thank you for your advocacy.

NICK GULOTTA: Thank you.

LORRAINE CORTES-VAZQUEZ: Okay.

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1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I will turn it back to the  
3 Committee Counsel.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I am just  
5 going to quickly ask again if there are any other  
6 Council Member questions at this time.

7 Seeing no hands, I am going to thank the  
8 Administration for their testimony and we will now be  
9 moving on to public testimony. I would like to  
10 remind everyone that we will be calling on  
11 individuals one by one to testify and each panelist  
12 will be given three minutes to speak. For panelists,  
13 after I call your name, a member of our staff will  
14 unmute you. There may be a few seconds of delay  
15 before you are unmuted, so we thank you in advance  
16 for your patience. Please wait a brief moment for  
17 the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin  
18 before starting your testimony.

19 Council Member who have questions for a  
20 particular panelist should use the raise hand  
21 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the  
22 panel has completed their testimony in the order in  
23 which you have raised your hand. I would now like to  
24 welcome our first panel. In order, I will be calling  
25

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1  
2 on Christian Gonzalez-Rivera followed by Kevin Jones  
3 followed by Nicole Rojas followed by Janet Perez  
4 followed by Jo-Ann Yoo. Christian Gonzalez-Rivera,  
5 you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 CHRISTIAN GONZALEZ-RIVERA: Hi everybody, my name  
8 is Christian Gonzalez-Rivera and I am the Director of  
9 Strategic Policy Initiatives at the Brookdale Center  
10 for Healthy Aging.

11 We are CUNY's aging research and pod center and a  
12 part of Hunter College. So, first of all, thank you  
13 Chair Chin and Chair Menchaca and of course members  
14 of the Committees for holding this hearing to draw  
15 attention to the – as Chair Menchaca keeps saying, I  
16 mean the specific needs of the now 51 percent of  
17 older New Yorkers who are immigrants.

18 So, immigrants are now the majority so this is  
19 extremely important to focus on this population and  
20 also, as you pointed out in your opening statements,  
21 older immigrants compared to US born older adults on  
22 average are more likely to have lower incomes, face  
23 language and cultural barriers and have lower levels  
24 of formal education but in this testimony, I would  
25 like to specifically draw the Council's attention to

1  
2 a problem that's been particularly salient during  
3 this pandemic and that is that lower income  
4 immigrants with less than a high school education are  
5 the largest group of New Yorkers that do not have  
6 access to the internet at home. They are the largest  
7 single group of people and this is information that  
8 we – that's drawn from a report that we published two  
9 weeks ago, as Chair Chin and members of the Aging  
10 Committee may recall, we presented this two weeks ago  
11 I mean, on the day that it was released.

12       So, in brief, out of the 1.7 million New Yorkers  
13 age 60 and above, 1 out of every 3 does not have  
14 internet access at home. That's 474,000 people and  
15 having lower levels of formal education was one of  
16 the biggest predictors of lacking home internet  
17 access. And many of these are immigrants. You know,  
18 fully 62 percent of unconnected older New Yorkers  
19 with less than a high school degree are foreign born.  
20 62 percent are foreign born and this alone is about  
21 120,000 people.

22       The vast majority of these have limited  
23 proficient in English. Half of them are Spanish  
24 speakers, 18 percent speak various Chinese language  
25

1  
2 and 11 percent speak Russian and the remainder speak  
3 other languages.

4 That means that bridging the digital divide for  
5 older New Yorkers cannot be done without a strategy  
6 to reach older immigrants, especially those whose  
7 primary language is not English. You know, thousands  
8 of immigrants without meaningful lessons to the  
9 internet have become dependent on others to meet  
10 basic needs. And senior centers can be important  
11 tech ambassadors to older New Yorkers but the  
12 capacity to do is really uneven across the aging  
13 services system because of lack of funds. I mean  
14 they largely have to fend for themselves when it  
15 comes to technology access.

16 And so, investing in building that capacity  
17 should be an important priority for the Council and  
18 the administration and not only for the aging  
19 services network but also for organizations such as  
20 museums, theaters, public libraries, who can also be  
21 effective tech ambassadors to older adults if they  
22 have that kind of specialized investment in reaching  
23 older adults.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.



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1  
2 CHRISTIAN GONZALEZ-RIVERA: So, just one quick  
3 last thing. I mean it's like for instance. I mean  
4 immigrant run cultural institutions are probably  
5 producing content and programming that could be of  
6 interest to older immigrants but they may just not be  
7 reaching out to older adults as an audience or making  
8 the programming accessible to them.

9 So, that we know why; I mean the technology we  
10 need investment in organizations becoming tech  
11 ambassadors within the aging service network but more  
12 generally, so that older adults can have access to  
13 the full gamut of services available throughout the  
14 city.

15 So, thank you very much for the opportunity to  
16 testify and of course, you know, we always remain  
17 available to you as you think about how New York City  
18 can be an even better place to grow older. Thank  
19 you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
21 I would like to now welcome Kevin Jones to testify.  
22 You may begin when you are ready.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.  
24  
25

1  
2 KEVIN JONES: Good afternoon Chairs Chin and  
3 Menchaca and members of the Committees on Aging and  
4 Immigration. My name is Kevin Jones, I am the  
5 Associate State Director of Advocacy at AARP New  
6 York, which represents 750,000 members of the 50 plus  
7 community in New York City.

8 Thanks for taking the time for providing me with  
9 the opportunity to testify today about the challenges  
10 that older adult immigrants currently face in New  
11 York City particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

12 Over the course of the past decade, New York  
13 City's population of older adults has continued to  
14 make up a greater share of the city's total  
15 population and immigrants ages 65 and older have  
16 driven much of the total growth of the city's older  
17 adult population. Soon more than half of New York  
18 City residents above the age of 65 will be  
19 immigrants.

20 As older immigrants account for a growing share  
21 of New York City's population, studies have found  
22 that a total number of individuals living in poverty  
23 continues to steadily increase. The growing rate of  
24 poverty among older adult immigrants in New York City  
25

1 should be a special concern for the city as a  
2 significant portion of those living in poverty do not  
3 have sufficient retirement incomes to cover their  
4 expenses. Do not qualify for Social Security  
5 benefits, lack sufficient access to affordable loans  
6 and banking and are disproportionately cost burdened  
7 by the housing expenses.  
8

9       Despite the issues that already existed for older  
10 adult immigrants in New York City prior to the  
11 pandemic, the onset of COVID-19 has also brought  
12 about unprecedented challenges for this population.  
13 Throughout this crisis we have heard from our  
14 partners about how language barriers have made it  
15 much more difficult for older adult immigrants to  
16 access city social services such as homebound  
17 delivery meal programs as well as some of the  
18 difficulties in navigating the 311 system for  
19 additional support services and public health  
20 information on the virus.

21       In addition, we have heard that many older adults  
22 particularly in the Asian community have often been  
23 afraid to leave their homes due to the rise of hate  
24 crimes targeting Asian populations.  
25

1  
2 In an effort to better serve older adult  
3 immigrants, communities during the COVID-19 pandemic  
4 and in the future, we urge that the city ensure all  
5 of its services provided to older adults from  
6 homebound meal delivery programs to Department for  
7 the Aging wellness. Check-in calls to the city's  
8 efforts to provide iPads and other internet enabled  
9 devices to seniors are implemented with sensitivities  
10 to any language barriers that exist to ensure that  
11 older immigrant adults have the same opportunity to  
12 access these vital services as any other aging  
13 individual in New York City.

14 We know that the work of supporting our city's  
15 older adult immigrant population could not be done  
16 without the hard work of the city's network of small  
17 nonprofit and community based organizations that are  
18 based in immigrant communities. We encourage the  
19 city to utilize its network of smaller providers more  
20 and allocate additional funds to support homebound  
21 meal delivery programs and similar services.

22 These providers are critical to serving older  
23 adults and immigrant communities since they have  
24 built trust and strong relationships within these  
25 communities and are often better equipped to reach

1  
2 older adults who have traditionally been underserved  
3 by the city's network of social services.

4 Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to  
5 testify today and I am happy to provide any addition  
6 information as needed.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
8 I would like to now welcome Nicole Rojas to testify.  
9 You may begin when you are ready.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 NICOLE ROJAS: Thank you. My name is Nicole  
12 Rojas, I am the Community Organizer at Mixteca  
13 Organization and I would like to thank everyone for  
14 your time today. And I just want to speak about a  
15 little bit of the services we have been providing at  
16 Mixteca Organization.

17 We have been providing services to the adults  
18 immigrant community and older immigrant community in  
19 Sunset Park for 20 years. Our work mainly started  
20 with HIV awareness and 20 years later, we are here  
21 again in the midst of the COVID pandemic, providing  
22 information on COVID-19, testing and vaccines and we  
23 have seen a high need in our community.

24  
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1  
2 Many of our immigrant communities do not have  
3 access to internet. Language access is very  
4 important as well and a reminder that our immigrant  
5 community, the one we serve do not – not only speak  
6 Spanish but they also speak indigenous languages like  
7 Mixteco, [INAUDIBLE 2:17:13]. So it is very  
8 important that we have all the resources possible in  
9 order to serve this community.

10 Also, in the midst of a new Administration  
11 providing hope for a pathway to citizenship, our  
12 older immigrant community is vulnerable to a lot of  
13 scams and fraud. So, we definitely need a lot of  
14 support in providing legal services for these  
15 communities, as well debunking myths.

16 Also in the midst of the rollout for COVID  
17 vaccines, it is very important for this to be  
18 accessible for our older immigrant community and part  
19 of the culture is to be informed, so we need the  
20 services to do this. A lot of our immigrant  
21 community, it takes a long time in order for  
22 information to get to them.

23 So, like as I mentioned, internet access has been  
24 a big one. Food access, rent assistance, so we have

1  
2 seen a high need in the community and we really ask  
3 for your support to keep funding these services as it  
4 is very needed.

5 So, I would like to thank all of you for your  
6 time.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
8 I would like to now welcome Janet Perez to testify.  
9 You may begin when you are ready.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 JANET PEREZ: Thank you. Thank you for this time  
12 to speak. Thank you Council Member and Chair for  
13 this time and others for raising these pressing  
14 issues and concerns for the aging immigrant  
15 community. So, my name is Janet Perez Director of  
16 Programs at Mixteca located in Sunset Park Brooklyn.

17 It is a community based organization that has  
18 been on the frontlines of the pandemic since April.  
19 Mixteca has witnessed first hand the hardships and  
20 challenges undocumented immigrant community members  
21 have faced. From losing their loved ones, livelihood  
22 and unable to make ends meet.

23 We have seen an increasingly number of older  
24 immigrants that continue to heavily rely on the  
25 family units to survive during the pandemic. We

1  
2 would like to highlight that in order to support the  
3 aging immigrant community, it is equally important to  
4 provide support to the caregivers as well who are  
5 also included or excluded from any relief benefits  
6 due to status.

7 In recent months, Mixteca has seen or has seen a  
8 trend in the community where many community members  
9 are either moving back with their children or the  
10 younger immigrant families are now taking on their  
11 aging immigrant community member. And so, this is  
12 why we – it is we feel it is indefinitely important  
13 to continue to advocate, not only for resources or  
14 support services directly for the aging immigrant  
15 community but for their families as well.

16 So, thank you for your time and these issues are  
17 the – as an immigrant – as a younger immigrant  
18 community that often comes or they may be a younger  
19 population but we have also witnessed that many  
20 established undocumented immigrant families are also  
21 aging as the years come by.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
23 I would like to now welcome Jo-Ann Yoo to testify.  
24 You may begin when you are ready.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.



1  
2 JO-ANN YOO: Good afternoon. Thank you for  
3 allowing me to testify today. My name is Jo-Ann Yoo  
4 and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American  
5 Federation.

6 I am here to offer testimony on two issues that  
7 are critical to the Pan Asian community. That of  
8 language access for immigrant New Yorkers and the  
9 importance of increasing direct services capacity in  
10 our community, especially during the pandemic. As  
11 you know, 70 percent of our city's Asian community  
12 boasts in immigrant heritage but we are also seeing  
13 challenges because of the sheer number of languages  
14 spoken in their home and the accompanying lack of  
15 accessibility to vital information.

16 One of four of our seniors lives in poverty and  
17 high percentages are limited English proficient, a  
18 combination that makes accessing services very  
19 difficult and compounds existing isolation.

20 The COVID crisis has exacerbated challenges for  
21 our already vulnerable seniors with widespread food  
22 insecurity, mental health issues, social isolation  
23 and now confusions about how to sign up for vaccine.  
24 The emergency amongst our community seniors is the  
25 curtain behind closed doors, where basic needs are

1  
2 not being met and social isolation is compounding  
3 issues in our community where our seniors serve a  
4 critical social role.

5 Our senior serving member agencies are working  
6 beyond capacity to support our elders and they are  
7 creating innovating processes to make sure our  
8 seniors are getting the services they need as  
9 efficiently and safely as possible. Like using meal  
10 delivery to conduct mental health checks with trained  
11 volunteers in Queens or sourcing culturally competent  
12 from local growers of Asian vegetables in Brooklyn.

13 From May to November alone, the federation helped  
14 six senior serving organizations to serve almost  
15 3,000 seniors with nearly 20,000 food programs and  
16 8,500 assurance calls. The stories of what our  
17 member agency staff, as well as all nonprofit staff  
18 have been going through is nothing sort of  
19 parallelism. For various contract bureaucracy  
20 reasons, the Pan Asian community, senior serving  
21 booths are woefully under resourced. These  
22 challenges have been brought to the attention of our  
23 DFTA Commissioner and we are working together to  
24 ensure that our seniors so not go without food or  
25 medical services.

1  
2 Our seniors depend on our community-based  
3 organizations who are leading by example and  
4 compensating for shortfalls in existing city  
5 programs. But our CBO's need the full backing of our  
6 city with RFP processes that account for the capacity  
7 limitations of smaller service providers and  
8 contracting reforms that prioritize CBO's with  
9 expertise in reaching isolated or hard hit ethnic and  
10 linguistic communities.

11 With the looming budget cuts, our advocacy effort  
12 and our budget ask is that our nonprofits be provided  
13 enough resources to protect essential –

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 JO-ANN YOO: Support our elders. Thank you very  
16 much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
18 I would like to now turn it to Council Member  
19 Menchaca for any questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and I want to  
21 say thank you to this first panel. All of you  
22 represent some of the more critical infrastructure  
23 that's on the ground. And so, I want to focus my  
24 questions on really connecting to what I was trying  
25

1  
2 to get out of the Q&A part, which is the interactions  
3 between DFTA and MOIA as it pertains to supporting  
4 you all. Maybe we can start with Jo-Ann and maybe  
5 you can kind of talk a little bit about all the work  
6 that you have just laid out. How have you felt  
7 support coming from DFTA and MOIA as they engage each  
8 other to support culturally relevant food, to  
9 community members for example or some of the worker  
10 and labor issues around PPE? And have you felt  
11 supported? And can give us any idea on  
12 recommendations on how to just better understand  
13 that. Is it happening? Are you getting support?

14 JO-ANN YOO: Sure. Uh, thank you for that  
15 question. Uhm, I guess a lot of our connection to  
16 both Commissioners is the fact that we you know,  
17 through our work together for many, many years you  
18 know, we have at this point it has become personal  
19 relationships right. And so, they do call us  
20 regularly. They check in all the time.

21 Any time there has been – we have had direct  
22 phone numbers to both Commissioners and any time  
23 there is an issue where we know that you know there  
24 is a lot of hemming and hawing you know in  
25 bureaucracy. We are able to call the Commissioners.

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1  
2 MOIA has included us in part of the OSF funding  
3 and we were able to get that – the funding out. A  
4 lot of it actually in your district Council Member  
5 Menchaca and we were really proud of that. We worked  
6 with a lot of our member agencies who normally  
7 wouldn't be able to access some of the funding's like  
8 that, to be able to get services out.

9 With the DFTA Commissioner, you know we are – we  
10 were at the height of sitting and working through the  
11 RFP process and talking about how do we really talk  
12 about contract reform, so that that way it is fair  
13 for the smaller nonprofits as sort of the Asian  
14 American community and then COVID hit. And so, like  
15 I think we were just slammed and we were pretty  
16 stemmed but I know that those conversations are  
17 happening again. In fact, I have a meeting with them  
18 this afternoon.

19 But I think uhm, we do talk to them regularly.  
20 They do understand. I think uhm, you know the  
21 Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez comes from our side of  
22 the world right. She is the head of the Hispanic  
23 Federation you know, which is our sister  
24 organization.  
25

1  
2       So, even before I went in there and said, let me  
3 tell you what I am seeing, she already knew and she  
4 already – we are already talking and we are already  
5 having plans and I know that she – I know for a fact  
6 that there has been robust conversation with our  
7 member agencies and DFTA. Because we are trying to  
8 get to the solution.

9       You know, I think it's just, you know, not you  
10 know, you both know, I have no problems speaking my  
11 mind and being an advocate but I think at this point,  
12 there is just – you know what we are all trying to do  
13 right now is the shared commitment of like getting  
14 every body vaccinated. There is so much confusion.  
15 There is so many challenges that even you know, it is  
16 simple supply and demand where we can't even get  
17 people vaccinated.

18       Uhm, you know and there is so much that needs to  
19 happen. PPE, you know, whenever I have asked for  
20 any, the city has always been able to step up. Test  
21 and Trace has been really great to respond to us but  
22 the other realities that a lot of our smaller  
23 organizations – a lot of our small businesses, a lot  
24 of the folks from our own community, the Pan Asian  
25

1  
2 community that could access PPE, have been stepping  
3 up. And they are saying, I have 5,000 masks I am  
4 flying in from you know, Korea for instance right.  
5 And I want to share it with these nonprofit groups  
6 and we uhm, we have been able to really spread that  
7 love around because we know what it is taking.

8 And uhm, you know, one of the challenges that we  
9 see is just you know, the inequality of funding. You  
10 know who gets what money. It is always the big  
11 agencies that get funded but a lot of the federation  
12 members are smaller nonprofit organizations that  
13 serve seniors and those seniors need to be uplifted  
14 too and so, some of the stories that I have heard  
15 from our senior organizations, those stories I at  
16 least share with Council Member Chin. You know,  
17 about how senior serving organizations are no longer  
18 just senior serving. They are also having to do MBWE  
19 contract applications and that that way the  
20 restaurants could feed the seniors.

21 You know those stories are heartbreaking because  
22 I know — and that's why it was really important for  
23 me just personally as Executive Director to uplift my  
24 counterparts and our member agencies in the nonprofit  
25

1  
2 world. I am going to try to say this without crying  
3 because I think it has just been extraordinary and  
4 this has been really scary and I think you know a lot  
5 of the reports talk about the Asian American  
6 community. You know nobody - I am going to be honest  
7 and say you know the frustration is very real. Thank  
8 you to Kevin, you know, my long-time AARP colleague  
9 who talked about the hate crimes right. And our  
10 seniors are afraid to leave the house because they  
11 don't know what is going to happen. You know,  
12 tonight is the vigil for Mr. Quintana who was going  
13 to work and he got his face slashed. There is so  
14 much happening and our nonprofit, our member agencies  
15 are doing extraordinary things and it is almost  
16 nothing. They are making things work and I don't  
17 even know how - but if we didn't have them, our  
18 seniors would not be fed, so.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for - yeah, just  
20 thank you for lifting up the federation  
21 organizations. I am with you. We had these  
22 conversations during the census work and so, this is  
23 real and the burden is held by you all on the ground  
24 and this is what I think Chair Chin and I are trying

25



1 to really figure out where is that gap. And so,  
2 maybe a question for some of the other providers and  
3 I just want to say thank you to Christian for  
4 bringing data that we were asking MOIA to answer.  
5 And so, you had it and so thank you so much for some  
6 of those pieces. You are an expert on this  
7 population specifically, this diagram that comes  
8 together around immigrants and elders in the City of  
9 New York. And Kevin also really pointing to the fact  
10 that this is where the face of our elders; this is  
11 who they are and so, maybe we can hear from Mixteca  
12 about some of the gaps. What we want to find out are  
13 gaps. How do we see and understand that gaps and I  
14 heard a lot of indigenous languages that are coming  
15 through the district in Sunset Park where I am  
16 Council Member.

17  
18 And so, how is MOIA and DFTA supporting you in  
19 connecting to our neighbors who have those language  
20 access issues, who are elder immigrant adults?

21 JANET PEREZ: Yeah, thank you for raising that  
22 concern. So, I mean we have seen now with the  
23 pandemic and everything going virtual. There has  
24 been a lot more needs for technology access. A lot  
25 of community members don't have access to internet as

1 well. So, we have seen that Mixteca has played a  
2 pivotal role in really connecting community members  
3 through services, through city services. So, even  
4 like applications, rent relief, applications or other  
5 resources that are available to community members,  
6 uhm, so we definitely seen that language access has  
7 played a big role, especially for our indigenous  
8 immigrant community members who we have to really  
9 play that role in interpretation which can sometimes  
10 take long because those language are not always  
11 available. So, I mean, we have seen many different  
12 gaps in terms of language access, technology access  
13 with the new virtual role it is even harder for  
14 community members to really access those resources  
15 and as many folks have mentioned, even connecting  
16 through the phone, it is also very intimidating for  
17 community members.  
18

19 And so what we have seen for us that works is we  
20 continue to offer in-person services. And when we  
21 do, we often see like an exaggerated amount of  
22 community members reaching out to Mixteca. And  
23 really the capacity is not always there. So, we  
24 would love to you know, work something out or  
25 something that works can work for the community.

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
THE COMMITTEE ON AGING

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Uh, I want to follow up with this question about how DFTA and MOIA can support the work that you just described and I am talking about reaching more immigrant New Yorkers, elder immigrant New Yorkers and so this is the opportunity to talk about some of that work, so that the Council can work through a budget or policy issue that we can change and make better. And I just want to ask if the DFTA and MOIA representative that are here, if you can say hi. I want to make sure that we still have DFTA and MOIA in the room. Because they need to be here listening to this. I just want to make sure that -

JANET PEREZ: I think my colleague Lorena is trying to unmute herself.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay.

JANET PEREZ: Whoever has access.

NICOLE ROJAS: And if I could just share quickly also, uhm, MOIA has been supporting with funding for the financial relief for our community members and we have worked with them for Know Your Rights workshops as well.

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With reporting wise, we also do let them know that there is an indigenous speaking community and it is great to make them visible but now we really do need the support to provide these services so information in these languages and also a reminder that a lot of these folks that do speak these languages are undocumented and we can't hire them. As much as we want to, to make these services available to the rest of the community that speak these languages.

LORENA KOUROUSIAS: Yeah, thank you for unmuting myself. I just wanted to add, we received some support from MOIA and we fundraise ourselves to put money on the hands of the other immigrant community and one of the first criteria was to speak an indigenous language as a first language.

The resources are not enough. We got super excited with the first money we got. We got excited with the money we were able to fundraise. With the first boxes of food, with the first culture and appropriate food put in the boxes, with all of the resources that we have been able to put over there and they are not enough. The community is huge and I

1 think what is happening is that it is a community  
2 that we haven't seen and I want to say that when MOIA  
3 gave us the money, we put out an application - we  
4 were thinking like we have a lot of money and let's  
5 distribute in the best way. We have received 4,500  
6 applications in three days.  
7

8       And then, we were like what are we going to be  
9 doing this huge amount of people and we discovered  
10 that there are 59 different languages, indigenous  
11 languages spoke in Brooklyn. And we just were like  
12 unable to solve all those situations even though we  
13 have been doing a lot of work. And now with the  
14 vaccine, I think it is important. The priority, that  
15 these people that it is real and original dreamers  
16 because they being the day laborlores. They bring  
17 one's family to this country to try to provide for  
18 their own families. I don't know - I am sorry. It  
19 is hard to witness what is happening with our  
20 community and in particular with the elderly  
21 community. Every Saturday lining up to get some food  
22 and talking about other resources or people are sick  
23 and they can't go and pick up the food. It's really  
24 - that's our basic rights and I am with you because  
25 it is really hard when we are think origin community

1  
2 and being in this situation, it's hard but seeing the  
3 immigrant elderly working their entire life, it's  
4 really heartbreaking and yes, there are some  
5 resources but what I want to say is it's not enough.

6 At Mixteca we got some cuts last year and thank  
7 you Council Member Menchaca. You rescued us and we  
8 were able to continue working but still a lot of  
9 need, a huge need and we have to develop new  
10 strategies to approach this community if we really  
11 want them to be vaccinated. If we really want to  
12 address the issues. It is not as easy as we believe.  
13 It is not as easy - my co-workers already mentioned  
14 the difficulties accessing to the internet. The  
15 needs, the believes. We got to really work hard if  
16 we want it to work in other situations and I am sorry  
17 for getting too emotional on this one.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: No, gracias. [SPEAKING IN  
19 SPANISH 2:38:57-2:39:04]. Just thank you so much for  
20 that voice. We need to hear that voice from you and  
21 Jo-Ann and everyone today about what the need is.  
22 This is the only way we are going to be able to get  
23 to that goal if we understand it deeply. And when it  
24 comes with emotion, it comes with truth and so, just  
25 keep showing up with that.

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
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Jo-Ann, I think you had your hand up as well.

JO-ANN YOO: I did. I really want to shout out all the great work that MOIA is doing as far as all the translations go. We get a lot of materials and you know on Twitter they tag us which we in turn share with our member agencies and there is a lot of really rapid, quick you know five second reads that MOIA is producing and I see that. I see that popping up in the federation Twitter. I really appreciate that but you know where the challenges and why I know Lorena and I are really emotional is because a lot of our seniors, immigrant seniors uhm, aren't even literate in their own language and they don't have Twitter.

So, we need to figure out all the different ways that we can convey information and now more than ever, getting information to people. That's critical. You know that is like, how do you get the vaccine? How do you sign up for food? It's not even, you know, this is where you can go get a senior center and relax with your friends but this is really lifesaving work and this is why the nonprofits on the ground in every corner, explaining things and letting

1  
2 people drop by and talk to them. This is why our  
3 work is critical and I think this why Lorena and I  
4 are very emotional because we know what it takes and  
5 we know what it is doing to our field and our staff  
6 because you know, a lot of these folks, they don't  
7 even think about their own safety because their own  
8 families safety. They are going out and trying the  
9 best that they can. The things that we are seeing, I  
10 mean, you know its hell out here. And we really need  
11 the Council to stand up for the nonprofit  
12 organizations.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I am going to  
14 hand it back to our Committee Counsel and what I just  
15 want to say is I think we had John Bay from MOIA say  
16 hi. I don't know if DFTA is here as well. I know we  
17 can't force you to keep your cameras on but we need  
18 you to stay present in this hearing. The words that  
19 we are going to hear from so many New Yorkers that  
20 are talking about some of our most vulnerable, our  
21 elder immigrant New Yorkers are adults that feel  
22 invisible to everything and everyone right now and  
23 need to be heard.

24

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1  
2       And so, we can't force you to keep your cameras  
3 on but I am going to ask you to do that from DFTA and  
4 from MOIA. Back to you Harbani.

5       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Menchaca. I  
6 am going to turn it to Chair Chin for questions.

7       CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Yes, thank you. I wanted to  
8 really thank this panel for your testimony and for  
9 all your hard work you know for our immigrant  
10 community and our seniors.

11       I just wanted to say that we need to support  
12 these CBO's in our community, especially the small  
13 ones that are serving population that the city has  
14 not recognized or don't even know about. And that's  
15 where the Council you know comes in and I just urge  
16 you uhm, to make sure that if you are a 501C3  
17 nonprofit, then apply for Council funding. Put in an  
18 application [LOST AUDIO 2:42:36-2:42:41] the only way  
19 that we can sort of help you. The Council are the  
20 one that - we are the one that are out there helping  
21 organizations in our community that serve the  
22 population that are in need.

23       So, for the panelists that testified, I hope that  
24 you know about the application. It's online and the

1  
2 deadline is coming soon. So, put something in and  
3 then we can get you more support and maybe there is a  
4 way that we can think of doing some initiative that  
5 can support these organizations that serve a  
6 population that the city's not even aware of and the  
7 different languages and dialects that are needed.

8 So, I really wanted to make sure that you know  
9 that we are here for you. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Chin. I  
11 would like to now ask if there are any other Council  
12 Member questions? Seeing no hands, I would like to  
13 thank this panel for their testimony and we will be  
14 moving on to our next panel.

15 In order I will be calling Margaret Garrett  
16 followed by Pia Scarfo followed by Sharanya Pillai  
17 followed by Felicia Singh followed by Jasleen  
18 Garr[SP?]. Margaret Garrett, you may begin when you  
19 are ready.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 MARGARET GARRETT: Hello everybody. Uhm, I  
22 wanted to thank everyone for putting together this  
23 testimony, this hearing today. My name is Margaret  
24 Garrett, I am a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid  
25

1  
2 Society and I am representing the Legal Aid Society  
3 today at this hearing.

4 Thank you again for including us in this  
5 discussion about what is effecting the older  
6 immigrant population in New York City. I feel  
7 honored to be part of this and to be able to learn  
8 from all of you and all your testimony that you  
9 delivered on their behalf.

10 Older New Yorkers face arrange of distinct  
11 barriers to accessing services that are often only  
12 heightened for members of immigrant communities. The  
13 problem of isolation, reduced mobility and other  
14 threats to individuals ability to live independently  
15 are further complicated by issues experienced by  
16 members of non-citizen communities.

17 Language and cultural barriers combined with  
18 different levels of education was a significant  
19 obstacle to many older immigrant New Yorkers  
20 attempting to navigate complex and bureaucratic  
21 government assistance programs.

22 This means that in addition to having on average  
23 far lower incomes and far smaller retirement savings  
24 that U.S. born residents, older immigrant New Yorkers  
25

1  
2 are less able to access vital services and receive  
3 fewer benefits from government programs.

4 This is compounded by higher levels of  
5 institutional distress experienced by many members of  
6 immigrant communities. These have only been  
7 exacerbated by the Trump Administrations overtly  
8 anti-immigrant agenda including damaging changes to  
9 public charge regulations.

10 For undocumented New Yorkers, the situation could  
11 be even more dire as they are shut out of many  
12 programs that are frequently the only available  
13 source of income and assistance for an individual  
14 unable to continue working.

15 The difficulties for older immigrant New Yorkers  
16 in accessing vital services during the pandemic have  
17 made it that they are more likely to forego  
18 vaccination out of concern for potential costs.  
19 Worry that obtaining it may lead to negative  
20 immigration related consequences.

21 I personally have spoken to older non-citizen  
22 immigrants who are concerned about accessing the  
23 vaccine. Many non-citizen New Yorkers are deeply  
24 concerned about the collection and sharing of their  
25

1  
2 personal information with federal agencies, which  
3 they fear could leave them open to future immigration  
4 enforcement actions.

5 These unique challenges facing vulnerable older  
6 immigrant New Yorkers across the city point to the  
7 need for dedicated services and outreach -

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 MARGARET GARRETT: Catering to these members of  
10 our community. Thank you to the City again for  
11 inviting us to speak on behalf of the Legal Aid  
12 Society. We look forward to future discussions.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
14 I would like to now welcome Pia Scarfo to testify.  
15 You may begin when you are ready.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 PIA SCARFO: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you so  
18 much the Committee on Immigration and the Committee  
19 on Aging to give us the opportunity to testify today  
20 and [INAUDIBLE 2:48:05] been providing three main  
21 services to the community. So, we are running a NORC  
22 program and a senior center for immigrant population.  
23 They are both based on discretionary funding and I  
24 don't know if the Commissioner is still with us but  
25 what I would like to share with you is there personal

1 banner is not being included because based on  
2 discretionary funding on the weekly brief that  
3 Department for the Aging is being given.  
4

5 So, we have been receiving information and  
6 updates from indirect sources and now thanks to our  
7 program officer from the NORC program and the senior  
8 center program, we are informed but we are still not  
9 part of this briefing.

10 So, [INAUDIBLE 2:48:56] as I said, we have the  
11 NORC program where the senior center for the  
12 immigrant population and we are also running a food  
13 pantry. So, since the pandemic, we have been  
14 changing the way the services were provided. Our  
15 food pantry became an express food pantry. So, we do  
16 home delivery to our community, to our seniors and  
17 immigrant population.

18 Regarding the NORC program, we have been  
19 providing case assistance and case management and  
20 health management over the phone in a very  
21 restrictive way in person when absolutely necessary.  
22 In terms of our food program, as I said, we have the  
23 food pantry. Now, the main concern – there are three  
24 main concerns that the [INAUDIBLE 2:49:44] would like  
25

1  
2 to raise and need your help to deal with this  
3 problem.

4       The first one is the vaccination. Our older  
5 minority elder population, there is not enough  
6 vaccination sites, I am sorry, we are looking in the  
7 lower East Side of Manhattan, I didn't say that at  
8 the beginning. So, the [INAUDIBLE 2:50:02] is  
9 working with the Department of Health to open a  
10 vaccination site here in the community. So, we would  
11 be happy to share good news with you Mr. Menchaca and  
12 Councilwoman Margaret Chin, we hope very soon.

13       The second thing is senior center. We need a  
14 senior center to go back and provide meals to the  
15 seniors. Even if they are close, they need to give  
16 them the opportunity to go and get their food.

17       The third thing is the digital program. The  
18 digital literacy is very low. We have been giving  
19 out tablets, giving training and doing Zoom classes  
20 but we need to do more and we need more money to do  
21 more and provide this help to other communities.

22       So, you know, I have been rushing through the  
23 three. I am very glad that I can speak and I hope we  
24 can share more. Thank you.

25       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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PIA SCARFO: Thank you Margaret.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

I would like to now welcome Sharanya Pillai to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

SHARANYA PILLAI: Thank you Chair Chin and Chair Menchaca for giving me the opportunity to testify regarding issues specific to aging immigrant populations.

I am writing from India Home, the largest senior center program dedicated to South Asian seniors. 100 percent of the clients we serve are immigrants and of 60 years of age and older. As you know, the populations we serve have been exacerbated crises on many levels due to COVID-19. Not only have the losses been numerous but the preexisting public health disparities have been exacerbated.

Food insecurity as mentioned earlier has made it difficult for South Asian older adults. We have been providing culturally competent home delivered halal meals to the population Jamaica Queens and grocery deliveries to seniors all over Queens.



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2       However, we know there is more of a need and we  
3 are at capacity. Furthermore, the immigrant  
4 populations we serve are already at high risk for  
5 social isolation, which makes times like now  
6 especially hard. We are providing virtual programs  
7 now seven days a week to combat this isolation and  
8 providing individualized training for seniors to join  
9 these programs. However, we do not have adequate  
10 technology assistance or capacity to support these  
11 programs in their full.

12       On that note, while digital access allows a world  
13 of opportunities during COVID, as you know, this does  
14 not translate for our older adults. Applications for  
15 benefits such as cash assistance, SNAP and SSI, all  
16 have to be done online, which is inequitable for  
17 seniors.

18       The waiting time on the phone to access these  
19 benefits is even longer than before and it makes it  
20 extremely difficult for our seniors to be able to  
21 enroll in these benefits during such times in need.  
22 Furthermore, the interpretation services that are  
23 there to access government services or assistance are  
24 inadequate. Many of our clients who have limited  
25

1 English proficiency don't know how to navigate  
2 through 311 to get through all the steps to be able  
3 to access that interpretation and get their needed  
4 assistance for benefits.  
5

6 A huge point of difficulty as has been addressed  
7 earlier has been accessing the corpus of Queens and  
8 especially in Eastern Queens makes it less equitable  
9 for our clients to get vaccinated. On top of sites  
10 themselves being unavailable and a low level supply,  
11 the vaccine appointment procedure is complicated and  
12 it is especially difficult for seniors who lack  
13 digital literacy and have language problems to access  
14 online services. Many of our seniors do not have  
15 internet, a smart phone or another device or even an  
16 email address to be able to navigate the system.

17 Especially the seniors who are living by  
18 themselves are effected. As they don't have the  
19 support to be able to help book the vaccine. We have  
20 seniors who are more than 70-75 years old and they  
21 don't have an email address etc. and we can't  
22 register on their behalf. And if there is a form to  
23 fill out you know; how will they fill it out if they  
24 don't have internet or if they don't have a printer  
25 or don't know how to use a printer? There are so

1  
2 much of such barriers to making the appointment which  
3 makes us feel helpless. Given so many barriers for  
4 our community to be able to access -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 SHARANYA PILLAI: What should be a basic right.  
7 We know team registration phone line was meant to be  
8 a more accessible solution for seniors, however,  
9 there is not language interpretation through the  
10 vaccine finder phonenumber for the South Asian  
11 languages that is needed.

12 These systems need to be improved to ensure equal  
13 access to immigrant communities. We urge the city  
14 and government agencies to provide language support  
15 and accessible methods for South Asian immigrant  
16 older adults to access these crucial services. We  
17 urge that vaccination sites are placed in more  
18 accessible areas for communities in which our South  
19 Asian seniors live and we urge the support to  
20 increase the capacity of direct service organizations  
21 such as ours that will help bring our communities to  
22 a more equitable future. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
24 I would like to now welcome Felicia Singh to testify.  
25 You may begin when you are ready.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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FELICIA SINGH: Uhm, the camera isn't on. My name is Felicia Singh and I am a daughter of a taxi driver. He is an immigrant from Punjab India and he is 66-years-old and still drives his taxi today because he is unable to retire.

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The New York Taxi Workers Alliance has a sound right and doable plan for debt relief, one that has been approved by our Comptroller and Attorney General Tish James. Our city has not protected our aging immigrants and this has happened on all of our watch. The medallion crisis is so real. My father has had no choice but to file for bankruptcy because of his medallion. The same medallion he was told he could sell and there went our income.

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On February 5, 2021, the bankruptcy court put a for sale sign on our house. You make us working class and you make us stay in this position forever by design. You want us to be working class because we do the work of serving all of you. The city has been built on our backs and in time of need, you have given us false promises.

24

25

The taxi cab medallion sale prices taskforce believe that "taking no action at all would only

1  
2 exacerbate the problems that are currently stifling  
3 this industry." But we have been telling you this.  
4 The question is, when is our Mayor and our City  
5 Council going to find the moral compass to do  
6 something about it? You have 85 days, 85 to push the  
7 Mayor to adopt the debt relief plan by New York Taxi  
8 Workers Alliance or my family and I will be unhoused  
9 and so will many other families of taxi drivers.

10 Every day I am going to remind the Mayor and this  
11 city and City Council, how many days we have left  
12 until you uphold the promise to center working class  
13 immigrants by giving us the debt relief we deserve.  
14 This is what seniors are facing right now. This is  
15 the pain. This is the intersectionality behind  
16 allowing predatory lenders to do this to seniors who  
17 now have to work for the rest of their lives in New  
18 York City to pay something they should have been able  
19 to retire on. It is our responsibility. We need to  
20 find the will and the courage to step forward and do  
21 something.

22 Time is running out. I will lose my house in 85  
23 days because of bankruptcy. Because of the United  
24 States Bankruptcy Court. This is what's happening to  
25

1  
2 our seniors. It is irresponsible. It is negligent  
3 and you all are responsible for this. We need to  
4 take action now and I will remind City Council every  
5 day that there is a plan that exists be it the New  
6 York Taxi Workers Alliance and there is a refusal to  
7 adopt it. Thank you for your time.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
10 I would like to now welcome Jasleen Garr to testify.  
11 You may begin when you are ready.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 JASLEEN GARR: Good afternoon, my name is Jasleen  
14 Garr and thank you to everyone for hosting this  
15 really important session and I am here to testify as  
16 a lifetime Glen Oaks resident in East Queens, which  
17 is home to one of the largest senior populations in  
18 our entire city.

19 I am here to testify on behalf of my father Bart  
20 Singh who is 62-years-old this year and has been a  
21 taxi driver, a medallion owner for over three decades  
22 now. Which for me is about at a 24-year-old means  
23 that I have seen my father wake up at 4 a.m. for his  
24 entire — for my entire life for 16 hour shifts for  
25 nearly as long as I have been alive.

1  
2 That also means that I have intimately known the  
3 medallion crisis for 7 years without an end in sight.  
4 Today, I spent my morning alongside Felicia Singh who  
5 just spoke before me and the New York Taxi Workers  
6 Alliance with organizers who have spent these years  
7 demanding that our Mayor bail out the workers who  
8 have kept our city moving.

9 And that is what's at the crucks of my testimony  
10 today, as our city has categorically failed to  
11 address the taxi medallion debt crisis. Among them  
12 were people who looked just like my father. Older  
13 immigrants speaking a number of languages. People  
14 have lost their loved ones to suicide.

15 My father immigrated to New York with the  
16 understanding that owning your own yellow cab was  
17 akin to striking gold. But what he, my family and  
18 thousands of workers across our city understand now  
19 is that we have struck deep misfortune instead. Our  
20 city knew that the taxi medallion industry markets  
21 were fraudulently inflating the values of medallions  
22 while allowing brokers to continue putting our  
23 immigrant workers into a lifetime sentence to debt,  
24 disenfranchisement and the most deeply disturbing  
25 cases, death.

1  
2       The same year the medallion bubble burst, I was  
3 meant to start my first year of university but in  
4 addition to hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth  
5 of medallion debt, I incurred tens of thousands of  
6 dollars' worth of student loan debt to finance my  
7 education. The city promised people like my father a  
8 pathway to put a mortgage on a home and to send their  
9 kids to great schools but what we now have is  
10 insurmountable debt. A home that's been refinanced  
11 and years spent on food stamps.

12       Our city's complicit and predatory lending and  
13 the manufactured negligence of immigrants who are now  
14 in their senior years. Living even more precarious  
15 lives than when they first arrived here in New York  
16 City but our Mayor continues to kick the can down the  
17 road, telling us that someone should do something  
18 about this while our seniors remain food and housing  
19 insecure. I want our Council and our Mayor to know  
20 that we can't lose another person debt. We can't  
21 lose and continue to curtail the right to a dignified  
22 life for the nearly 950 taxi drivers who have filed  
23 for bankruptcy. For the nearly 25 percent of drivers  
24 who have contracted COVID-19, especially for senior  
25



1  
2 immigrant drivers, like my father who never stopped  
3 working and I can't even get him an appointment even  
4 with the new city field vaccination site that's  
5 opened up in Queens.

6 Owning a medallion should never mean signing your  
7 life away and under our current system, we will  
8 continue to see people like me, children of  
9 immigrants being the retirements funds for our  
10 parents and grandparents. I can't wait to see my  
11 father stop working but it is time for our city to  
12 work for them to grant retirement funds.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 JASLEEN GARR: Pensions, stolen wages with direct  
15 services and the array of languages our drivers speak  
16 from Bangla, Punjabi and Mandarin and Spanish and so  
17 many more who are facing a digital divide.

18 I will close with this, that refinancing  
19 medallion debt would cost our city \$75 million across  
20 20 years making monthly payments only at an estimated  
21 \$800 a month instead of well over \$2,000 a month.  
22 Our Comptroller already agrees that this is a viable  
23 plan, we just need our Mayor and our Council to  
24 unmask the political will to put this plan into  
25 action. Thank you for your time.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
I would like to now turn it to Chair Menchaca for questions.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I want to thank this panel again for reminding us about the intersectional conversation that we are having here today and that our seniors are working. They are working many times because they have to. And so, I want to thank the testimony from both Felicia and Jasleen who have really brought to us a very long term conversation that we have been having at the city without a lot of political will to change it.

And so, maybe I will ask both of you to commit time to sit with me and my team to review this plan. I want to get to know the inner, outer components of this plan and you have my commitment to sit down and learn about what's happening exactly. Not just to your families but to the many elder immigrant workers who cannot retire at this point and who are in bankruptcy.

I know that the Council has a lot of role to play in this and so, I want to be a champion within the City Council and that this is going to be a budget

1 conversation, which means that we have to start  
2 thinking about that now. And so, we are going to  
3 need that support. We are going to need that  
4 pressure. Both Council Member Chin and I are on the  
5 budget negotiation teams which means that we need to  
6 get that going and learn about what's happening so  
7 that we can actually be the best advocates we can be.  
8

9 And so, maybe that's my question to both of you.  
10 Will you commit to just sitting down with my team at  
11 the Council to get a better sense of it, so that I  
12 can be an advocate for you?

13 Okay, wonderful and I think with Pia's piece, I  
14 want to just say that the vaccination conversation is  
15 going to be really important and there are a few  
16 vaccination public hearings on its way but the  
17 language component is where I want to stay focused  
18 and ensuring that I can support the rest of the  
19 Council Members on ensuring that language access is  
20 no longer a barrier and I have heard some really  
21 great comments from a lot of you about MOIA's  
22 commitment to the language piece and so, this is just  
23 good to hear. We need to hear that in these public  
24 hearings that it is working and how do we just bring  
25 more support to ensure that there is no barrier when

1  
2 it comes to language to the vaccination sites and  
3 bringing a vaccination site to your space as well,  
4 working with your Council Member and I don't know if  
5 it is Council Member Chin or Rivera exactly where  
6 that falls but I want to be supportive as the Chair  
7 of the Immigration Committee. That's it for me.  
8 Thanks Harbani.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I would  
10 like to turn it to Chair Chin for any questions.

11 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: No, I just want to make a  
12 comment and thank you to all the people who testified  
13 in this panel and you know, for the senior center I  
14 know Pia and you guys work so hard serving our  
15 seniors and when it comes to language access, it is  
16 not enough. The city is not doing enough. They are  
17 not complying with the local law 30. Because most of  
18 the time when information gets out, it is only in  
19 English and then we have to say, hey, where is the  
20 Spanish, where is the Chinese, where is the other  
21 languages?

22 So, I think that's something that we need to work  
23 with MOIA to really strongly advocate on. And I also  
24 wanted to thank the Taxi Worker Alliance. We have  
25

1  
2 been working with you all these years to try to find  
3 a way to help the taxi workers that are suffering  
4 right now. And I know that the Chair of the  
5 Transportation Committee, Council Member Ydanis, is  
6 also you know a strong supporter in this.

7 So, let's get together and see how we can make  
8 this happen to really finally bring some relief  
9 because there has been so much tragedy that has  
10 happened and I think we need to work together to  
11 bring some solution to this. So I just really wanted  
12 to thank all the advocacy on this front. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I would  
14 like to ask if there are any other Council Member  
15 questions at this time?

16 Seeing no other hands, I would like to thank this  
17 panel for their testimony and we are going to be  
18 moving onto our next panel. In order, I will be  
19 calling Binta Touray followed by Richard Chowl[SP?]  
20 followed by Jana Stroe followed by Jean Rene B.  
21 Tannis followed by William Ritziu followed by Bhair  
22 Desnai. Binta Touray, you may be begin when you are  
23 ready.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1  
2           BINTA TOURAY: Thank you for the opportunity to  
3 testify on the older adult immigrant population. My  
4 name is Binta Touray and I am an Intern at LiveOn New  
5 York. I am excited to testify at this hearing  
6 because my parents are immigrants and as they are  
7 aging, I see the issues older adults in the immigrant  
8 population are facing.

9           LiveOn New York's members include more than 100  
10 community-based nonprofits that provide core services  
11 which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our  
12 communities as we age. LiveOn New York's workers  
13 work to improve the lives all of all New Yorkers  
14 including immigrants and we all know that New York's  
15 immigrant seniors now compromise the majority of the  
16 city's older adult population. A 2010 study, 8  
17 percent of U.S. born elder live below the poverty  
18 line whereas 16 percent of foreign born elderly live  
19 below the poverty line.

20           It has been found that immigrants compromise 65  
21 percent of all seniors living in poverty. When it  
22 comes to gathering immigrant seniors, appropriateness  
23 of spaces with regard to culture must also be taken  
24 into account. For example, there are instances where  
25 most women from traditional families lose their

1 husbands and tend to become more isolated, which is  
2 actually due to difficulty finding spaces where it  
3 is gender segregated and a place where they can take  
4 of the hijab. These challenges, language barriers,  
5 financial barriers and lack of culturally appropriate  
6 spaces are important to keep in mind as each can  
7 exacerbate the risk of isolation.  
8

9 Isolation must be taken seriously even prior to  
10 COVID-19 because it is a greater predictor of  
11 morbidity. Senior services funded through the  
12 Department for the Aging play an important role in  
13 combating isolation among older immigrants and  
14 services provided including meals are offered in a  
15 way that is inclusive and culturally competent.

16 Beyond partnering and emergency response, the  
17 city must also look to reaffirm its commitment to  
18 nonprofit senior service in the budget. Today, the  
19 DFTA budget still accounts for less than 1 percent of  
20 the total city budget. This might call to provide  
21 services to a rapidly increasing and more diverse  
22 older adult population. To fully fund the system and  
23 thereby improve the ability for providers to serve  
24 older immigrants, sorry. The following must be  
25 prioritized.

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2 First, the city must fully fund home delivered  
3 meal programs at the national average to ensure  
4 programs can continue to provide culturally competent  
5 nutritious meals to homebound seniors across the  
6 city.

7 Two, the city must allocate the promise to \$1  
8 million funding in senior center staff and \$5 million  
9 funding for senior center kitchen staff.

10 And three, recall for the indirect costs to be  
11 fully funded. Thank you for the opportunity to  
12 testify.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
14 I would like to now welcome Richard Chowl to testify.  
15 You may begin when you are ready.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I think we might be having  
18 some technical difficulties. I will move onto the  
19 next panelist. I would like to welcome to testify.  
20 You may begin when you are ready.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Your audio is a little  
23 muffled, if you could speak a little louder. I am  
24 sorry, I think we are unable to hear you. We will  
25



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1  
2 circle back. I am going to move onto our next  
3 panelist Jean Rene B. Tannis. You may begin when you  
4 are ready.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 JEAN RENE B. TANNIS: Thank you to have me. My  
7 name is Jean Rene B. Tannis. My Medallion Number is  
8 6F20. My license number is 218384 and I am driving  
9 Yellow Cab for 34 straight years and then I stopped  
10 work, I stopped since March 12 until now. I did not  
11 go back to work because of the pandemic. I have a  
12 loan for \$436,000 with [INAUDIBLE 3:11:38-3:11:40]  
13 and then right now, I am 72-years-old. I have no  
14 pension, no retirement, no nothing because of the  
15 loan I owe and then I speak with the union. If they  
16 can lower the medallion like \$120,000 or \$100,000  
17 dollars and then my loan by coming down to \$750,000  
18 or \$700,000. Even if I don't go to work, I still  
19 have managed with my family to pay the bills and I  
20 hope the Mayor can divorce the opportunity for the  
21 debt forgiveness and I would be very happy. Because  
22 I cannot put food on the table. I cannot take care  
23 of myself because I don't have nothing and the  
24 medallion park at home with the taxi. I have not put  
25 it yet on the restorage. I am still paying insurance

1  
2 without no working, no nothing. But if the past six  
3 months, I don't know what I am going to do from now  
4 if I am going to restorage the medallion and selling  
5 the plate to taxi to motor vehicle. But I hope the  
6 Mayor can invest in, the panel can invest in our  
7 suffer and can help us and we will be very happy.  
8 Only one thing we need please is debt forgiveness.  
9 Because we really cannot afford to pay \$2,500 \$3,000  
10 anymore. Okay, alright, I thank, that's it. Thank  
11 you very much. I hope the City Council sees our  
12 needs. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
14 I would like to now welcome William Ritziu to  
15 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 WILLIAM RITZIU: Okay, good afternoon Chair Chin  
18 and all the present panel. My name is William  
19 Ritziu, I am a 73-year-old. I have no pension. I  
20 base on Social Security. I came here a long time ago  
21 in '84. I am living in Astoria Queens and I am a  
22 proud member of the Taxi Worker Alliance.

23 When I came here originally I was to put the food  
24 on the table, me and my family, I had to work on the

25

1 taxi while later on in the evening and the shifting,  
2 the shift, I was going to the graduate center and  
3 this is how I am a PhD arriving with statistics and  
4 even teaching statistics to CUNY, John Jay College  
5 and so on. But my concern right now is different.

6 I am retired. I have cancer and the cancer was a  
7 surgery two years ago. I hope that it will go away  
8 but the problem is that I have debt with \$500 because  
9 I didn't give up to the medallion, I said to invest  
10 in this medallion.  
11

12 I was driving all the time and its very  
13 impossible to be paid. When I bought the medallion  
14 in 2006, the city took the money and took the money  
15 for every medallion and we have to pay back the money  
16 to the credit union and so on. The city took the  
17 money, which we pay very hard. A lot of us are not  
18 here because the Committee 3 site because the house  
19 and everything was going to be taken and work taken  
20 by the banks and federal credit union.

21 I am in the same situation; we need debt  
22 forgiveness. \$125,000 is a fair wage and the city  
23 has to help after they took all the money, they have  
24 to help with nothing. \$75 million in 20 years is  
25

1  
2 nothing. They just have to do more. The Mayor said  
3 he is going to help, now is the time to show that.  
4 He got the money from the government from the  
5 federal, from every, now is the moment, I have no  
6 pension, I need a pension. I have help from some  
7 other friends but you cannot stay on your friends.  
8 You have to be by yourself. What is this?

9 I really need your help for the debt forgiveness  
10 especially I am talking about. And I would like to  
11 mention that I am member of Senior Association. I  
12 had to leave -

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 WILLIAM RITZIU: Yeah thank you. I was teaching  
15 senior citizens on the internet, so now you have a  
16 group of senior citizens who maybe know to go to the  
17 internet. I have to thank you very much for your  
18 time and thank you. Bye, bye.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
20 I would like to now welcome Bhair Desnai to testify.  
21 You may begin when you are ready.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 BHAIR DESNAI: Good afternoon. I am Bhair  
24 Desnai, I am the Executive Director of the New York  
25

1  
2 Taxi Workers Alliance. It is our proposal that our  
3 members are testifying about today. The reason that  
4 we are at this joint hearing is because close to 30  
5 percent of the driver's who filled out our form for  
6 debt forgiveness are over the age of 62. The debt  
7 forgiveness, the Yellow Cab owner drivers are  
8 fighting for is an immigrant senior issue. 93  
9 percent of them have an active loan. On average,  
10 they are paying close to \$3,000 a month. Over 64  
11 percent of them are driving alone, meanwhile close to  
12 30 percent of them either have had COVID and were in  
13 the hospital or have been living with a family member  
14 or a roommate with COVID.

15 The story of the debt forgiveness in this  
16 industry is a tragic tale of utter corruption. While  
17 the owner drivers have a financial bankruptcy, the  
18 city has a moral bankruptcy that it needs to answer  
19 to. Our proposal is simple, bring down all the debts  
20 to \$125,000. Refinance at no more than \$757 a month.  
21 The city can backstop all of those loans. The city  
22 will only have a cost to pay. If that loan is  
23 delinquent and nobody buys the medallion when it is  
24 resold at a higher rate than the balance of that loan

1  
2 at that time. The Comptroller has reviewed our  
3 proposal, so has the Attorney General. It is  
4 financially sound. We are so heartened to hear that  
5 you know Councilman Menchaca say that both Council  
6 Members Menchaca and Chin are on the Budget  
7 Negotiations Committee.

8 The Mayor has said that if the money comes in  
9 through the stimulus, you know, he is willing to  
10 address this issue. We cannot wait. There are  
11 already so many bankruptcies and foreclosures. Our  
12 senior members have lost their retirement. They have  
13 been working under sheer poverty. At this point,  
14 what you can do is free them from a life imprisonment  
15 of debt. It is simple for a city of \$90 billion a  
16 year budget, even with a \$5 billion deficit, which we  
17 know is going to be addressed with the stimulus  
18 funds.

19 Our proposal is only \$75 million over 20 years  
20 for a workforce that has collected almost \$2 billion  
21 in taxes and fees to the City of New York and to the  
22 MTA. This city owes gratitude to the men and women  
23 who have served close to 500,000 people every single  
24 day. We can get this done. Council Members -

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

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2 BHAIR DESNAI: Delay is going to lead to utter  
3 devastation. Please, push for the plan right now.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
5 I would like to now circle back to see if we can get  
6 the two individuals who were unable to – on the panel  
7 before. Richard Chowl, you may begin when you are  
8 ready.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, still having technical  
11 difficulties. Jana Stroe?

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 JANA STROE: Hello, can you hear me now?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you. Can  
15 you speak louder.

16 JANA STROE: Yeah, I am trying to. [INAUDIBLE  
17 3:22:06-3:22:28].

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I am sorry, unfortunately we  
19 are having difficulty hearing you. Your audio  
20 doesn't seem to be coming through. We will circle  
21 back after the next panel to see if you can get back  
22 on. I am going to turn it to Chair Menchaca and  
23 Chair Chin for any questions.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I do not have any  
25 questions and really a recommitment to sitting down

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1  
2 and getting a sense of it. I think we have Bhair who  
3 spoke as well and I want to sit down with you and I  
4 think to just a continued focus on our elder  
5 immigrants in New York City who are working, who are  
6 continuing to work, who need services. That is what  
7 this hearing is all about. And so, I am committing  
8 to ensure that we leave this hearing with a sense of  
9 plan and a sense of the gap, so that we can fill  
10 them. Part of it is going to be budget and the other  
11 part is going to be policy. Thank you.

12 Oh, and I want to say thank you to Nick, the  
13 Director at MOIA who is still here today and just  
14 thank you so much for being present the way that you  
15 are. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Chair Chin,  
17 any questions?

18 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: No, I just wanted to thank  
19 this panel. It is just heartbreaking and I am along  
20 with Council Member Menchaca, we will do everything  
21 we can to really bring some justice to these issues  
22 for the taxi workers. And then we have to work with  
23 the Mayor to get it done and if it's a solid plan, if  
24 there is a solution there, then let's work and get it  
25 done.



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So, you have my commitment on that and I just wanted to make sure that the taxi drivers also know that there are resources out there. Whether it is a Get Food program, whether it is the Care program for health insurance and I am sure that the Taxi Worker Alliance is helping you and we just want to make sure that whatever resources are available, that you are able to access that while we work on this solution of the you know the debt bailout program.

So, thank you again. Maybe for Jana, is there a phone number that maybe she can call in, so that we can hear her testimony if the video is having problem? Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. As a reminder for anyone who is unable to testify today, uhm, please submit written testimony at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) and we will be including it for the record.

We are going to move onto our next panel. In order I will be calling on Joseph JA Joute, Mostapha Alabsy followed by Gerson Fernandes followed by Basia Osowski followed by Dorothy Leconte. Joseph JA Joute, you may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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JOSEPH JA JOUTE: Yes, good afternoon everybody.  
My name is Joseph JA Joute. I am a Member of the New York City Taxi Worker Alliance. I am 64-years-old and I am a resident of Canarsie Brooklyn. I am an immigrant here Haiti. In 1977 at the age of 21 years old. I bought my medallion in 1988 and for over 20 years I drive working long hours and making this a living.  
That all changed when the city let Uber and Lyft come in and take the market from us. I am now almost a half a million dollars in debt. I come to this country to make a better life and working hard to make a better life. Working hard I was able to buy a house but now, we have to get debt forgiveness. Now, that could be taken away from me and my family.  
They have stolen my retirement. I suffer high blood pressure and no longer work the long hours I used to do to pay all this debt. The government allowed this to happen. Uber has made \$1 million but we now owe the bank. The city must do something for the minority people like us the taxi drivers. I think I love the City of New York. I come in here when I was a young boy and never moved from Brooklyn

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1  
2 and what we need now is a debt forgiveness. It is  
3 the only way we can survive.

4 I think now the good Mayor, the good City of New  
5 York City, please turn your head down. Sit down and  
6 look at the poor immigrant people like me and  
7 thousands of us. I think enough is enough Mr. Mayor.  
8 Enough is enough. That's why we are looking for -  
9 please the Council open your heart to look after the  
10 poor people like we immigrants. All our blood is in  
11 the City of New York City. We drive like a slave to  
12 get a better life. That's what happened to us.

13 Now, I think we got the power to do the good  
14 thing for our senior citizens. I would like to say  
15 thank you to everybody who share this commitment.  
16 Please, please again, do something. Do something  
17 again. Please again. Thank you and God bless the  
18 City of New York and God bless America. Thanks  
19 again. Bye, bye.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
21 I would like to now welcome Mostapha Alabsy to  
22 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 MOSTAPHA ALABSY: Good afternoon, do you hear me?

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes.

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MOSTAPHA ALABSY: Do you hear me?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

MOSTAPHA ALABSY: Yes, debt forgiveness is my hope instead of suicide. I am Mostapha Alabsy 68-years-old, started driving New York City Yellow medallion taxi in 1996. I loved it very much and I thought it is the very good destiny for excellent and secure retirement. So, in 2008, I decided to purchase my Yellow Taxi Medallion for about over \$600,000. I was fully confident and I thought it was a very secure regulated and protected business by the City of New York City for all that is to retire taxi business.

At the beginning, it was good. I worked hard, long hours to fulfill my two monthly payment responsibility. In 2014, because I worked hard, long hours, I ended in the hospitals. I had two major heart open surgeries. I went back to work. At the beginning of 2015 to catch up with my late payment obligation but I found the taxi business declined by having competitions from other less expensive sectors.

1  
2 The app companies who were allowed to work by the  
3 City for free. Again, in 2017, I ended in the  
4 hospitals have stress, high blood pressure,  
5 cholesterol which add more illness to my health. At  
6 this age, it is hard to work comfortably in this  
7 state of health at this age. And the present my taxi  
8 medallion worth less. My business I bought just from  
9 the city went free to other competitors sectors. I  
10 cannot make good living. I cannot make the  
11 medallions monthly loans payment. So, the lenders  
12 will take my house. My fear at this end I will be  
13 homeless. God forbid, I would like to ask the City  
14 Mayor, the other city officials, all Senators,  
15 congressmen and congresswoman's who feel our men to  
16 fulfill their promises to act now and include us in  
17 the coming stimulus bills and work with our WTA union  
18 for the debt forgiveness now as it was by our TWA  
19 \$125,000 and cap the monthly payment and makes the  
20 lengths longer for the loan because the Yellow  
21 Medallion -

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

23 MOSTAPHA ALABSY: Is not going to be as it was  
24 because of the COVID-19 is not over yet and the  
25 business is not going to be as it was ever. Thank

1  
2 you very much and work with our union. Thank you  
3 everybody and bye, bye.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
5 I would like to now welcome Gerson Fernandes to  
6 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 GERSON FERNANDES: Hello, can you hear me?

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

10 GERSON FERNANDES: You can hear me, okay. Good  
11 afternoon. Thank you for giving me a chance to  
12 testify. My name is Gerson Fernandes, I am 67-years-  
13 old. I am a Yellow Taxi driver owner. I started  
14 driving in 1999. I bought my medallion in 2003. I  
15 made my payments on time from 2003 till March 2020.

16 In those days, the taxi industry was a good job.  
17 When you could make a decent living and you could  
18 take care of your business and family. We were about  
19 13,500 yellow cabs and we could make money with the  
20 customers we had. Later in 2014 or 2015, the city  
21 allowed Uber, Lyft, via and the app companies to  
22 infiltrate the taxi market.

23 In course of time, the Black cars, Uber and Lyft  
24 via etc., totaled 100,000 cars. The taxi industry is

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1 completely disrupted. The Yellow Taxi owner drivers  
2 find it difficult to pay our bills. Mortgage or the  
3 taxi medallion, taxi insurance, credit card, day to  
4 day expense etc., etc.. All these bills pile up and  
5 no money to earn. Please try to help us out now.  
6 Make up for the past mistake of letting in the app  
7 companies, Uber, Lyft, via etc., who dismantled the  
8 taxi industry.  
9

10 There is a solution to this. I belong to the New  
11 York Taxi Workers Alliance, our leader Ms. Bhairavi  
12 Desai, has a very good and practical proposal for the  
13 city to follow. This proposal helps the city and the  
14 yellow taxi owner drivers. All the loans are brought  
15 down to \$125,000 for all owner drivers over a period  
16 of 20 years and a monthly payment of \$757 a month.  
17 Which is practical to pay.

18 Please get our union leader to the bargaining  
19 table and please discuss with her. This is the only  
20 way we can get back on our feet and the iconic yellow  
21 taxi is back where it belongs. Please, please help  
22 me and all the owner drivers. Imagine, I am still  
23 working at 67 and I love it. Please get -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.  
25

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1  
2 GERSON FERNANDES: Please get the yellow taxi  
3 industry back to its feet so that we can make our  
4 living and pay our bills on time. Thank you very  
5 much for giving me the time and listening to my  
6 witness. God bless and have a good day.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your  
8 testimony. I would like to now welcome Basia Osowski  
9 to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 BASIA OSOWSKI: Hello, can you hear me?

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we can hear you.

13 BASIA OSOWSKI: You can hear me. Good afternoon.  
14 I just would like to emphasize that we are in the  
15 predicament today because of the corruption on the  
16 top of the government of New York.

17 In 1937 our grandfathers got taxi alliance to  
18 allow the immigrants to build their retirement, their  
19 children's future and unfortunately we were wrapped a  
20 few years ago by the City of New York. I am a taxi  
21 driver for close to 40 years. I was proud owner till  
22 last year of yellow taxi medallion. Unfortunately, I  
23 am losing everything. Now I am facing almost losing  
24 my house because of the predatory loans and the whole  
25



1  
2 nine yards while the city and the lenders worked to  
3 get it up.

4 So, please help us somehow to have the right  
5 retirement. Yes, once upon a time I was young but I  
6 was thinking about my senior years and I believe I do  
7 deserve this, which I don't have to struggle. I  
8 never asked the city for help but now because they  
9 robbed us, they are obligated to all individual taxi  
10 owners, medallion help.

11 Really, I am speechless. So many guys are  
12 already suicide. You know day to day we are thinking  
13 who next because we cannot take the pressure. This  
14 is totally unfair.

15 So, I would like to talk about this subject for a  
16 long time but I know the time is limited. So, I will  
17 just emphasize again, make people responsible who  
18 made the robbery in the daylight. Thank you very  
19 much.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your  
21 testimony. I would like to now welcome Dorothy  
22 Leconte to testify. You may begin when you are  
23 ready.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

25 DOROTHY LECONTE: Hello. Hello?

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THE COMMITTEE ON AGING

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We can hear you. Go ahead.

DOROTHY LECONTE: Yeah, so good afternoon. My name is Dorothy Leconte and I have been a taxi driver for 34 years. Uhm, while I do not want to repeat myself like everybody else. You heard all the guys and the ladies talking about our retirement. All ages, we all work very hard like they said, I work very hard. I did not expect right now for me to be in that situation where we are wondering the next day or the next month, are we going to survive?

As you know with the COVID, when the gentleman said, I used to work and pay my mortgage. No retirement or no late fees. My mortgage being taken away from the broker every week. I used to pay my mortgage breaking down weekly. Weekly payment goes normally until March 2020 the COVID come out.

As a matter of fact, I do love somebody very close to me which is the father of my son. The first week of COVID, the gentleman passed away with COVID disease. So, leave my son devastated. He is very stressed out. He can't continue going to school because one father one son. He cannot believe his father died with COVID and I also got the bugging in

1  
2 my back because I have no money to support my son.  
3 He has to quit school to go working and get a \$16 an  
4 hour where I was putting my money towards his  
5 education.

6 Right now, we are in the situation where even  
7 though I have the problems, I have problems myself  
8 but I have been hearing other friends who is even  
9 worse than me. People have heart disease, people got  
10 heart open surgery. People got a lot of problems at  
11 home and they are calling me day and night. Dorothy,  
12 what are we going to do?

13 I had a conversation with the Mayor on Friday. I  
14 did ask him this question. When is he going to help  
15 us out? Because he's been promising many times I met  
16 Mayor de Blasio, he promised I would be able to save  
17 for retirement. He will save our retirement but he  
18 still doesn't do anything. Right now, he said the  
19 last time he didn't have money but now I know we are  
20 going to have some money from the stimulus. We,  
21 Department of the Small Business, they are the one  
22 who put us in this trouble. They have to help us  
23 out.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
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DOROTHY LECONTE: They do need to help us out.  
So, I am begging you, please talk to the Mayor. Let  
everything go on the table because our project 125,  
\$750 a month, it could cover the medallion and we  
could have our life back together. Please, thank  
you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
I would like to ask if Council Members Menchaca and  
Chin have any questions.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I just want to say thank  
you again for your testimony. Each of you have your  
own story that needs to be heard and I am going to go  
back. The invisible nature of our elder immigrant  
workers has to stop and that's what this hearing is  
about. So, thank you so much and I look forward to  
hearing more.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Chair Chin?

CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I also wanted to just thank  
the panel and thank you for telling your story. And  
I think you can count on us to really advocate for  
you because when you are telling our immigrant  
stories and what happened is very, very bad and  
unfortunate and we cannot let this tragedy to

1  
2 continue. So, we are going to work together and  
3 really work on the solution.

4 So, hang in there okay and continue you advocacy.  
5 Don't give up, thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair and I would  
7 like to thank this panel for their testimony. We  
8 will now be moving on to our next panel.

9 In order, I will be calling on Harbans Singh  
10 followed by Vito Lanza followed by Ajit Bharth  
11 followed by Ricardo Lopez. Harbans Singh, you may  
12 begin when you are ready.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 HARBANS SINGH: This is Harbans Singh. Hello?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, we can hear you. You can  
16 go ahead.

17 HARBANS SINGH: This is Harbans Singh. Good  
18 afternoon everybody. I bought my medallion in 1987  
19 and it's like a 32 year, 33 year and I am a taxi  
20 driver all the time and now after the Uber came in  
21 and the Lyft came in, the apps company at 2014, I am  
22 stuck with the debt.

23 So, I hope people can help us, all the taxi  
24 drivers. I am from the Alliance Union Taxi Workers

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1  
2 and I am badly stuck. I am 71-years-old, I lost all  
3 of my retirement. Please help us. Thank you very  
4 much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your  
6 testimony. I would like to now welcome Vito Lanza to  
7 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I believe we are having  
10 technical difficulties, so I will move onto our next  
11 panelist and we will circle back. I would like to  
12 now welcome Ajit Bharth to testify. You may begin  
13 when you are ready.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 AJIT BHARTH: Hello? Hello?

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi, we can hear you.

17 AJIT BHARTH: Can you hear me?

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

19 AJIT BHARTH: Hello, yeah, this here is Ajit  
20 Bharth. I am like 67-year-old and looking for  
21 retirement benefits. This is not father could you  
22 know. This the for the rest of the home. We give a  
23 lot of money every month to the city as it empty  
24 attacks improvement to search congestion price. But  
25

1  
2 now, I am out of pocket. It is very hard to put the  
3 food on the table every day. So, please everyone  
4 need to help. You know our lenders phone, make the  
5 phone call. We can't oblige them. It is very hard,  
6 impossible to do it. Let's talk to my son can talk  
7 with you.

8 AJIT BHARTHS SON: I am just representing my dad.  
9 So, essentially what he is trying to say is that he  
10 is 67-years-old. He has worked for the city for 20  
11 years, probably serviced at least 120,000 New Yorkers  
12 and if you think about it, for years he has been  
13 paying the MTA tax, the congestion tax, the  
14 improvement surcharge and per ride, that could be  
15 anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of the actual income  
16 that he was making. Which is ridiculous when you  
17 think about it in the context of what percentage of  
18 income do corporations make? Amazon or even small  
19 businesses. This small business was squeezed from  
20 both the city and obviously from competition from  
21 Uber and these are 65, 70-year-old people with  
22 \$400,000 in debt. And trying to think about how to  
23 live the last like decades of their life through  
24 debt.

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If you think about it, you also have a responsibility as a city to make sure that all the income that these people provided through physical labor to the city, any other job you would be investing that money in a 401K. It would be appreciated. It would be a path for a white collar individual to retire and what we are imploring City Hall to do, is to think about the working class. To think about the promises that were made in the early 2010's.

Why people ended up taking exuberant loans because they had the comfort of you know, this is a million dollar asset. And then, allow rampant competition from Uber, which other cities in the world did not do. You know, London protected it tax drivers. New York City did not.

So, it's not just free markets at that point, it's more about what are doing as a city to treat our working class and contextualizing that from a tax retrospective and saying, they paid the city for two decades, three decades, what is the city going to do to have their back at this point?

Is there anything else you want to say?



1  
2 AJIT BHARTH: [SPEAKING IN OTHER LANGUAGE  
3 3:50:22-3:50:28].

4 AJIT BHARTH'S SON: Yeah, and as you can see, he  
5 was a bit emotional because one of the unspoken  
6 aspects of this entire situation is the anxiety it  
7 induces. For anyone that has been consistently  
8 working 10 hours a day for decades and still not have  
9 the financial security to retire comfortably and  
10 having lenders threaten bankruptcy and thinking about  
11 what does that mean for their financial future if  
12 they have to defer to bankruptcy.

13 So, again, there has been - like, all of that is  
14 the underlying foundation for why there are so many  
15 taxi driver suicides over the past couple of years.  
16 And this is one, a financial obligation I think the  
17 city has towards its working class.

18 Two, mental health obligation that the city has  
19 towards this working class.

20 So, that's all essentially we have to say. Thank  
21 you for your time and I really hope that the City of  
22 New York who prides itself in being a working class  
23 city and being represented by a multicultural  
24 community where 70 percent of New Yorkers are non-

1  
2 White, we actually put our money where our mouth is  
3 and actually help people with diverse backgrounds.  
4 As opposed to just the corporations that I work for,  
5 I benefit from.

6 But to see my father struggling in his old age, I  
7 cannot imagine the outrage I would have at the city  
8 if the city treated me like that. And there is not a  
9 level of entitlement that the older generation has  
10 that the younger generation definitely has and that  
11 does not mean that we would exploit the older  
12 generation. It should mean that we actually like  
13 step up to the plate and help them in their time of  
14 need.

15 So, thank you for that. I appreciate it. You  
16 guys can take the mic back.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your  
18 testimony. I would like to now welcome Ricardo Lopez  
19 to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 RICARDO LOPEZ: Oh, hi, I am Ricardo Lopez, I am  
22 69-years-old. I came from Columbia with my wife. I  
23 got married in 1973. Excuse me, and I thank everyone  
24 of you for listening to all of us, okay. Thank you,  
25

1  
2 thank you for listening to all of us. We really  
3 appreciate it.

4 I went to Law School in Columbia. I came here  
5 but not thinking that I was going to stay. I liked  
6 it so much and I stayed here. So, I bought my taxi  
7 in 1980 and I have been driving 41 years so far. I  
8 went through colon cancer also and it is amazing how  
9 the economy is going with all of us. We are  
10 literally, literally going out of bankruptcy. I am  
11 probably next in line to commit suicide and it might  
12 be in front of de Blasio's office.

13 I don't know, I have no idea yet because the  
14 thing is that it is so hard to make money these days.  
15 That everything is closed. All the hotels are gone.  
16 Most of the major hotels are gone. Most of the  
17 businesses in New York City are also closed, the  
18 restaurants, everything. Nobody is taking Yellow  
19 Cabs anymore. I worked, even though I am still  
20 working because I want to keep on supporting my  
21 family. Paying everything at home and all I am  
22 making is \$120 a day, \$120. I don't know where we  
23 are going to go with this without the - what do you  
24 call it? The help from the de Blasio and everyone,  
25 these official people that are out there.

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2 We are right now heading and closing the Brooklyn  
3 Bridge. I have no idea what is closed I believe and  
4 uh, and uh, I am trying to tell you that please help  
5 us. Help us to get this debt forgiveness, please.  
6 To come down to \$125,000. I owe almost \$500,000. I  
7 don't know how I am going to be paying these people  
8 the monies that I owe.

9 I really, really, really - help us please.  
10 Please help us because I don't know where else to go.  
11 I have no idea. I have been working 41 years. I  
12 went through cancer and uh, my leg is gone already my  
13 left leg because I have been sitting 41 years in my  
14 cab. My back, it's all crooked because of it too. I  
15 used to sit 85 hours a week. Now, I am sitting only  
16 75 hours a week. So, I don't know what else to do.

17 I want you to please help us otherwise we are  
18 going to go out of business soon. Thank you, thank  
19 you very much to all of you, appreciate it.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
21 Uhm, I am going to turn it back to Vito Lanza to see  
22 if we were able to get him back on.

23 VITO LANZA: Hello, hi, my name is Vito Lanza. I  
24 have been serving New Yorkers for 43 years as a

25

1 medallion taxi driver and own my own medallion. I  
2 am 65-years-old. I can't afford to retire due to  
3 scam and discrimination. I don't have any debt. My  
4 medallion is my only asset in life. I never borrowed  
5 on it to buy any property and I don't have any  
6 savings or pension. Recently, I was in Mount Sinai  
7 Beth Israel hospital for 19 days with COVID-19  
8 pneumonia. 17 of those days I was on oxygen to help  
9 me breathe. My lungs may never fully recover. I am  
10 still sick and have problems breathing. It would be  
11 inhumane for me to work 12 hours a day, 60 hours or  
12 more a week at my age and condition to make a living  
13 driving a taxi.

14  
15 The TLC was auctioning medallions for over \$1  
16 million. Then the TLC allowed the 100,000 app  
17 services to come in for free and destroy the value of  
18 the medallion which they were selling for over \$1  
19 million. They gave basically these app services \$100  
20 million for nothing and I am sure there was a lot of  
21 bribery and corruption involved.

22 I don't own a house, who am I supposed to suffer  
23 by everyone wanting to destroy the value of the  
24 medallion which the TLC was selling for \$1 million.

1  
2 The value of the medallion was my retirement. When  
3 they destroyed the value of the medallion, I don't  
4 have anything else. A lot of drivers, they buy  
5 houses for \$500,000 and you know, if they wanted to  
6 pay off their debt, they could just sell their  
7 houses. I don't have a house. I don't have  
8 anything. I just have the value of the medallion  
9 which the TLC wasn't saying was over inflated when  
10 they were selling it for \$100,000.

11 Uber wasn't saying it was over inflated, when  
12 they came in, there was a sign on Van Dam Street  
13 guaranteeing drivers \$10,000 a month. That Uber gets  
14 \$3,500 a month by getting 35 percent. That's \$13,500  
15 guaranteed. Does that sound like an over inflated  
16 price? I have a broker friend Neil Grenbound[SP?].  
17 He was able to rent taxi's per shit, \$750 a week.  
18 That's \$6,000 a month. Look at the money it was  
19 generating. When somebody would get out of a taxi,  
20 somebody was waiting to get in.

21 Basically, the City, Uber and these officials  
22 created this conspiracy scam to rob me of a medallion  
23 that they were selling over \$1 million and I want  
24 compensation for it because I don't want to be  
25

1  
2 punished that I paid off my medallion and everyone  
3 wants to make it worthless now.

4 And yeah, you know, anyway thank you. And anyway  
5 senior citizens like me -

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 VITO LANZA: Shouldn't have to - okay.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
9 I am going to now turn it to the Chairs for  
10 questions. Chair Menchaca?

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Harbani. Yet  
12 again, I want to say thank you to everyone who  
13 testified today. And [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 3:59:34-  
14 4:00:09]. Okay, so [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 4:00:10-  
15 4:00:20].

16 CHAIRPERSON CHIN: I just also want to thank the  
17 panel for your stories and I remember you know as the  
18 last speaker was saying that yeah, medallion was over  
19 \$1 million way back and I remember hearing during the  
20 Bloomberg Administration, they were selling  
21 medallions to cover the city deficit.

22 So, I think you know the city needs to really  
23 step up and try to solve this problem and help the  
24 taxi workers who have contributed so much to the  
25 economy as a city. So, we are going to work on this

1  
2 and Mr. Lopez and all the people who testified, I  
3 just hope that you stay in there. Stay healthy, stay  
4 strong and continue to advocate to make sure justice  
5 is done. Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member  
7 Chin. I am going to now just ask – this concludes  
8 our panels for today. I just want to ask if we  
9 inadvertently missed anyone that has registered to  
10 testify today and has yet to be called, please use  
11 the Zoom raise hand function now and you will be  
12 called on in the order that your hand has been  
13 raised.

14 Seeing no hands, I am going to turn it back to  
15 the Chairs for closing remarks. Chair Menchaca.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Today was not an easy  
17 hearing. We heard about a community, our aging elder  
18 immigrant population and every testimony was  
19 connected to an incredible experience that our local  
20 on the ground services providers that are asking for  
21 help from our city agencies. And I know that we are  
22 doing our best to the city but it is just not enough  
23 right now. And we have a big role in the City  
24 Council to play the role of advocacy and connection  
25 to the ground and we heard from so many of you.



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Whether you are a taxi medallion owner and a senior and have a family and so much was seen today when your family, your kids were here to testify with you. This is a family issue. This is not a medallion issue; this is about homes and lives. And so, if the city government cannot wield it's own power to support an immigrant that is an indigenous speaking immigrant who is in a line in Mixteca or a medallion worker who is an elder, then I don't know what.

And that's what we have to do and we have the power to do that and so, I stand with our Chair Chin and the work and the roles that we have in the City Council to ensure that we shift our focus. To ensure that those that have felt invisible, no longer feel invisible and that they get what they have earned.

This is what the city has been about, our immigrants and as they age in the city, it is them who we need to take care of, our elders. That's how I was brought up and I think that that is something that is well understood and known in our city. We just have to summon that power and courage to make that happen.

1  
2       And so, the last thing I want to say is thank you  
3 to MOIA. I see Nick here. Thank you so much for  
4 being here. This is what government is. We have to  
5 sit and listen. That is the first step to making  
6 policy that is of the people. And so, I want to say  
7 thank you to you and your team for being here and we  
8 need to follow up on that data. If we cannot measure  
9 the things that we want to impact, we are not going  
10 to ever impact it. And I am so thankful that the  
11 Commissioner Cortes-Vazquez really heard that and we  
12 want to follow up to ensure that not just the  
13 vaccinations that are immediate to people's minds but  
14 that everything, as we come out of COVID, has a  
15 special understanding of our elders, our immigrant  
16 elders, our New Yorkers.

17       Thank you Chair Chin. It is always a pleasure to  
18 do this work with you.

19       CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you Chair Menchaca. We  
20 have a lot of work to do. New York City is an  
21 immigrant city and you know a lot of us came here  
22 looking for the American dream and for a lot of the  
23 older immigrants, that's how they started. They want  
24 a better life for their children.

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And for a lot of the younger generation, we have benefited from our parents hard work and now that they are you know, in the age that they should be enjoying themselves and you know, retirement and you hear stories of people suffering and stressing out because you know they have all these worries and they are not getting the services and support that they need. And that's why we have to continue to make sure that they are taken care of. That our elders are taken care of and that's a tradition that we grew up with.

And so, we will work very hard to make sure that you get the support and I want to thank all of you who testified today. Share your story and we are just going to have to work together and work hard to make sure that justice is done and that our immigrant elders are being heard and that you are not invisible.

So, I also want to thank all the staff who helped put together the hearing and all the Sergeants who help us run these virtual remote hearings and we will continue to work together. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And with that, we will  
close this hearing and follow up as we commit. Thank  
you so much. [GAVEL].

CHAIRPERSON CHIN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Okay, we have ended the  
livestream. Thank you everyone.

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date February 28, 2021