



**New York City Council
Committee on the Whole**

**Oversight - Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to
Migrants**

**Testimony from the New York Immigration Coalition
December 20, 2022**

Good afternoon. My name is Theodore Moore and I'm the Vice President of Policy & Programs at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving member organizations. Thank you to Speaker Adams and Deputy Speaker Ayala and the members of the City Council for convening this important hearing and allowing us the opportunity to testify.

New York is facing a pivotal moment in its long history of welcoming newcomers. Since May we have all been responding to the humanitarian crisis with the sudden arrival of more than 30,000 immigrants to our city. This crisis is caused by both our broken immigration system and Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott using human beings as political pawns by bussing individuals and families by the hundreds directly to NYC. While we have seen a slowing down of individuals arriving since it hit its peak in the late summer with the potential ending of the Trump-era Title 42 policy we expect there to be an increase of new arrivals again.

Since the first bus sent directly to the Port Authority arrived early in the morning on Sunday, August 7th the NYIC, along with many of our member and partner organizations have been in non-stop rapid response mode both at the Port Authority and in communities throughout the city. This has been necessary to meet the immediate, medium, and long-term needs of these asylum seekers. Our already overcommitted and underfunded organizations have met the moment in a way that sends a message to the rest of the country and world that New York City is and will continue to be a Welcoming City. Unfortunately I can't say that we've seen the same level of response from government. We have to acknowledge the fact that our city government was late to respond to this crisis and continues to be reactionary and often has devised solutions that range from



inadequate and ineffective to downright harmful. The response from the State has been even slower and the Federal government has been virtually non-existent.

This moment continues to call for a robust, coordinated response from the Federal level down to the local level - one that will meet basic needs, but that will also help rebuild the welcoming system for asylum-seekers and refugees gutted during the Trump Administration. For that very reason the NYIC created the [Welcoming New York Campaign](#). It is an effort to ensure that every asylum seeker who makes it to New York has the services, shelter, and care that they need to not only survive but thrive - and that we use this opportunity to demonstrate to the rest of the country that welcoming immigrants helps strengthen New York.

We must acknowledge the administration for their commitment to providing additional funds for legal services and for schools with large populations of recent arrival asylum seekers. Also the expansion of housing voucher eligibility along with the plan to build hundreds of thousands of new homes will go a long way to solving both short-term and long-term housing crises. However there is still a lot that can be done. To start we can:

- Expedite funding for legal and wrap-around services, with funding amount and focus determined in partnership with community based organizations
- Drastically expand resources for care coordination and sustained case management, especially with community-based organizations providing these services
- Increase funding for Access Health and other programs run by community based organizations to provide financially, culturally, and linguistically accessible healthcare for all people, regardless of immigration and/or employment status
- Remove any barriers to shelter, transitional, and long-term affordable housing that are due to immigration status

Unfortunately none of these things can be accomplished by choosing budget austerity over meeting the needs of all New Yorkers. We understand the need to be responsible and prudent but we have an opportunity to help New York respond in a way that provides a path forward - not just for the City, but for the country as a whole. In order to meet the overwhelming and unmet needs of asylum seekers to New York we must act swiftly and strategically. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with you all.



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Testimony of Sarah Stefanski
Assistant Director, New York City Independent Budget Office
To the New York City Council Committee of the Whole
Regarding the City's Response to Asylum Seekers
December 20, 2022

Good afternoon, members of the City Council Committee of the Whole. I am Sarah Stefanski, an assistant director at the New York City Independent Budget Office. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of today's hearing. My testimony will focus on some of the budget implications of the recent influx of asylum seekers to the city.¹ This ties both to questions on the city's ability to adequately fund and deliver services, but also to the city's fiscal condition, as expenses associated with asylum seekers at the present scale were not anticipated when the city adopted its budget this past June. IBO's testimony draws on [our analysis](#) of the costs to provide services to asylum seekers published in early November and our [Fiscal Outlook](#) report released yesterday.

Per-Household Costs of Providing Services. The total cost of city services provided to the newly arrived asylum seekers is difficult to estimate with certainty as the number of people arriving, and remaining in the city, continues to evolve. Because of this, IBO has estimated the annual per-household cost of the various services. This allows stakeholders to update cost estimates as the situation unfolds. Our total per-household estimate ranges from about \$2,000 for an individual who does not enter the city's shelter system and receives some basic health and legal services, to nearly \$93,000 for a family of four who enters a shelter for one year, has two children enrolled in the city's public schools, and receives some basic health care and legal services.

The largest portion of this per-household cost is shelter. Based on the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) average daily cost of providing shelter in fiscal year 2022, IBO estimates that the annual shelter cost per household to be around \$50,000 for an individual, \$69,000 for a family with minor children, and \$63,000 for a family of related adults. This incorporates not only expenses associated with housing, but also meals, security, and case management costs. IBO's shelter estimates encompass all types of asylum seeker shelter stays—whether at a DHS-run facility or at a Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Center (HERRCs)—as we expect the costs of associated stays at the city's current hotel-based HERRCs to be similar to DHS shelter costs. Our per-household shelter estimates do not include, however, the costs associated with the construction, relocation, and demobilization of the temporary structure at Orchard Beach and later Randall's Island as many of these costs have been part of larger contracts and not specifically broken out.

The second largest part of our per-household cost is for public education. IBO estimates that the annual per-pupil costs for students coming from asylum-seeking families totals \$8,240. This includes \$6,240 through the city's Fair Student Funding formula allocation—which accounts for the additional funding the formula provides for English Language Learners. Our per-pupil cost also factors in a special \$2,000 per-pupil allocation that the city's Department of Education (DOE) announced in October for schools that enrolled six or more students who live in temporary housing coming from what the city had identified as asylum-seeking households. Along with these shelter and education costs, IBO also included per-person costs totaling around \$2,000 for basic healthcare and legal assistance costs.

November 2022 Financial Plan. In addition to examining the per-household costs, IBO estimated a related but somewhat different cost in our recent Fiscal Outlook report—the funding that will need to be added to the city's budget to pay for these services this fiscal year and next. In its November Financial Plan, the Adams administration included \$1 billion of unspecified federal funding in this fiscal year, 2023, to reimburse the city for costs associated with asylum seekers. The mayor's budget office has not publicly identified a source for this federal funding. IBO's own analysis finds that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is unlikely to be a large source of funding. Furthermore, border states and other localities have made similar requests for federal aid that remain largely unfulfilled, making the question of federal assistance much larger than just the dollars New York City is seeking.

Additional City Funding Needed for 2023 and 2024. Without a specific federal funding source identified, IBO expects much of the asylum-seeker costs will be borne by the city, and that costs will be incurred this fiscal year and next. For fiscal year 2023, IBO estimates that the city will require an additional \$374 million in city funds. Of this total, \$261 million are for shelter costs, \$50 million for emergency management, \$30 million for information technology, \$23 million for social services, and \$10 million for administrative services. For the shelter portion of this cost, IBO builds off our per-household estimate of shelter costs, taking into account forecast growth in the asylum seeker population, while at the same time accounting for funds already included in the city budget for DHS shelter services this year, which can be used to cover some of the asylum-seeker shelter costs. The non-shelter portion of the 2023 estimate is based on what the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has budgeted with federal dollars for the related agencies in the November Financial Plan. To be clear, these amounts do not reflect the entire cost of providing services, but rather what IBO estimates is needed outside of current agency budgets for the 2023 fiscal year.

The November Plan added no funding (federal or city) for asylum seekers for the next fiscal year. IBO estimates that another \$628 million in city funds will be needed in fiscal year 2024, specifically for shelter costs. IBO's shelter adjustment for 2024 is larger than 2023 for three main reasons: first, we assume asylum seekers will continue to enter the shelter system in the months ahead; second, we assume many asylum seeker households will remain in shelter for at least one year; and lastly, because DHS currently has less budgeted for shelter costs in 2024 than it does 2023.

Costs Not Include in IBO's Estimate of Additional Funds Necessary. OMB's \$1 billion in federal funding for asylum seekers included \$310 million for H+H, the city's public hospital system. IBO does not

anticipate that costs for direct medical care provided through H+H will fall to the city. As a public hospital system, H+H maintains its own budget, separate from that of the city. For now, we assume that all health costs for asylum seekers will be borne by H+H, rather than the city.

Lastly, the November Plan did not include any asylum-seeker federal aid for DOE. IBO assumes the DOE will use funding from elsewhere in its existing budget to cover costs associated with educating children from the families of asylum seekers through its mid-year adjustment process.

As the total number of asylum seekers who will ultimately arrive in the city is difficult to predict, IBO's estimates are just that, our best projections given available data. We will continue to closely monitor and report on the expected costs.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ For the purposes of this testimony, IBO refers to the newly arrived individuals and families as asylum seekers. Neither IBO, nor the city, know the immigration status of all the newly arrived individuals and they have been often interchangeably referred to as migrants and asylum seekers. While we use the term asylum seeker, this is not meant to denote a specific known legal status. For a more technical and legal explanation of the terms "asylum seeker," "migrant," and "refugee," see [UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms](#).



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
DECEMBER 20, 2022

Good Morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Speaker Adams and all members of the City Council for holding this incredibly important hearing.

Since the influx of asylum seekers to New York City earlier this year and presently, we have had time to look back and reflect on the City's response in welcoming our newest New Yorkers. As the city transitions to focusing on the development and implementation of permanent, long-term solutions for our new neighbors, it is integral that there remains a framework of a culturally and linguistically-sensitive rapid response in the event of additional influxes of migrants. Our city has welcomed over 30,000 migrants, and it is estimated that over 20,000 remain in the city.¹ I commend the administration for working under immense pressure and strain to support the asylum seekers given the circumstances. As with every unprecedented event, there are lessons to be learned on all fronts, and it is my hope that moving forward, we build out a sustainable infrastructure and ecosystem that affirms the abilities to seek shelter, safety, and belonging in New York City.

Prior to the state of emergency declared in October and after, my office and I were on the ground to see for ourselves what the situation was like in multiple asylum seeker-serving sites. I made visits to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing Intake Center, a shelter in Hollis, Queens that has been housing migrants, and the Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center. These visits underscored the vital importance of a fluid rapid response strategy. Upon arrival, one of the biggest priorities and challenges for asylum seekers is finding immediate shelter for them and their families, especially if they have children. They have spent days, weeks, and months traveling by foot in treacherous terrain like the Darien Gap, and finally having a space to rest and heal is of utmost importance.

One of the temporary solutions that was implemented to address this need was the Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs), which are one of the first touch points for asylum seekers when they arrive. With the initial news of the Orchard Beach HERRC, I shared concerns like many about environmental flooding, incoming cold weather, and shelter arrangements, and plans for that HERRC were scrapped, only to pivot to a similar environment at Randall's Island. That HERRC did not last very long and is no longer in operation after less

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/17/us/new-york-city-migrant-crisis-federal-support/index.html>



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than a month.² The newest HERRCs are housed in hotels, which are a setting improvement given their proximity to public transit and their indoor nature as temperatures are rapidly dropping.

HERRCs have always been meant to be temporary placements for new arrivals; the city also allows flexibility in migrants' stay at the HERRC if they do not find immediate housing.³ That being said, the NYC shelter system is severely strained, and has been for years, with over 60,000 people currently in shelters.⁴ This is a situation the City has found itself in due to a lack of financial and housing resources to aid New Yorkers who have been languishing in the shelter system for months and years in their transition to permanent housing. In the past, I have called for changes to programs such as CityFHEPs vouchers, and the City is taking steps in the right direction with the recent CityFHEPs eligibility expansion and commitments to affordable and supportive housing.⁵ I intend on keeping the administration to their promises.

Moreover, by providing pathways to permanent housing, there is greater space in our shelters and greater capacity to meet the needs of all who reside there. This includes a plethora of resources to deploy, and one I wish to particularly highlight is mental health resources. Very recently, we have heard the news of another death in the shelter system, the second migrant that has taken their own life. Asylum seekers' journeys to get to this country and city are often traumatic, and the trauma can continue to manifest even as they find shelter and resources in our city. I urge the City to focus on this intentional and compassionate care for individuals' wellbeing, and that extends to everyone in the shelter system. To be unhoused and face such instability is traumatic in and of itself, and we must ensure that adequate mental health resources are readily available to all those who could benefit.

Another major concern of mine is the migrant children that have mostly accompanied their family members in this journey to New York City. For school-aged children, the City has done well in helping them get enrolled into schools. Upon enrollment, there are so many factors to consider in providing adequate support for the child, such as language access, mental health resources, and nutritious meals. Granted, this applies to all students in the Department of Education system, but in particular, these migrant children have gone through experiences that

² <https://citylimits.org/2022/11/10/mayor-adams-set-to-shut-down-randalls-island-tent-complex-for-asylum-seekers/>

³

<https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/695-22/mayor-adams-humanitarian-emergency-response-relief-centers-further-support-asylum>

⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>

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<https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/835-22/mayor-adams-takes-major-steps-help-new-yorkers-access-high-quality-housing-using-more-quickly-move#0>



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require dedicated and informed support from school faculty.⁶ With the DOE’s “Project Open Arms,” the public school system has enrolled over 7,000 children in 2022 who temporarily resided in hotels or shelters (this figure is not broken down by immigration status as DOE does not track it, but most are likely migrants).⁷

In addition to schooling is the question of what a migrant parent is to do if they want to work but cannot leave their child to do so. Migrants have lamented the strict rules of the shelter system that requires children to remain with their parents and not others even if the parent allows it. This has put parents in the precarious position to choose between childcare and searching for work, leaving them in what is essentially limbo.⁸ With the news of “Promise NYC,” which aims to provide temporary childcare assistance to low-income families who otherwise would not qualify for existing federally-subsidized childcare programs,⁹ there remains concerns as to the implementation of the program and who would be left out of the equation. One, the program will last for six months, which is insufficient knowing that migrants’ asylum cases can take years and obtaining work authorization is a long journey as well. Additionally, Promise NYC will cover roughly 600 children, a fraction of the number of migrant children that have arrived in the City. While I agree with the intentions of the program, the program may only mitigate a small portion of a much larger issue.

One of the biggest questions presently and for the future is how much longer our current systems and infrastructure can sustain themselves. The biggest part of this question and equation is funding from the state and federal government. In late November, Governor Hochul announced the allocation of three million dollars for legal assistance for newly arrived immigrants.¹⁰ This funding will be crucial in helping migrants navigate their asylum cases and legal representation in immigration court. These are the kinds of investments that are integral in ensuring the city does not collapse in on itself and can continue providing the services and resources needed to our newcomers. In this equation is also the continued financial support for non-profit providers, mutual aid groups, faith-based organizations, and individual advocates who are continuously on the ground to support migrants.

⁶ <https://documentedny.com/2022/11/28/migrant-children-shelter-homeless-venezuela/>

⁷ <https://news.yahoo.com/york-schools-embrace-thousands-migrant-142018469.html>

⁸ <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-shelter-rules-around-childcare-are-making-it-hard-for-migrant-moms-to-find-work>

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<https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/909-22/mayor-adams-rolls-out-promise-nyc-provide-childcare-assistance-low-income-families-with>

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<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-legal-services-program-aid-newly-arrived-immigrants-new-york-city>



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**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
DECEMBER 20, 2022**

While many of our newcomers may not have sought out New York City as their end goal, it says a lot that so many have decided to remain here. This is a testament to the City's commitment and continued work to ensure that every person who steps foot in our city has the opportunities to live, work, thrive, and call New York City our home, and we must continue to uplift this goal moving forward.

Thank you.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

**Testimony of Win (formerly Women in Need, Inc.)
for the New York City Council Committee of the Whole
on the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants**

Thank you, Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and the Committee of the Whole, for offering this important chance to testify. My name is Chris Quinn, and I am the President and CEO of Win. Win is New York City's largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness. We operate 14 shelters and nearly 600 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Currently, more than 6,200 people call Win "home" every night, including 3,490 children — in total, we house over 14 percent of homeless families with children in New York City.

As migrants have come to New York City in record high numbers, Win has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that these vulnerable families have a safe place to rest, heal, and recover from what was an extremely traumatic journey for most. Win is currently providing shelter for 274 migrant families, including more than 700 children, from the most recent wave of migrants that began in August. But immigrant families are not new to Win. In fact, many of the families that have been in our shelters the longest are undocumented immigrants. In our deeply unaffordable city, immigration and homelessness are inextricably linked. For Win and other social services providers to be able to serve these families, and for migrant families to have a chance to overcome homelessness, we need more support. We echo the Mayor's call for assistance from both the state and federal government to help pay for basic needs and to provide the means for migrants to support themselves through access to benefits and work authorization. Yet, irrespective of state and federal assistance, there are additional steps the City can and should take to help mitigate this crisis. The City must help organizations cover the costs that were incurred while providing services for which they do not receive funding. Additionally, the City should free up shelter capacity and create a pathway to permanent housing for migrant families by eliminating archaic policies such as the 90-Day Rule and expanding voucher eligibility to non-citizens.

As we've welcomed migrant families into our shelters, most of whom are from Central and South America, we've heard stories of unimaginable trauma and remarkable resilience. Their experiences, a few of which I will share today, also indicate that many more families will arrive here in the following years. We must be prepared to provide for their needs. For many, choosing to embark on the long and perilous journey to the United States was a matter of life and death. For one family in a Win shelter, the mother vividly recalled having only "tortilla with salt, and sometimes not even that" to eat in her home country. They left because the alternative was starvation. For others, violence and persecution left them with no other option but to flee. One woman was receiving continuous threats from the same gang that had already killed her partner. She told us, "They would tell me they were going to kill me with my children." Knowing what the gang was capable of, she left to save herself and her children from a violent death. Many of our residents are members of the Garifuna ethnicity, an Afro-Honduran minority group, and were forced to flee their ancestral home because of widespread racial discrimination, state sponsored violence, and persecution. A Garifuna mother at one of our shelters explained, "We receive a lot of discrimination, as if we are not part of Honduras. The governments and the people discriminate



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
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against us a lot. Even the lands that our ancestors bought, all of that, the government says do not belong to us. They want to shoot us only because of our origin.” Unfortunately, these accounts resemble countless other stories, and people continue to flee their homes by the thousands to save their lives and find a better future for their children.

After making the impossible decision to leave, these families travel north, mostly on foot and typically following established routes through South America, Central America, and Mexico.ⁱ Unfortunately, those routes are extremely dangerous both because of the treacherous terrain and the criminal networks that operate along them.ⁱⁱ As men, women, and children travel for thousands of miles towards the United States, countless numbers face the traumatic horrors of rape, kidnapping, extortion, and extreme deprivation.ⁱⁱⁱ One woman described the systematic rape that she and other women were forced to endure as they made their way here, “Women had to sleep with a coyote in order to eat, otherwise you were only given bread and water. It was in front of everyone, while the kids were asleep. If one wanted to eat well, you had to sleep with them.” Another mother told us that, in an effort to prevent rape and sex trafficking, she had shaved her daughter’s head to make her resemble a boy. Others told us about the horrors of the terrain and the near-death experiences they faced. One woman remembered, “My daughter almost drowned in the river. I was in the middle of the river, and I saw my daughter floating down the river. I fell under the river as well, until a Honduran man helped me up.” Although the families that made it to Win survived the journey, they bear the scars both literally and figuratively, and all of them require some combination of physical and emotional healing from the intensive trauma they endured.

In recent weeks, the busses paid for by politicians on the southern border have mostly stopped due to the reinstatement of Title 42, a rule that uses the COVID-19 pandemic as justification for preventing migrants from seeking asylum in the U.S. Although the future of Title 42 remains unclear due to ongoing litigation, migrants are continuing to come to New York regardless. Further, when the temporary rule finally does expire, we know that many more busses will come, and New York City will see a new influx of migrants that will likely surpass the last wave.

In the absence of any additional financial support from the City, Win has stepped up, utilizing unrestricted dollars to address the needs of our migrant families that are not covered in our contracts. However, this temporary stop gap is completely unsustainable. As the weather gets colder, the needs of these families continue to increase, while our donations department is running low on coats and other warm clothing. Families need winter gear, and many have been unable to access food stamps, straining Win’s limited food resources and the stock at local soup kitchens and pantries. Although we recognize that support is needed from all levels of government, the City must step up and provide additional resources so that providers like Win can meet the growing needs of our most vulnerable families. To begin, the City must commit to reimbursing providers for the additional costs that were incurred by providing basic necessities not covered in their contracts. Additionally, the City should create flexibility for providers to use money from unfilled staff lines to pay for the unique human capital needs related to the migrant crisis, such as critical translation services. Spanish speaking staff are stretched thin trying to meet the newfound needs of migrant families, and shelters need funds to employ additional bilingual workers who can provide trauma-informed care to Spanish speaking families and children. Migrant families also urgently need access to affordable legal aid services, and the City can and should lead the



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charge to increase the availability of immigration attorneys for those in need.

In addition to financial and legal support, the City must also prioritize moving families out of shelter to free up capacity for new arrivals. Even before the recent influx of migrants, the New York City shelter system had limited resources to spare. Unfortunately, the thousands of families entering the system have totally overwhelmed the limited capacity that existed, forcing the City to rapidly open hotels and HERRC's to accommodate the new arrivals. Despite being faced with this massive capacity crisis, the City has maintained the archaic and cruel 90-Day Rule, which senselessly requires families to remain in shelter for an arbitrary 90 days before they can even apply for rental assistance. This criterion forces families to stay in shelter months longer than they need to, unnecessarily costing the City thousands of dollars per family per month, while prolonging an already traumatic experience. As migrants continue to arrive, many of whom are wrongly ineligible for any form of rental assistance, it is even more critical to prioritize moving families who are eligible for vouchers out of the system. By repealing the 90-Day Rule, the City can immediately help increase shelter capacity. Additionally, the City can and should expand CityFHEPS eligibility to people regardless of immigration status. For migrant families who lack citizenship and a social security number, there are almost no options to move out of shelter. This heartbreaking reality was summed up by one Win mom who said "It would be much better if I weren't an immigrant. I would have already left shelter, because an American child is worth more here than an immigrant child... They aren't given the same opportunities." We can and must do more to provide families like hers an opportunity to get out of shelter and into a home of their own.

The Mayor is right to call on the state and federal government to assist with the current humanitarian crisis facing New York City. The forces at work that are driving this crisis are on a global scale, requiring a coordinated effort that goes far beyond the capacity of the New York City government to solve. We need additional resources, and migrant families need access to benefits and work authorization that the City can't grant on its own. Yet, the City can and should act to help mitigate the crisis by giving service providers the funds they need to continue operating, eliminating the archaic 90-Day Rule, and expanding CityFHEPS eligibility to people regardless of their immigration status. Although the City can't solve this crisis on its own, these actions can help manage the crisis and make the system work better for our most vulnerable residents.

ⁱ Higuita, Nelson Agudelo, Jose Antonio Suarez, Eugenia Millender, Elizabeth Garcia Creighton, Michaele Francesco Corbisiero, Christian Olivo Freitas, Jose Henao Cordero, et al. "U.S. Bound Journey of Migrant Peoples InTransit Across Dante's Inferno and Purgatory in the Americas." *Travel medicine and infectious disease* 47 (2022): 102317–102317.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn since 1971

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee of the Whole

Re: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

December 20, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Diana Aragundi, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney on the Immigrant Students' Rights Project at Advocates for Children of New York ("AFC"). For over 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York City students who face barriers to academic success. The Immigrant Students' Rights Project advocates for better educational opportunities for English Language Learners ("ELLs") and immigrant families in New York City public schools.

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The recent influx of immigrant families has highlighted the critical need for the New York City Department of Education ("DOE") to better meet the needs of all immigrant youth. Through our know-your-rights workshops at schools with high numbers of immigrant students, as well as our direct 1:1 assistance to families on education-related issues, we have seen schools that have insufficient resources and are ill-equipped to effectively serve immigrant students and their families. I am here today to urge the City to focus on four ways to better serve immigrant students and families, so that they have the tools that they need to succeed in school.

First, the DOE should ensure immigrant youth have access to bilingual staff and programs. We have heard from parents whose children are placed in monolingual English classrooms, even though the City has available seats in bilingual programs, as well as students placed at schools that do not have needed bilingual staff. The DOE needs to ensure they place bilingual teachers and staff, including bilingual social workers and special education teachers, in all schools that have enrolled migrants this year. Additionally, the DOE must educate immigrant parents about their rights regarding ELL programs, including the right to transfer to a school that offers a bilingual program if their current school does not offer one.

Second, immigrant families have sought our help because their children have disabilities but are not receiving any special education services. In some cases, school staff have not referred immigrant children for special education evaluations even



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where a parent has informed the school that their children received services in their previous country. The DOE must train school staff to identify students who are suspected of having a disability and promptly refer them for special education services in accordance with the law. School staff should not delay in referring students merely because they have been in the United States a short time or have limited English language proficiency. In addition, the DOE needs to inform parents of their special education rights so that they know of the services that are available and are thereby better equipped to advocate for their children's needs.

Third, the DOE should better identify and serve older immigrant youth. We have met older immigrant youth who did not know they have a right to go to school. We commend the DOE for recently opening seats for newly arrived older youth at six Transfer High Schools in Queens, Bronx, and Brooklyn. These programs help students learn how to read, write, and speak English while they earn a high school diploma. For these programs and students to succeed, the DOE should increase outreach about these Transfer High Schools as well as provide all school staff at these schools with professional development, hire additional English as a New Language ("ENL") teachers and bilingual social workers, and offer culturally responsive wrap-around supports and services, so that all educators are prepared to support older immigrant youth.

Finally, it is imperative that the City continue working on ways to engage new immigrant families whose home language is not English, including those who have lower levels of literacy and access to digital media. We urge the DOE to ensure that each school has a Language Access Coordinator and educate school staff about their obligation to provide parents with quality, culturally appropriate translation and interpretation services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Asian American Federation

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

December 20, 2022

Written Testimony

I want to thank the New York City Council for holding this hearing and giving the Asian American Federation the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Hadeel Mishal and I am the Senior Civic Engagement Coordinator at the Asian American Federation. AAF represents the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

We are here to discuss the city's response and delivery of services to migrants. CBOs are trusted and accessible hubs for services, they serve as the first line of access for migrants. Moreover, the migrant crisis has highlighted needs and policy shortcomings that must be urgently addressed, not just in this crisis but to address the needs of all immigrant New Yorkers.

Since 2010, the Asian population in New York City has increased 34%, growing from over 1.1 million in 2010 to over 1.5 million in 2020, making up 17.3% of our city's total population. Overwhelmingly, Asian New Yorkers are immigrants, with two out of three in the city being foreign-born. Of those Asian immigrants, 47% arrived in 2010 or after. Additionally, language barriers remain high among Asian New Yorkers. Overall, 48% of Asians have limited English proficiency in New York City, compared to a citywide rate of 23%.

By assessing the needs of migrants, and the services the city provides, we can come together as a city to address the needs in an effective way. The coming Budget will have to make a priority of supporting our immigrant communities and the CBOs that have led by example in providing language accessible and culturally-competent services. The migrant crisis is a crisis long in the making, and our community is particularly familiar with the root causes. After years of regressive policies aimed at punishing immigrant communities, on top of the xenophobic rhetoric relating to the pandemic and increase in anti-Asian violent crimes, the urgency has never been greater for our City Council to help restore our immigrant communities' trust in their government.

Immigration Services

As an extension of the difficulties faced by our immigrant communities over the past several years, funding for accessible immigration legal services has remained stagnant even while demand has increased. From the Muslim Ban, to an increase in deportation rates, and the public charge assault of the previous administration – these attacks have exacerbated already growing fears and hesitancy in immigrant communities. The Asian American community is scrambling to find culturally-competent, language-accessible affordable immigration legal advocacy in the aftermath. While we want to acknowledge the steps that City Council has taken to aid our immigrant communities, City Council should do its part and prioritize funding immigration legal services and case management provided by CBOs with a track record of connecting community members and making legal services accessible.



Asian American Federation

Without Asian CBOs' ability to provide language and navigation support, few people would be able to access these legal services. As the migrant crisis continues to show, accessibility should be the first concern of the government.

Nonprofit Support:

But as our immigrant community also bears a disproportionate burden of the basic need insecurity brought on by the pandemic, the City must reinforce safety net programs, such as community health centers and clinics, as well as food pantries. Asian immigrants, and all immigrants, have a greater need for access to these programs in part due to the continued aftereffects of the previous administration's public charge assault that resulted in immigrants disenrolling from public benefits and the continuing alienation of their needs by other States. Our communities need an emergency network of linguistically and culturally competent food service programs, and a means of connecting LEP seniors to these alternative food benefits in order to begin to address the harm inflicted on this population by the loss of access to traditional government assistance programs.

The City should prioritize working with CBOs that have the expertise needed to make the most of every dollar in our communities by giving greater weight to organizations with a demonstrated track record of serving low-income, underserved immigrant communities with linguistic and cultural competency. Our CBOs are leading by example in the provision of direct services, from providing wrap-around services that include mental wellness checks, to allying with food suppliers that provide culturally-competent food. CBOs were the tip-of-the-spear in the City's initial response to the migrant crisis, and as we ask long-term sustainability questions, it'll be our CBOs, rooted in our immigrant communities, that will be instrumental in restoring trust between our immigrants and the City.

Language Access

And finally, language access: immigrants continue to be unable to navigate complex citizenship processes that are language limited. And stories of migrant children unable to fully engage in our schools reflect longstanding concerns across our immigrant communities. Immigration policies are in such a state of flux that our communities will need sustained in-language engagement to stay abreast of changing policies, processes, and documents.

The City must also take measures to assure that Local Law 30 is fully and consistently implemented across city agencies. In our work and the work of our member and partner organizations, we are constantly reminded that much of the language accessibility issues our community is grappling with relate to issues of capacity. Immigrants are often the last to know about key information, and the pandemic has demonstrated that there is still much work to be done in making sure our immigrants, many of whom are our frontline workers, benefit from the work of our city agencies.

We at the Asian American Federation thank you for allowing us to testify and look forward to working with all of you to make sure our communities get the support they deserve.



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TESTIMONY OF:

Ellen Pachnanda, Director

Immigration Practice

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before New York City Council Committee of the Whole

City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

December 20, 2022

My name is Ellen Pachnanda and I am Director of Brooklyn Defender Services' Immigration Practice. Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. For over 25 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. We want to thank the City Council for its commitment to the diverse members of the immigrant community in New York City and to the Committee of the Whole for convening this important two-day hearing to assess the city's response and delivery of services to newly arrived immigrants seeking asylum in the United States.

BDS represents approximately 21,000 people each year who are accused of a crime, facing the removal of their children, or deportation. BDS is fortunate to have the support of the City Council to supplement the services we provide as a public defender office in Brooklyn. Through specialized units, we provide extensive wrap-around services to meet the needs of people with legal system involvement, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing, and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

BDS' Immigration Practice protects the rights of immigrant New Yorkers by defending against ICE detention and deportation, minimizing the negative immigration consequences of criminal and family charges for non-citizens, and representing immigrants in applications for immigration benefits. We represent people who are applying for immigration relief before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and in removal proceedings in New York's immigration courts.



Since 2009, we have counseled, advised, or represented more than 19,000 clients in immigration matters including deportation defense, affirmative applications, advisals, and immigration consequence consultations in Brooklyn’s criminal court system.

BDS is one of three New York Immigrant Family Unity (NYIFUP) providers, specializing in representing people who are detained while they await their deportation hearing. Since the inception of the program in 2013, we have represented over 1,700 people in detained deportation proceedings.

The City Council has long been a champion of the rights of immigrants and one of the most profound ways in which the city has demonstrated its commitment has been through the groundbreaking NYIFUP program. Brooklyn Defender Services is proud to have partnered with the City Council on this program with our co-providers, The Legal Aid Society and The Bronx Defenders for almost a decade, during which time we have assured thousands of people obtain full representation for the complicated issues they face in removal proceedings.

BDS’ immigration staff has stepped up and remained flexible and ready to support our clients throughout the pandemic, a shift in presidential administration, constantly evolving immigration policies and now as we emerge from the pandemic. The support of the City Council allows us to respond to people’s immediate needs—such as detained deportation defense and screening and advisals for immigration relief—and to provide education and resources to the community and other legal providers.

As a NYIFUP provider, we experience many challenges in delivering legal services to New York City’s immigrant population. In providing immigration representation to our clients more broadly, including through IOI-supported the Immigrant Community Action Project (“ICAP”) initiative, we can help New Yorkers obtain stable immigration status and advice about their risk of immigration enforcement, preventing them from ending up in immigration detention and then having to scramble to file immigration applications defensively in an immigration court proceeding. The increasing delays in case timelines both in removal defense and affirmative applications have resulted in representation that often spans many years; combined with ongoing intake we are seeing higher caseloads. Longer timelines that span across multiple presidential administrations also means changing rules, policies, and procedures throughout the course of representation that add layers to already complex cases. Ongoing geographic and financial eligibility restrictions for existing cases, especially given the delays mentioned above, add an additional administrative burden, and require repeated rescreening of current clients to report our representation and receive funding under our contracts.

Providing Full Service Legal Assistance to Immigrant New Yorkers

First and foremost, we are committed to continuing to provide the robust and comprehensive legal representation needed for people facing removal, including assisting any asylum seeker who might end up in detention with the full services we can provide. We would like to ensure

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that the City Council maintains its commitment to the NYIFUP program and that any new initiatives complement our current work.

BDS handles other types of immigration legal matters in addition to our NYIFUP work. Representing people who face complex immigration situations and need a coordinated strategic legal plan to assure the best outcome for them and their families; we identify and apply for affirmative immigration relief, provide removal defense, and facilitate employment authorization and general documentation assistance enabling our clients to access health insurance, public assistance, and higher educational opportunities. In addition, we take on some cases that are referred from community-based organizations or through our own community outreach. In general, BDS is focused on full representation of clients although we do provide brief advice for some clients under our current funding.

Full Legal Representation for Newly Arriving Immigrants in New York

With respect to those who have recently immigrated to the United States and have now arrived in New York City, we urge the City Council to ensure that there is sufficient funding for both brief advice and full legal representation because the needs of individuals and capacity for people to navigate the byzantine immigration system varies widely. In addition, the legal services these communities need extend beyond immigration application assistance; they are more likely to face barriers based on their immigration status in a wide range of areas including employment discrimination, landlord harassment, and difficulty accessing benefits where temporary, or pending, immigration status can cause erroneous ineligibility determinations.

Prioritizing funding for full representation means ensuring we can continue to provide multidisciplinary services for our immigrant clients and their families. In terms of our interest in providing additional services, BDS believes our expertise lies in the complex legal issues that arise in an immigration case. Issues such as contact with the criminal legal system or the Administration for Children's Services, prior deportation orders, mental health concerns, and the coordination of pursuing multiple forms of immigration relief for any given individual or family are spaces where our unique expertise comes into play.

To provide that level of full representation for many more people, we would need additional staff and that would have to be funded properly for us to do justice for those we represent as well as the new clients we could accept. We would be able to accept cases from the agencies that are handling screening or "know your rights" sessions. In general, our preference is to serve the Brooklyn community as a borough-based organization, but we understand that immigrant communities are connected in ways that are not always defined by borough, so we would consider people who are residing in Queens and possibly other areas of the city if that is needed. BDS would also be able to offer training as a service to the community and to the city. Depending upon the specific need, we could coordinate with other providers to determine the best way to ensure a wide range of needs are being met.



And finally, another challenge we have experienced is the extensive delays in contract registration we face on a yearly basis. NYIFUP has been renewed towards the end of the year every year and that forces us to basically expend the payroll to do the work, resulting in large sums owed to us by the city. Contract delays in our other city contracts exacerbate the issue. The City Council should investigate and take action to assure all nonprofits are able to get paid by the city in a reasonable amount of time.

Conclusion

In the coming year, we urge the City Council to prioritize incorporating future funding for these, and related, programs into the city budget as opposed to funding the programs through discretionary annual funding. We require baseline funding to give providers the stability to build robust programs that can respond to large influxes of people from other countries. Organizations that are stable and well-staffed can step in when a crisis occurs and assist immigrants and address a particular situation as it arises. Unlike other types of legal work that can be fairly stable over time, we have seen that the needs of immigrants in New York City do not follow a pattern. There is always a new situation that needs to be addressed and legal services providers need to be properly funded and staffed with experienced attorneys, paralegals, and other staff to perform critical work on a short timeline. In recent years, as an example, we handled the Muslim ban at JFK International Airport, the Haitian earthquake, family separation at the US border, the surge of young people crossing the US border and now asylees being sent the New York City, Ukrainian and Russian people seeking safety from the war, a large influx of Venezuelan people and still the usual deportations and removals, some of which are for people who have been in the United States for decades. A deep commitment to funding our services over time would allow us to be nimble and provide flexibility for the city to meet the needs of its residents and their families.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with providers around these important issues. We look forward to continued conversations and collaborations both on our existing programs as well as new initiatives being developed to meet the legal services needs of our city's immigrant community.

Please contact me at epachnanda@bds.org with any questions. We would be happy to meet to discuss how we can contribute to the City Council's goals.



Catholic Migration Services
Testimony regarding the City's Response to the Arrival of Asylum Seekers
December 20, 2022
New York City Council Committee on Immigration

Catholic Migration Services (CMS) is pleased to submit this testimony regarding our experience providing legal services to the newly arrived migrants and recommendations to the City in preparing for the arrival of additional migrants. CMS is an affiliated agency of Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens and supported by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn. Each year, we provide free legal services to more than 4,000 low-income immigrants on immigration, housing, employment matters; provide critical and reliable legal information about their rights to thousands of other households and organize groups of tenants to stand up to harassment from their landlords and preserve their affordable housing.

CMS staff have interacted with hundreds of newly arrived migrants since July. When individuals and families first showed up at our office, we set up an attorney-on-call system to meet with them. Soon, that became untenable given our existing caseloads, so we switched to providing group legal orientations at churches in coordination with our partners at Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens. We combined that with volunteering at the City's Navigation Center and assisting new arrivals who had been paroled in for a year with work permit applications at our office. We recruited and trained volunteer attorneys and interpreters to assist us. Our staff attended national meetings about immigrants bussed from the southern border and NYC meetings of advocates brainstorming how to address the situation.

We salute the City, especially Mayor Adams and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs for establishing the Navigation Center and funding satellite sites throughout the city to provide both legal services and case management to newly arrived migrants. The provision of wrap-around services at one location saved this population that has already been through so much from the confusion and time of having to travel from agency to agency in a new city for critical services.

The new arrivals we met with have different legal needs and abilities to address the rigors of our broken-down immigration system. They all need clarity about their immigration cases, and most importantly the opportunity to explain why they came to the United States and to apply for any immigration benefit that would give them legal status. It goes beyond saying that every one of these new arrivals – from the single mother shepherding her children to the single men and women seeking safety – have endured unspeakable horrors on their journeys to safety in the United States. For this reason and because if they fear persecution and torture our law dictates that they be given an opportunity to be heard, we must determine how best to use our scarce resources to give them that chance. To put it simply, they risked everything to get to the United States and we must help them access any available protection from deportation.

Traditional lawyering – one-on-one representation – is undeniably the best way to assist new arrivals and indeed anyone coming up against our convoluted immigration system. But the



overwhelming majority of these new arrivals have no resources to pay for an attorney and NYC's free immigration legal services providers have been overburdened for years. To address immigration legal needs of the new arrivals, we need to adopt new models that take into account their different needs and providers' abilities to meet them.

In CMS' experience, the most important legal need for the new arrivals is clarity about the immigration system, including the difference between ICE and immigration court, the removal defense process, eligibility for immigration benefits that avoid deportation, authorization to work legally, the importance of changing addresses with ICE and the court, change of venue, etc. Understanding our immigration system is crucial to being able to navigate it without a legal representative.

The second most important need for some of the new arrivals is a smart phone. Recently arrived immigrants need phones throughout the legal immigration process to check in with ICE, change their addresses with the court, check their next hearing dates, and seek legal assistance. Our legal staff and volunteers have found it difficult to assist new arrivals who did not have phones because we could not show them how to email ICE to comply with the 60-day check-in requirement, how to change their addresses with ICE and the court, or how to check the EOIR system for their next hearing. We also found it difficult to follow-up with those without phones who were eligible for assistance with work permits.

An essential yet simple service that most migrants need is assistance to ensure that ICE and the immigration court have their current address, so that they receive their hearing notices where they are currently residing. This is something that can easily be provided *pro se* by well-trained volunteers. This is a critical service, because a missed court hearing is likely to result in an *in absentia* removal order.

Newly arrived migrants also need access to legal consultations to learn about their eligibility for immigration benefits, including relief from removal. There are different models for scaling up provision of such consultations, such as clinics that leverage experienced immigration attorneys and accredited representatives with trained volunteers, use comprehensive screening tools, and have systems for triaging those who are found to be eligible for relief based on whether they a) can proceed completely on their own if provided with guidance materials, b) need a level of *pro se* assistance completing forms, or c) need direct representation based on type of relief or legal complexities. Such triage is key because – short of right to counsel legislation and funding – not everyone will be able to secure an attorney, particularly not in time to apply for asylum before the one year deadline, should they be eligible.

Because non-profit legal service providers are at capacity with already existing cases to be able to take on high numbers of removal defense and asylum cases for the new arrivals, it is important to develop a robust *pro se* assistance system that builds on existing programs such as the federally-funded Immigration Court Helpdesk. Such a system – or systems – would combine experienced attorneys and trained volunteers who prepare and file applications without



undertaking representation. Ideally, pro se application assistance will be supplemented with group sessions on how to gather corroborating evidence, country condition packets, and workshops that prepare applicants for their individual hearings. With the support from the Robin Hood foundation and New York Community Trust, CMS, along with UnLocal, Central American Legal Assistance, and several community-based organizations, are currently developing a pro-se pilot program to create a model on how best to use pro-se services to reach as many migrants as possible.

Because many of the new arrivals have young children, there is also a need to secure childcare while parents and older siblings attend legal workshops, screening clinics, and *pro se* assistance workshops.

CMS is well situated to work collaboratively on a model that leverages the expertise of our immigration attorneys with volunteers who are trained to conduct eligibility screenings and provide *pro se* assistance. We can build on existing relationships with law firms and volunteer networks to recruit and train volunteers. Partnering with Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens, which currently provides case management services to newly arrived migrants at four different locations in Brooklyn and Queens, including in the building where CMS is located, will allow migrants to continue to receive wrap around services in one location.

We thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and look forward to working with the City to meet the needs of this population.

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**Testimony of Juan Diaz, Jenny Veloz, Rebecca Charles, and Caitlyn Passaretti
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**

**Submitted to the New York City Council Committee of the Whole
Oversight Hearing: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
December 20th, 2022**

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is a 76-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, nor represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank the New York City Council for holding today's important hearing on the response and delivery of services to migrants. Many of the migrant families entering New York have experienced hardship and trauma in their journey to our city. Our city has a responsibility to not only support the immediate needs of new arrivals, but to identify systemic changes that can support the long-term wellbeing of immigrant children and families.

Access to Legal Services and Translation/Interpretation Services

Community-based organizations serving asylum-seekers in New York have identified legal services and translation/interpretation services as among the most urgent needs confronting them.

We therefore urge City leaders to ensure that all the city's contracted programs have access to translation and interpretation services, both written and verbal. In particular, providers and advocates have underscored that lack of Spanish-speaking social services and information is prevalent at DHS-shelters and other city government agencies.

Additionally, we urge the city to make immediate funding available for more lawyers and legal professionals that specialize in immigration law, and to address concerns regarding current RFPs and contracts that have inhibited the city's ability to expand this workforce. Permanent investments in legal support are essential to ensure asylum seekers are able to navigate the complex and lengthy legal processes facing them.

Access to Housing and Economic Security

The current crises in housing and shelter capacity has been exacerbated by the recent arrival of over 27,000 asylum-seeking individuals. These families deserve stable and safe housing options,

particularly in light of the traumatic journey many undertook in order to arrive in New York. As a member of the Family Homelessness Coalition, CCC strongly supports efforts to address both the chronic and emerging housing needs confronting housing-insecure families. By addressing long-standing issues within our housing system, we can connect more New Yorkers to permanent housing and expand capacity during times of crisis.

CCC supports the following policy and administrative reforms to promote housing stability for migrant families with children.

- Expand CityFHEPS eligibility for undocumented families. All families deserve access to permanent housing.
- Eliminate chronicity eligibility requirements such as requiring shelter history or a housing court eviction to receive CityFHEPS. Eliminating these unnecessary requirements will allow the city to better leverage the subsidy as a preventive measure and keep housing insecure families in their homes and out of shelter.
- End the 90-day rule of shelter stay, prior to City FHEPs eligibility. This illogical and costly rule further extends unnecessary lengths of stay of families with children. Instead, the City must end this rule to move families through shelter to permanent housing quickly and other restrictive.
- Provide funding to youth shelter providers for translation, transportation, legal and emergency housing for migrant youth.

Access to Anti-Hunger Supports

One of the primary needs identified by community-based organizations serving migrants is the need for enhanced food supports. Skipping meals or lack of healthy food options can have an adverse effect on a child’s physical and mental well-being. Children facing hunger are more likely to be hospitalized and face higher risks of health conditions like anemia and asthma.ⁱ Hunger can also impact a child’s school performance and behavior. Lack of focus, absenteeism, and poor grades are also linked to childhood hunger. 1 in 4 (or more than 462,000) children in New York City are experiencing food insecurity.ⁱⁱ

Programs like SNAP and WIC are critical to families experiencing food insecurity and allow families to have healthy food choices. However, these federal programs are not an option for undocumented families, who must rely on friends, food pantries, or less healthy options for groceries. Numerous CBOs have had to expand nutrition programs to meet the needs of migrants they serve, but many lack the funding necessary to meet the demand. **We urge the City to enhance funding available to community-based organizations to provide outreach and enrollment in nutrition programs, as well as to provide direct food aid to support individuals ineligible for state or federal programs. Additionally, we support Res. 305 by Council Member Ayala calling on New York State to create a program to provide food benefits to those currently ineligible for existing benefits.** All children and families in New York City deserve food security.

Access to Education

Even before COVID-19, the NYC public school system was ill-equipped to serve English language learners and immigrant families, and too many families were unable to access high-quality schooling and programs for their children. The pandemic only compounded these barriers. Immigrant-serving CBOs across the city have been overwhelmed throughout the pandemic as they struggled to find enrollment and communications support for newcomer families, and far too many eligible students were unable to even enter the education system. Today, the City faces a historic number of asylum seekers in need of accessible education and English language supports, and our leaders must provide.

All New York students must graduate high school by the age of 21 before they are considered to be aged out. This presents a major hurdle for older, newcomer immigrant youth (ages 16-21) who have little time to learn English and fulfill graduation requirements. Transfer schools can play an essential role in supporting students at risk of dropping out and helping under-credited students work toward graduation. However, up until last year, these transfer schools were not accessible to immigrant youth outside of Manhattan. This year, the DOE expanded access to six transfer programs for English Language Learners (ELLs) in the outer boroughs but has yet to fully fund the type of robust programming that ELL transfer schools need to enable older immigrant youth need to succeed.

CCC joins the New York Immigration Coalition and other partners in calling on city leaders to baseline \$3M to add comprehensive services to the six new English Language Learner (ELL) Transfer School Programs in Queens, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. This funding would employ bilingual social workers, provide robust training for school-based staff, and offer community-based wrap-around supports, bringing these important new programs in line with best practices for newcomers ages 16-21. The funding also includes the capacity to develop a data-driven model that can be replicated throughout the City. **Additionally, we urge the City to enhance students' access to bilingual staff throughout the city, including educators, social workers, and special education teachers.**

Access to Youth Services + Programs

Youth services and programs provide essential interventions and opportunities for positive youth development. Programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) provide youth with the opportunity to explore different careers, earn a wage, and strengthen their future job prospects, and have also been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of arrest and incarceration.ⁱⁱⁱ We are grateful for the expansion of SYEP in last year's city budget. Unfortunately, SYEP is not an option for undocumented young people due to federal labor regulations. **We urge the City to develop a model of SYEP that allows participation by all New York youth, regardless of immigration status.** Access to these programs is a lifeline for young people and opens doors to incredible futures. All youth deserve opportunity, community,

and the right to be involved in the wide variety of programs New York City offers for young people.

As New York rebuilds and continues to recover from the pandemic, we must keep our sights on an equitable future. Pandemic relief was not available to immigrant communities until 2021, creating increased financial hardships for many individuals and families. New York has an opportunity to not only enhance supports to migrant New Yorkers, but to create pathways for future opportunities and stronger communities in the long term.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

ⁱ Feeding America. "Facts About Child Hunger in America." <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts>

ⁱⁱ City Harvest. "Hunger in NYC." <https://www.cityharvest.org/food-insecurity/#:~:text=As%20New%20Yorkers%20struggle%20with,began%20sending%20food%20prices%20soaring>

ⁱⁱⁱ Judd B. Kessler & Sarah Tahamont & Alexander Gelber & Adam Isen, 2022. "[The Effects of Youth Employment on Crime: Evidence from New York City Lotteries](#)," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, vol 41(3), pages 710-730.



COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION of New York State

New York City Council Committee of the Whole
Oversight: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
December 20, 2022

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) is thankful for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the New York City Council Committee of the Whole on Oversight: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants. CHCANYS is the statewide primary care association representing New York's 70+ federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), also known as community health centers (CHCs)

CHCs are located in medically underserved communities and provide high quality comprehensive primary and preventive care to everyone, regardless of ability to pay, insurance coverage, or immigration status. CHCs do not collect information on immigration status. In NYC, CHCs serve more than 1.2 million patients at 490 sites across the city. CHCs are a vital safety net for quality affordable healthcare services for many New Yorkers who otherwise wouldn't have access to healthcare. Among NYC CHC patients, 83% are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, 92% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty line, 12% are uninsured, 68% are on Medicaid and/or Medicare, and 29% are best served in a language other than English. In short, CHCs are NYC's primary care safety net providers - keeping people well in the community and out of emergency rooms.

CHCs are Rapidly Responding to the Migrant Crisis

When the news came that migrants would be bussed to NYC from the Texas/Mexico border, CHCs were among the first community partners to begin collaborating with NYC government to ensure migrants were connected to comprehensive primary care. CHCs continue to work to connect migrants to medical care, including mental health services, by conducting initial assessments to identify needs, providing vaccinations to children for school, setting up appointments, and even providing onsite care in hotel shelters. One health center has set up a dedicated medical room within a hotel to provide direct medical care onsite. The health center reported reduced calls to 911 and emergency room visits because of that care. CHCs are also providing enabling services to further enhance access to supportive services, including care coordination and patient education, translation, transportation, and temporary shelter. One health center shared the importance of ensuring migrants are provided culturally appropriate food, acknowledging that providing familiar food would make migrants feel safer, especially when they have not yet acclimated to their new environment.

Many CHCs operate school-based health centers (SBHCs), which are medical health centers located within NYC schools that help students manage their illnesses during the school day. SBHCs are a convenient healthcare option for students whose parents cannot always take them to medical appointments due to scheduling difficulties. One health center has seen almost 150 migrants enroll into their SBHC while utilizing the SBHC as their primary source of healthcare. In that instance, the SBHC staff have been providing comprehensive primary care including well child exams, vaccinations, and episodic care. At the same time, the staff have been working hard to obtain documentation necessary for school requirements (i.e. vaccination records, health histories, and insurances) and to get the students and their families health insurance and access to prescription drug coverage. This is truly a herculean effort, given city policy requiring documentation within 30 days of school enrollment.



Continued Workforce Challenges Amidst Rising Demand for Services

The migrants' arrival to NYC comes amidst an unprecedented workforce shortage in CHCs and across the healthcare system. According to CHCANYS' 2021 survey on workforce-related challenges and priorities, CHCs reported immediate staffing needs across occupations including Licensed Clinical Social Workers/Licensed Professional Counselors, Psychiatrists, Nurses, Family Physicians/Internal Medicine, Nurse Practitioners/Physician Assistants, Dental Providers, and Case Managers. CHCs also reported insufficient educational pipelines, uncompetitive wages, and high clinical/case load requirements as some of the reasons for recruitment and retention challenges. All the while, 26,000 migrants have suddenly arrived, and all require access to comprehensive care. Although CHCs were able to integrate the migrants into existing workflows, those workflows have quickly become overwhelmed, and schedules are overfilled.

Significant investment in healthcare workforce is required to ensure that CHCs can keep up with the demand for services, especially in behavioral health – given that many migrants have endured long and potentially traumatic journeys and may have undiagnosed behavioral health needs. Investments might include funding for existing workforce programs, developing new loan repayment programs for nursing and behavioral health staff, especially in communities of color, expanding loan repayment programs for individuals living in medically underserved communities, and increasing workforce development opportunities in medically underserved communities and communities of color. More immediately, many CHCs are working with DOHMH to bring on DOHMH-hired staff to help with the urgent need to ensure all children enrolled in NYC schools meet vaccination requirements within 30 days of enrollment.

More Care Coordination, Supports, and Services are Needed Than What is Currently Available

A. Care Coordination & Outreach

The migrants need far more care coordination than what is currently being provided. It takes a significant amount of coordinated community care in order to help the migrants acclimate to a new environment with different customs, systems, and language. The US healthcare system itself is extremely complicated and confusing, even more so for people who are suddenly inserted into the system from another country. CHCs have identified the need for more Spanish speaking patient navigators to provide patient education on healthcare insurance, connections to care, and accessing pharmacies to eliminate confusion and increase access care.

B. Translation & Interpretation Services

Translation and interpretation services are a critically needed resource in providing care to migrants. According to DOHMH, Spanish is the most common language spoken among the migrants with Haitian Creole being the second most common. Although there are CHCs that do have staff who are bilingual and many CHCs are able to access translation and interpretation services, it is not enough to keep up with the demand for such services. Interpretation can be very costly, and the costs further increase when there are additional needs for education. More funding is needed to support the costs of providing translation and interpretation services which would greatly benefit both the migrants and the health center staff.

C. Transportation Barriers

Transportation is also an ongoing barrier to accessing care. Although the NYC transportation system is vast, it is very complicated for the migrants who do not understand how to navigate it. One CHC



reported that an escort is needed to assist migrants whenever they need to use the transportation system but that there aren't enough people to provide escorts every time someone needs assistance to use transportation. Another health center reported that some hotels where the migrants are temporarily housed are too far away from public transportation, making it difficult for migrants to utilize transportation to access services and supports. In sum, more support is needed to assist migrants in navigating transportation and to provide methods of transportation to and from care and other services.

D. Long-term, Stable Housing

Even before the arrival of migrants, the NYC shelter system faced long wait times for connections to housing. Now, the City has partnered with hotels to open temporary shelter sites for migrants. However, CHCs are reporting that more housing supports are needed as the numbers of migrants arriving in NYC continue to increase. Hotels and shelters are not the solution for these migrants who need long-term stable housing so that they can thrive in their new home in the US. Increased investments in quality stable affordable housing are needed to transition migrants out of the hotels and shelters and to alleviate NYC's overwhelmed and overburdened shelter system.

E. Legal Services

Several health centers reported that migrants want to work but that there is currently no legal avenue for them to do so since they must wait for a period of time before being able to start the paperwork. A solution needs to be developed so that migrants can work as soon as possible. Additionally, they need significant assistance in navigating the immigration system and have many questions that can only be answered by legal and immigration experts.

The Impending State Medicaid Pharmacy Benefit Carve Out Will Reduce Access to Care

The Federal Public Health Service Act 340B drug discount program was enacted in 1992 by Congress to allow safety net providers, including CHCs, access to pharmaceutical drugs at reduced costs and to reinvest the savings to expand access to healthcare in medically underserved communities. CHCs have been able to use 340B savings to provide migrants with access to free or low-cost drugs and other support programs that are not funded by Medicaid. 340B savings has been especially critical in supporting care for those migrants who have not yet been deemed eligible for state insurance.

However, the 340B program is currently under threat due to the State's proposal to carve the Medicaid pharmacy benefit out of managed care and into fee-for-service, which would result in an annual \$61M lost across NYC's CHCs. The carveout cause unprecedented disruptions for the safety net community, greatly impacting the provision of care to migrants who are benefiting from programs funded by 340B savings.

Conclusion

CHCANYS is grateful for the opportunity to submit this testimony to highlight the great work CHCs are doing in responding to the migrant crisis and the challenges that CHCs continue to face in keeping up with the demand for services. For questions or follow up, please contact Marie Mongeon, Senior Director of Policy, mmongeon@chcanys.org.



**NYC Council Committee of the Whole Hearing
Oversight - Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
Tuesday, December 20, 2022**

Thank you to City Council for the opportunity to offer testimony on the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF, is a non-profit organization with a 40-year history of combining education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age. While our primary focus and direct services are around access to high quality, culturally responsive and sustaining early learning and school-aged education, we understand that many intersectional circumstances and experiences within the community impact the well-being of children and their family support structures, and as such we deliver holistically responsive services within the school and wider communities we serve.

CHCF is a citywide agency with contact points throughout the five boroughs. A large point of contact exists via our three after-school programs, and our newly opened office in the Bronx. Over the years, we have seen influxes of migrant families in our school communities and have continued to work diligently with school leaders to coordinate resources that meet the ongoing and growing needs of families and children. Our Community Empowerment team works to leverage community resources that go above and beyond academic support, including housing, food, healthcare, and immigration needs. Our unique position as a community-based organization allows us to identify additional partnerships and funding opportunities to supplement the services directly offered through schools, working with other city agencies, such as the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, our community elected leaders' offices, philanthropic organizations, and other community-based organizations that might focus on other specific resource access for community members and families.

Like so many organizations in the communities that are receiving the recently arriving migrants, our recently opened Bronx office has seen an influx of newly arrived, Spanish-speaking migrants reaching out for support in settling in New York City. Our team has been working to offer one-on-one needs assessments and connections to resources including, but not limited to, school and child care access, housing, food, and mental health supports. In order to effectively deliver these services, our organization works hard to maintain a connection with city agencies to ensure that we are aware of all available resources that we can connect families to. With the influx of migrants to our city and the strain on citywide resources, we have found that city-coordinated outreach to CBOs, like CHCF, has waned. It seems that the Administration's released plan in response to the migrant crisis is to work with specific, larger non-profits to coordinate resources, which certainly serves its purpose. The concern is that those mid-to small-sized community-based non-profits that are often closer to the ground and better equipped to offer safe, culturally and linguistically responsive supports to individuals and families are not consistently looped into larger, coordinated efforts by city agencies and larger non-profits.





It remains critical that the city strengthen its efforts to loop in organizations that are closer to the ground, ensuring seamless access to available resources. It is essential that these organizations are offered funding to build out staffing capacity accordingly to meet the influx of migrant needs, of those community members who have identified us as safe access points and are working with us to navigate complex systems of resource access. It is particularly important that the city and the specific, larger non-profits that have been tapped to lead service delivery efforts are connecting with organizations that meet language needs beyond the top languages in the city; especially those that specialize in indigenous languages. We don't doubt that the city is working diligently to communicate in linguistically responsive ways, but there continue to be gaps in access to agency support staff that speak the language of the people seeking services. The city truly needs to leverage the language skills sets that community-based organizations are better equipped to meet. Small- and mid-sized CBOs continue to be the DeFacto system support for families navigating complex bureaucracies that are still overwhelmingly only in English, and they deserve to be supported and compensated for this critical work.

We thank the Council leaders for the opportunity to hear directly from City agencies in Monday's hearing. As CHCF's work is particularly tied to the Department of Education, with our school-based programming and contracted Family Child Care Network in the Bronx, it was of particular interest to hear updates on their efforts in schools for children and families. It was wonderful to hear that the DOE is coordinating resources across the DOE, which has been a historically siloed agency. In line with what we discussed earlier, the one piece that was starkly lacking in their testimony was how they were coordinating with the community-based organizations that are present in schools across the city and that are positioned to leverage additional resources, beyond the scope of the DOE. CBOs in partnership with schools, such as those partnered with community schools, are positioned to support trauma-informed care, academic needs, health, housing and food needs, and more. They are often deeply connected with school attendance efforts and support the family's needs, beyond the students enrolled in the schools. While we don't doubt that the DOE is aware of the strengths of these partnerships, we feel that it does a disservice to not center and strengthen these relationships alongside those with social workers and bridge the gap workers, in meeting the needs of incoming migrant students and families.

CHCF joins our coalition partners, like the Coalition for Community Schools Excellence and the Latino Education Advocacy Directors (LEAD) in uplifting models and relationships that are already demonstrably meeting the needs of the communities served, particularly migrant communities. Inside of difficult budget discussions, the city must recognize models that work, the unique value add that they already bring to the school communities they are present in, and we must invest not only in sustaining those existing models, but in expanding access particularly in those communities that are receiving newly arriving migrants. Models, like Community Schools and Internationals Schools, are already positioned to meet the unique needs of migrant students and families coming in; these models should be leveraged and further invested in.

Of additional concern is the administration's recent shift in investments towards universal 3K. Even before the influx of newly arriving migrants, many advocates would argue that any perception of a lack of demand for universal 3K is inaccurate. We continue to find that families still need care and early





learning for 0 to 3-year-olds; the issue is availability of extended day/year slots to meet the care needs of a 3-year-old. CHCF, for example, received a disproportionate number of contracted 3K school day/year slots compared to 3K extended day/year slots; we continue to see 100% enrollment for 0-2 and 3K extended day and year, and under-enrollment in 3K school day/year, with ongoing waitlists for extended day/year. This reflects the true need that families with 3-year-olds have. We remain concerned about the outreach and enrollment efforts of the DOE, particularly targeting families most in need, those who are more likely to be unaware of available, free programming, and those that are more likely to have reservations in reaching out to government agencies for programming (i.e. immigrant families). All this to say, this is not the time to reduce investments in early learning and care programs. There is absolutely a need, particularly for expanded access to extended day/year care options for families that would better meet the needs of the family and their young children. NYC must remain committed to full outreach and enrollment efforts, demonstrating the true need for these services and identifying need beyond what the DOE might be offering, before determining that need has been met and therefore the investment can be reduced.

With the migrants coming in, it is further worth uplifting what the DOE named, which is that while undocumented families can access the 3K services, they do not have access to the 0-2 and extended day/year care because of its reliance on federal Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding. As we know, the Council fought for and won \$10 million in last year's budget for undocumented child access to child care. The subsequent program, Promise NYC, is set to launch in January 2023, with four lead organizations serving as the access points for families: the Chinese American Planning Council (Queens), Center for Family Life (Brooklyn), Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (Manhattan and the Bronx), and La Colmena (Staten Island). As was named in the Mayor's Blueprint, the \$10 million is expected to reach 600 children. Given the additional number of migrant children arriving in NYC, it will be important to track the demand for these dollars and rate with which they are exhausted.

Thank you for the opportunity to present a testimony; and if there are any questions about our work or what is presented in our testimony, please reach out to Danielle Demeuse, Director of Policy, at: ddemeuse@chcfinc.org or 212-206-1090 ext. 359.





Tuesday, December 20th, 2022

New York City Council Testimony

Committee of the Whole Hearing: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

Re: Children's Rescue Fund Policy Priorities

Speaker Adams and Members of the City Council:

My name is Orlando Ivey and I am the President and CEO of Children's Rescue Fund (CRF), a Bronx-based non-profit organization that provides transitional housing services to families and individuals. As an organization, we are dedicated to assisting vulnerable populations and collaborating with our clients to empower them towards self-sufficiency.

Since 1992, CRF has provided critical housing and supportive services to thousands of families daily in facilities, throughout the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. We have placed over 6,000 families experiencing homelessness into permanent housing; connected over 300 job seekers with employment; and provided educational support to over 800 young children at our shelter-based childcare programs.

The demand for our services has never been higher. At a time of great urgency due to the housing crisis, increased demand for social services post-COVID, and an unprecedented number of new migrants, CRF pivoted to meet the needs of our communities, opening six new facilities in nine weeks. Our work is not just to ensure basic needs are met but that individuals and families can achieve long term stability and are able to live and thrive in our great city.

As the city has experienced an unprecedented demand for its services, non-profits across the five boroughs have served as an essential relief valve. The success we've had is a testament to the ceaseless collaboration between non-profit partnerships and the city. We'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the City Council for all you have done to welcome and support the needs of migrant families and asylum seekers.

However, we believe that there is still more work to be done to ensure that new arrivals have the support they need to thrive.

As a recent Committee Report from the Committee on Immigration noted, "individuals who are applying for asylum are often survivors of unimaginable atrocities." Some may have been separated from family or friends by conflict, violence, and chaos. We have seen the impact in our facilities firsthand, especially among children.

Unfortunately, in many of the sites we provide services, the high demand for mental health programs is currently unmet due to a lack of social workers trained to provide specialized support. Social



workers can provide crisis counseling, assessment, referral services, and facilitate connections to mental health resources in the community. We would ask the Council to consider funding for such resources to ensure we can better serve affected populations.



As many of these migrants have pending asylum applications, there is a need for legal and language translation services to support families navigating the immigration process. They need help to overcome cultural barriers, continue children's education, and make plans to obtain permanent housing. It is critical that we furnish asylum seekers with the tools necessary to provide for their families and lead a healthy life outside of a shelter.

CRF is committed to providing employment support to those in our care. We strive to assess the skills and abilities of those who are eligible to work and provide specialized job training and placement resources to assist them pursue employment that aligns with their unique talents. We would ask the Council to help fund our endeavors, to ensure we are preparing our residents for success.

Last, no holistic plan can be complete if it does not consider education. It is important to provide the children in our care with the necessary resources and support to succeed in school. With additional staff and funding support, we could ensure that they have access to laptops to review lessons and offer targeted services to address any anxiety they may have regarding school culture and expectations.

There is an acute need in our city today. Thousands are eager to support their children, stabilize their family, and thrive in a new environment. It is challenging. But we believe that with the allocation of additional resources, non-profits will be well-positioned to both assess and meet the needs of New York's newest residents.

Thank you for your dedication to supporting migrants in New York City. We look forward to working with the city to ensure that our communities continue to receive the support they need.

Sincerely,

Orlando Ivey

Orlando Ivey

President & CEO



Testimony of

**Lauren Galloway
Advocacy Coordinator
Coalition for Homeless Youth**

Before the

**The New York City Council
Committee of the Whole**

On

Runaway and Homeless Youth

**Verbal Testimony
December 20, 2022**

**Written Testimony
December 22, 2022**

Introduction

Good morning. My name is Lauren Galloway (she/they), and I am the Advocacy Coordinator at the Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY), also known as the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services. CHY has advocated for the needs of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) for 45 years. The coalition is comprised of 65 providers of services to homeless youth across New York State, including 29 members in New York City. Our members include providers that are directly contracted to provide services to RHY as well as agencies that intersect with the RHY population within the larger scope of their work.

We would like to thank Speaker Adams and Deputy Speaker Ayala, as well as the rest of the members of the New York City Council, for holding the Committee of the Whole Oversight Hearing to Examine the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants, and for highlighting the needs of migrant youth during the hearing.

As stated during our verbal testimony on December 20, 2022, we are submitting this written testimony to amplify the needs of migrant youth and the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) provided that are funded by the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD).

Addressing the Needs of Migrant Youth & Young Adults

Like many nonprofits in other sectors, runaway and homeless youth (RHY) service providers, the majority of whom are funded by DYCD, are seeing an influx of migrant youth arriving daily without stable housing and in need of services and support. CHY and its member providers are confused and concerned by the lack of system coordination the city has implemented to support the needs of migrant youth, as well as the RHY providers that are serving them.

Providers already report hundreds of migrant youths accessing services in the RHY system, and despite working tirelessly to meet the needs of this growing population of young people, without additional funding or city support, some RHY providers have already been faced with having to turn youth away due to lack of capacity to serve them. Although this level of capacity strain is currently isolated at a number of programs, the entire sector is concerned that as the number of migrant youths presenting at their programs continues to grow, they will also be faced with having to turn youth away (both migrant and not), due to their lack of capacity to serve them.

In the absence of city coordination and guidance, CHY has been hosting weekly convenings with RHY providers where they can support and learn from each other. However, the sole burden of coordination of this magnitude cannot be placed on the programs. It is time for the city to step-up and support.

Therefore, we are recommending that the city acknowledge and support the needs of the RHY-system now, before this becomes a system-wide crisis, by implementing these immediate and long-term recommendations:

Immediate Needs

- Translation

- DYCD needs to ensure that all their contracted programs have no-cost access to automated translation services through Language Line.
- DYCD needs to make funding immediately available to their DYCD RHY contracted providers to cover the cost of on-site translation services.
- Transportation
 - The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) needs to create a simple process for DYCD programs to utilize Project Reconnect to support youth that want to reunify with family members outside of the city.
 - Health & Hospitals (H&H) needs to create a simple process for DYCD programs to utilize the transportation resources available through the Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRC) to reunify recently arrived migrant youth with family members outside of the city.
- Legal Supports
 - DYCD and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) need to share available legal resources with RHY providers.
 - DYCD needs to coordinate with a legal assistance agency that specializes in doing immigration law with youth to conduct training for the RHY community. This training should provide an overview of the various application processes and eligibility criteria.
 - DYCD and MOIA need to make immediate funding available to expand the and support the on-site legal support at RHY programs.
- System Coordination
 - H&H must work with DYCD to ensure that the HERRC has specific support in place for unaccompanied migrant youth and that DYCD is charged with working with their RHY providers to coordinate the placement of youth into the RHY system.
 - DYCD must work with ACS to successfully coordinate placement and services for unaccompanied migrant minors that present at the RHY programs.
- Emergency Shelter
 - DHS needs to allow youth the option to be referred for placement in a non-youth specific DHS shelter through the DYCD to DHS referral process. Accommodating these requests should consider youth choice regarding location and population-specific sites.
- Housing Access
 - The Commissioner of the Department of Social Services (DSS) needs to eliminate the 90-day eligibility criteria for CityFHEPS vouchers.
 - The Administration needs to expand the eligibility for CityFHEPS to undocumented immigrants that otherwise are eligible.
 - The Administration and DYCD need to work to identify landlords that have vacant units to match youth with Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) to free up beds within the RHY shelters.

Long-term Needs

- Translation
 - The Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) needs to issue funding to their DYCD RHY contracted providers to support pay increases for their current bi-lingual staff, and additional funding needs to be awarded to hire bi-lingual clinicians.

- Legal Supports
 - MOIA needs to partner with DYCD to fund legal support for runaway and homeless youth. This could be facilitated through a contract amendment with a current legal provider who has the capacity to expand their work to include recurring legal clinics at the RHY programs.
- System Coordination
 - DYCD must identify a youth drop-in center to serve as the centralized assessment and support center for migrant youth and young adults. Additional funding and support must be issued to the identified program to cover bi-lingual staffing, mental health personnel and lawyers, as well as emergency clothing, food and hygiene products.
- Emergency Shelter
 - DHS needs to fund additional youth-specific shelters in their system. The current three available have proven inadequate to meet the need
 - DHS needs to create young adult specific mental health shelters as well as young adult specific Safe Havens and stabilization sites. NYC currently does not have a youth specific mental health shelter, which directly leads to chronic street homelessness amongst young adults with mental health needs.
 - DYCD needs to fund additional beds for young adults (21-24yo). The current 60 beds available remain full on a nightly basis, leaving young adults who do not feel safe in the DHS system to stay on the streets or in the 24hr youth drop-in centers.
 - DYCD needs to fund Crisis as well as Transitional Independent Living Programs that specialize in working with youth with more significant mental health needs.

For questions please contact:

Lauren Galloway

Coalition for Homeless Youth, lauren@nychy.org, (404) 408- 1431

The Coalition for Homeless Youth

Founded in 1978 as the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) is a consortium of 65 agencies whose mission is, as a membership organization, to use its collective voice to promote the safety, health, and future of runaway, homeless and street involved youth through advocacy, authentic collaboration with youth and young adults (YYA) with lived expertise and training and technical assistance.

CHY is primarily an advocacy organization, leveraging the expertise and experience of its membership as well as YYA with the lived experience of homelessness to shape the landscape for runaway and homeless youth across New York State. This is achieved by increasing public awareness, coalition building, policy work and public advocacy campaigns for pertinent legislation and funding. Notably, in 2015, CHY was instrumental in the advocacy efforts that resulted in the doubling of the State budget for runaway and homeless youth services. CHY's advocacy also contributed to the development of NYS statutory and regulatory changes that became effective in 2018, permitting localities across the State to extend length of stay and increase age of youth served by RHY programs in their communities. Most recently, we passed state legislation this session that will grant decisionally capable runaway and homeless minors the ability

to consent to their own health care, including gender-affirming care. As well as NYC legislation that gives both homeless youth and youth aging out of foster care access to city-sponsored housing vouchers.

An additional area of focus for CHY is the strengthening of service delivery for runaway and homeless youth, primarily through the provision of specialized trainings and technical support. Until 2019, CHY held the state contract to provide annual web-based trainings, on diverse topic areas, to providers across the state, reaching hundreds of professionals working with homeless and runaway youth. Since 2019, CHY has continued to provide training and technical assistance on a smaller scale due to funding restrictions; however, resuming this service remains a top priority for our membership.

Lastly, and most importantly, as a coalition and voice for a community that is often overlooked, underrepresented and under-resourced, CHY prides itself on ensuring that the majority of our staff have the lived experience of youth homelessness. Our commitment to giving power to those with lived experience is also prioritized through our support of the New York City Youth Action Board (YAB), as well as our annual Youth Advocacy Fellowship Program and new Homeless Youth Peer Navigation Pilot. These initiatives not only expand the way that CHY is authentically collaborating with YYA who have the lived experience of homelessness, but it also awards us the ability to work together with YYA, to give them the tools and supports needed so that they can effectively create change.

New York City Council, Committee of the Whole

Oversight-Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

December 20, 2022

My name is David Miranda, and I am the Senior Staff Attorney at Covenant House New York (CHNY.) I would like to thank the New York City Council for the opportunity to testify today. I am pleased to be here on behalf of our Executive Director of Covenant House New York, Julie Farber, and our entire Covenant House community.

At CHNY, we serve youth ages 16 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness. We are the nation's largest, non-profit agency specifically dedicated to serving homeless, runaway and trafficked youth. During this past year, CHNY served more than 1,600 young people in our programs. On a nightly basis, we provide shelter, transitional and supportive housing to approximately 350 young people, including LGBTQ youth and pregnant women and mothers with their children as well as survivors of human trafficking/commercial sexual exploitation. Our youth are primarily people of color and more than a third have spent time in the foster care system. Many of our young people have experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of parents or other caregivers, and a disproportionately high percentage of our youth struggle with the pervasive impacts of trauma, mental health issues, and substance abuse. We provide young people with food, shelter, clothing, medical care, mental health and substance abuse services, legal services, high school equivalency classes and other educational and job-training programs. All of these services help young people overcome the trauma of homelessness and abuse and move toward stability, security and a successful future free from exploitation.

Influx of Immigrant Youth

Since the current immigration crisis began, CHNY has served more than 70 migrant youth and currently more than 30 are residing with us. We are proud to be on the frontlines helping these vulnerable young people by providing food, safety, shelter, immigration legal services, mental health and medical care, among a variety of other services.

We testified at a NYC Council hearing in September 2022 that, while we are grateful to be able to help, the situation is stretching the available resources for all of us that work with runaway and homeless youth (RHY,) particularly in the area of immigration legal services. Since the last hearing, no additional funding has been provided by the city, state or federal governments, and the public and media spotlight has seemed to dim. Yet, the service needs have not diminished. In addition, although there have been many discussions about the needs of these new arrivals to our city by all levels of government and throughout the nonprofit community, there has been little specific attention paid to the unique developmental needs of youth and young adult migrants. Additionally, most of the early public discourse focused on the migrants' immediate needs, including food and shelter. Now that many of the migrants have been in NYC for several months, we must turn our attention to their long-term needs, especially housing.

Service Needs/Spanish Speaking Staff and Programming

Our Spanish speaking staff at CHNY are doing everything they can to help at all hours of the day and night. We have implemented Spanish speaking mental health groups and life skills workshops. We have started classes to familiarize our young migrants with New York City, including how to navigate the subway/transportation system and understand U.S. currency. The hearts of the Covenant House and wider RHY community have gone out to our young migrants. However, more resources are urgently needed in order to support targeted services that can be delivered by Spanish speaking staff.

Immigration Legal Services

After immediate needs are met, the most important need is legal services. Most of these young people are fleeing persecution (some for their LGBTQ+ status, others for their or their family members' participation in political protests) parental abandonment and

starvation. My role at CHNY is to provide direct legal representation for our youth. Since the closing of the Peter Cicchino Youth Project at the Urban Justice Center, I think I may be the only lawyer in NYC exclusively dedicated to helping young people experiencing homelessness.

Navigating city transportation and services is extremely difficult/overwhelming for youth in crisis. That's why I'm here-so youth can get help right where they live. Until recently, my caseload included public benefits, orders of protection, the collateral consequences of criminal convictions, name changes for trans youth and trafficking survivors and whatever other issues a youth experiencing homeless who drops by my office might have. These other cases are now taking longer as my attention has turned to dozens of immigration cases.

In other years, we would refer our small number of youth needing immigration legal services to community partners with an expertise in immigration law, such as the Door. However, the Door now has more than 300 immigrant youth on its waiting list, and no legal services agency in NYC that we are aware of is currently taking additional immigration cases. All immigration legal services providers in NYC are at capacity and are not accepting new cases.

Timeliness can be crucial in these cases as immigrants have only one year from entry into the US to claim asylum, and young people must have Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) paperwork into family court before the age of 21, which many of the youth are quickly turning.

The City Bar Justice Center has generously stepped in to run immigration clinics at CHNY. Their model of training and supervising corporate lawyers to handle immigration issues will expand the number of young people who will be able to receive high quality, pro bono immigration legal services. I am proud not only to work at CHNY but also to be part of a homeless youth and legal services community that works together to properly care for and serve vulnerable newcomers. Yet, even with all of this help from community partners, the resources are far from sufficient. CHNY and our colleague organizations need additional resources for immigration legal services.

Need to Find Guardians

Not all of our migrant youth have strong claims to asylum. This is because unfortunately, federal law does not consider fleeing starvation or violence (other than persecution by the government) to be grounds for asylum. Many of our young migrants would be eligible for SIJS, as they have been abandoned by one or both parents. However, a guardian is required to support a SIJS applicant's claim. A guardian's obligation to youth over 18 is to act as a mentor and guide, which is something that young migrants could greatly benefit from. Unfortunately, very few of our migrant youth have been able to find guardians to support their SIJS claim.

Long term Housing

Now that some of our migrant youths have reached the maximum length of stay allowed in a crisis program, we have needed to turn our attention to long-term planning, with housing being the first priority. Unfortunately, most of these youth are not able to access various housing programs and vouchers due to being undocumented.

Transitional Housing (TH) programs, where youth can stay for up to two years, are currently the best option for undocumented youth who have reached the maximum length of stay in crisis shelter programs. However, there are limited TH beds in the RHY system, and they are only available until youth are 21. If we cannot figure out long-term plans, in addition to TH for these young migrants, our two choices are bleak – either discharging them to homelessness (which we try to avoid at all costs,) or having migrant youth remain endlessly in our programs, thereby taking up beds for other youth. We respectfully ask NYC to create a special housing voucher program specifically for migrant youth.

Ultimately, young people under the age of 25 have unique developmental needs that have been compounded by the trauma they have experienced in their home countries and on their treacherous journey to the US. Dedicated youth immigrant beds and services, especially immigration legal services, long-term housing programs and vouchers and appropriate translation and mental health services are urgently needed. Appropriate resources will enable these young immigrants to reach their full potential so they can both

legally stay and thrive in their new country. CHNY is on the frontlines of this crisis and here to partner with NYC. Additional beds and resources are necessary to meet the needs of this crisis, and to model to the world the right way to welcome abandoned youth and asylum seekers.

I again thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

David Miranda
Senior Staff Attorney
Covenant House New York
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Testimony Submitted by Nicholas Buess
on behalf of
Food Bank For New York City
for the
New York City Council Oversight Hearing
on
Examining the City’s Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
December 20, 2022

Thank you to Speaker Adams and the City Council for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the city’s response and delivery of services to the recent arrivals to our country and our city. I am Nicholas Buess, Director of Government Relations for the Food Bank For New York City.

ABOUT FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

For 40 years, Food Bank has served the people of New York City, and we currently support a member network of nearly 800 food pantries and soup kitchens citywide. Food Bank’s network feeds an estimated 1.6 million New Yorkers, providing free, nutritious, and culturally appropriate meals to New Yorkers in need – this is at the very heart of Food Bank’s mission. Our partner network of community-based organizations throughout the five boroughs provide food assistance to New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. Thanks to investments from the City Council and other partners, we are also able to distribute personal care and hygiene products such as shampoo, deodorant, diapers, and menstrual products which can be prohibitively expensive but are no less necessary.

SERVING IMMIGRANTS AT THE EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK

Since the news on the arrival of new immigrants from border states earlier this year, Food Bank’s member organizations have reported increases in individuals and families needing emergency food network services at their food pantries and soup kitchens. **Many new arrivals rely on the emergency food network since they often do not qualify for federal benefits** until they have received an affirmative decision on their asylum petition.

Serving Food and More

Our members have reported that many migrants have lost almost everything during their journey to get to New York City. They have observed that young children and families outnumber older individuals and couples. Migrants are in need of clothes, including winter clothes. Many are in need of hot meals while they are staying in shelters or temporary housing without cooking equipment. One member in Queens has received approximately 1,500 migrant clients so far, more than doubling the number of people they see every week. Another program in Manhattan is serving an additional 2,250 meals each week. They described the sudden increase in demand as alarming, and they are not sure how

their food supply budget will hold up as Title 42, the law that grants federal authorities the power to deny entry of people and products into the country to limit the spread of a communicable disease, expires this month and new waves of immigrants are expected to arrive in our city. Our member organizations also report that migrants are seeking assistance with obtaining proper identification and job referrals, trainings preparation and opportunities for those that will be eligible to obtain a work permit through asylum. Additionally, migrants need access to health care in the community where they are staying, as well as phones and MetroCards.

New York City's food pantries, soup kitchens, and community-based organizations that make up the emergency food network have been reactive to serving migrants, but need additional resources in order to be able to cope with the need. In addition to food assistance, some are already able to provide translation services thanks to community volunteers. Others, including Food Bank For New York City's direct service center, are helping process applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for those who are eligible.

The emergency food network is facing food shortages. During the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, public and private investment in emergency food assistance increased. These were essential supports that helped us meet spiking community need. However, today those emergency resources are gone, while the lines at our food pantries remain just as long. Because of a dwindling food supply among other circumstances, Food Bank has had to suspend our onboarding of new food distribution partners, despite dozens of requests for assistance from organizations that are working to serve food, including to recently arrived New Yorkers, and need additional assistance.

IMPROVING SERVICES TO MIGRANTS

Invest in Existing Social Service Network

To successfully address emerging community need with public funding, New York City should invest in the existing social service network to help strengthen services to the new immigrants and asylum seekers; and provide funding for flexible, scalable food distribution to bridge the gaps in the brick-and-mortar network.

Fortify The Emergency Food Network

Food Bank For New York City will continue to support our network members with food, provide SNAP application support, and operate with mobile pantries in communities that include higher numbers of settling migrants. **The City should take action to address food shortages at food pantries and soup kitchens** by addressing food supply gaps for programs participating in NYC's Community Food Connection (CFC) program while ensuring community organizations that are *not* participating in CFC have access to additional resources including baby formula and milk, culturally relevant foods, and ready to eat meals.

Strengthen the Food Pantries Initiative

Food Bank applauds the City Council for ongoing support of emergency food providers with the Food Pantries Initiative. We have been proud to partner with the Council for years to administer the initiative for hundreds of food pantries and soup kitchens. **Food Bank urges the City to continue to protect and strengthen this support to local community organizations**, as well as provide flexible funding to address emerging community needs throughout the year.

Invest in Mobile Pantries

The City should invest in flexible food services such as Food Bank's *Mobile Pantry Program* which deploys full pantry distribution at locations that don't have a traditional food pantry location. This flexible program delivers food for same-day distribution in collaboration with a local partner who provides community outreach and volunteer support. Each Mobile Pantry stop provides clients with a bag of shelf stable pantry items, protein and fresh produce and feeds 300 families in each visit. Mobile pantry allowed us to serve immigrants from Ukraine this past summer and continue to serve zip codes the City identified as key areas where migrants have been settling.

Support Community Based Benefits Outreach and Assistance

Emergency food will continue to aid all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. Migrants who have approved asylee status are eligible for benefits including SNAP. *Food Bank's SNAP Task Force* will continue to offer community outreach and assistance for migrants who may qualify for these grocery benefits. We applaud HRA/DSS for their recent trainings on how migrants can access benefits, and **support investment in robust community-based outreach and assistance in collaboration with our SNAP Task Force.**

At Food Bank For New York City, we will continue to strive to meet the need of this moment and support our member organizations as they continue to feed food insecure New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, amidst the ongoing economic fallout of COVID, in face of rising food prices and supply chain challenges. Our city, state, and federal government should leverage the existing, trusted network of community based organizations that make up the emergency food network, investing resources and providing support, to quickly get assistance to those who most need it most.

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**Testimony re: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services
to Migrants in New York City**

Submitted to:

Committee of the Whole

Submitted by:

Frankie Miranda, President & CEO, Hispanic Federation

December 20, 2022

Thank you, Speaker Adams and all other members of the Committee of the Whole for allowing me to present this testimony on behalf of the Hispanic Federation; a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance the Hispanic community, support Hispanic families, and strengthen Latino institutions through direct service programs and legislative advocacy. I am here today to discuss how we can continue to support asylum seekers and migrants in New York City.

Background

At the beginning of 2022, our city began experiencing an acute and complex humanitarian emergency. Texas' Governor Abbot began sending migrants and asylum seekers to the Northeast in droves. He justified these actions by citing that immigrants would face a better quality of life in sanctuary cities, such as New York. New York City has always provided services to those who seek it, and we cannot ignore that the treatment of migrants in Southern states this past year has been abominable. Once in Texas, migrants were often forced onto buses and with very little information as to where they were going and given no choice to decide where their home should be. Despite the difficulties that migrants are facing, New York has maintained its promise to provide asylum seekers the resources and support that they need to not only survive, but also thrive. Since May, over 20,000 migrants have been transported from Texas to New York City.¹

HF's Presence

¹ "Why New York is Resorting to Tents to House Surge of Migrants" *The New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/22/nyregion/migrants-homeless-shelter-crisis.html>

Many individuals arriving to the United States are escaping civil strife, environment disasters, and economic and physical violence. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Since the arrival of migrants, Hispanic Federation alongside many other community-based organizations, have been critical in ensuring that the needs of migrants are prioritized. In August of this year, my staff and I traveled to Port Authority on countless mornings to join the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to welcome those from Texas and neighboring states. At Port Authority, we were the first people to welcome these individuals and offer resources such as personal hygiene products and clothing. After helping them settle in, we connect them with essential services, such as health insurance, shelter, food, and legal support.

In August, we were invited to join community-based organizations at the city's resource center to ensure that migrants are being enrolled in health insurance plans. Our navigators worked with over 40 individuals a day to ensure that they found a health plan that fit their needs. Additionally, we awarded \$100,000 in aid to organizations that are also on the frontlines supporting migrants so they can further support this population by providing shelter, food, clothing, medical care, transportation, and more. These organizations have been essential to bridge the gaps that city services cannot provide, and we are truly thankful for their work.

In November, a family of four showed up at Hispanic Federation headquarters requesting assistance. A mother and father with two young girls that fled their country because two family members were murdered, and they were the next target. They came to our borders with hope, as many of their family members had to be left behind. They have been referred to many agencies and are currently on a four-month waiting list to access legal counsel. Luckily, with our limited resources, Hispanic Federation was able to provide legal consultation, shelter information, enroll them for health-insurance, and provide a hot meal. Yet, they still cannot access a critical service, and that is direct legal representation. With no work authorization, they cannot hire a private attorney, which can cost upwards from \$16,000.

In direct response to the urgent needs of migrants, Hispanic Federation launched a national effort in 2021, Caminos de Esperanza, to provide direct legal representation to serve the most vulnerable. Collectively, we were able to represent 590+, including families and children. Yet, with 1.6 million pending cases, not including any initial application submitted, and

the influx of newly arrived migrants, there is much work to be done. Hispanic Federation and our network of nonprofits are eager to continue providing aid and resources to those in need; however, they are limited in capacity and funding. We are confident that state and federal funding will come through to support NYC. When that happens, nonprofits must be prioritized and be funded. We encourage New York City to partner with Hispanic Federation to provide critical services such as direct legal assistance. HF has a long standing performance history of providing culturally and linguistically competent information to the community, and we hold the capacity to tap into our partner organizations for support.

Issues being faced

Currently, we find ourselves in a state of crisis. The number one issue that migrants face is the lack of accessible and affordable legal representation. Most people coming into New York City do not have direct legal representation or know where to find it. When aid is provided by the state, there are long waiting lists which can impede access to additional services, and delay filing important paperwork. Moreover, many incoming migrants do not have the means to get legal representation. With limited resources, many of our community-based organizations are at overcapacity or cannot meet the demand for vital services needed. With the one-year window working against families to find assistance to submit their asylum applications, thousands of vulnerable people will lose the opportunity for humanitarian relief and are at risk of being sent back to their native countries, often in dangerous or life-threatening conditions.

Secondly, migrants need medical care, but are not familiar with 1) which services they are eligible for, and 2) where to find them. Hispanic Federation is working arduously alongside our diverse and trusted member agencies to ensure that we can meet this population's basic needs. Community based organizations serve as the bridge to these critical resources and need investments to continue meeting the growing needs of these asylees.

Furthermore, the Department of Education is dealing with an influx of students from migrant families seeking asylum – more than 5,500 new migrants have enrolled in New York City public schools this year – and they need substantial support. Migrant children who arrive in New York City after fleeing their home countries have experienced extreme trauma due to their

displacement and current living conditions. These new arrivals are often placed in shelters that don't provide them with adequate resources to succeed at school.

Unfortunately, this year alone, over three quarters of NYC public schools experienced nearly half a billion dollars in Fair Student Funding cuts that caused loss of staff and programming – hurting already vulnerable populations like migrants and special needs children.² Although the city gave schools serving asylum seekers \$12M, the NYC Comptroller estimates \$34M is needed so schools can hire professionals (teachers and mental health workers) to properly support these students. The DOE has taken steps to provide these students with transportation, food, and language assistance. However, these efforts alone will not succeed in helping these children overcome their trauma and succeed academically in our public schools. They instead need extensive academic and social-emotional support to help them transition into their new schools.

Recommendations

The City Council and Mayor's Office can lead by expanding resources and partnerships with trusted community-based organizations to deliver culturally and linguistically competent care. Migrants deserve the right to receive information in their native language, and these community-based organizations have proven their ability to efficiently connect with high-need individuals and provide services through public education campaigns. Hispanic Federation has worked relentlessly to ensure that basic needs are met, and we encourage city government to minimize duplication of efforts by partnering with us and our network to ensure that incoming migrants continue to receive timely, high-quality care. We hope city government can provide additional long-term investments for these organizations to help this large population of migrants achieve the quality of life they fought so hard to obtain.

The children of migrant families will face challenges beyond those common to other children in the New York City school system. Their living conditions are often substandard, and they may lack access to proper health care or other necessities. Many come from rural areas with vastly different cultures and standards than those found here in New York. Many have

² NYC Schools Face Funding Shortfalls As They Step Up to Meet The Needs of Migrant Students:
<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/nyc-schools-face-funding-shortfalls-as-they-step-up-to-meet-needs-of-migrant-students/>

suffered trauma during their journeys across the country; some have witnessed or experienced violence. The city and DOE must act swiftly to provide schools with the necessary funding to support the complex needs of students from migrant families focusing on culturally and linguistically competent aid.

Additionally, community-based organizations have a proven capacity to provide legal aid in linguistically and culturally responsive ways through the DOJ's accreditation program. However, there are barriers in place for CBOs to receive accreditation. We recommend that the process to become an accredited organization be expedited so that migrants can receive the services that they urgently need from organizations that are capable of providing aid. We urge the city to provide assistance to CBOs for expanded legal services and case management for migrants, so they have long term support in New York.

Lastly, we encourage city government to create a robust database with information on the services available to migrants so that CBOs are not duplicating efforts. This information can be placed in a centralized location and shared with migrants so that those arriving in NYC are aware of services they can receive. Having this information available can help service providers and the city to be more intentional and strategic with the support offered to migrants.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. New York is, and will always be, a sanctuary for migrants. We thank the City Council for your continued efforts to support the immigrant community. We look forward to collaborating with you to elevate the quality of life for everyone in New York City.



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Homeless Services United's Written Testimony Submitted to

The New York City Council Committee of the Whole Oversight Hearing on the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants, December 20th, 2022

My name is Eric Lee and I'm the director of policy and planning at Homeless Services United. Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing mission-driven, homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers. Thank you, Speaker Adams and Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the Council for convening this hearing and allowing me to testify today.

HSU is grateful to the Council for its steadfast leadership on immigration rights and commitment to housing all New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status. Through your efforts, New York City continues to be a beacon of hope and protection for families and individuals seeking a better life. While the immediate need is daunting, the Human Services Safety Net can meet the demand with key investments and policy changes.

The task before the City and shelter providers is considerable, and while there has been a lull in the influx of migrants, the system must be prepared for an uptick in demand for shelter as Title 42 is likely to expire on December 21st. Since the Council's Immigration Committee Hearing on September 30th, the City has made some incremental progress towards reducing homelessness, including hiring additional NYCHA staff to expedite lease ups with Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV), creating a 1-month unit-hold fee for EHV apartments (beginning January 1st, 2023), and proposed changes to the CityFHEPS rule to add flexibility to income limits for single adults and work requirements for families with minor children. While these steps are promising, **larger reforms must still be implemented to further expedite housing placements from shelters and to strengthen the safety net to prevent more households from being homeless while ensuring the DHS shelter system and its non-profit providers are able to meet current and future crises:**

- 1. Fasttrack hiring of frontline staff to fill vacancies at HRA and DHS to eliminate delays for Cash Assistance, SNAP, One Shot Deals, and rental assistance**
- 2. Bolster eviction prevention and legal services to meet overwhelming demand**
- 3. Establish a reliable DHS shelter pipeline to create purpose-built service-rich shelters and normalize fiscal operations of DHS-contracted programs**
- 4. Expedite placements from shelter into permanent housing to shorten time spent homeless**

Making these changes will result in efficiencies that can help DSS and DHS meet savings targets required by the Mayor's PEG without undercutting the homeless and social services safety net during an economic downturn will diminish services when more people must rely on them.

1. Fasttrack hiring of frontline staff to fill vacancies at HRA and DHS to eliminate delays for Cash Assistance, SNAP, One Shot Deals, and rental assistance

As HRA recently testified that their agency has a staggering a 20% vacancy rate, as well as other recent reports of vacancies at DHS and other City agencies, we are seriously concerned that Mayor Adam's directive to City Agencies to eliminate 50% of their vacant positions as a cost-savings measure will permanently hobble units that should be enhanced to ensure that New Yorkers experiencing homelessness have timely access to assistance to regain permanent housing. Moreover, it should be noted that eliminating vacant positions primarily funded through Federal dollars would not result in noticeable if any cost savings for City funds, as was the case when HRA eliminated Medicaid positions.¹ A significant portion of the Federal funding for these positions is not received by the City until they positions are filled, so eliminating vacant positions does not free up additional monies.

Extraordinary efforts should be taken by the Administration and HRA to address severe staff vacancies at HRA's Public Benefits Access Centers (formerly called Job Centers) and SNAP Centers. Public Benefits Access Centers play a pivotal role in both preventing homelessness as well as enabling households in shelter access permanent housing. Providers are reporting significant delays with Public Assistance applications and telephone interviews, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits, processing of client documents, CityFHEPS recertifications, FHEPS applications and modifications. As a result, applicants are seeing their Public Assistance applications denied or cases closed, One-Shot Deals denied, their on-going CityFHEPS fail to renew, and households at risk of eviction or in shelter unable to qualify for rental assistance vouchers like CityFHEPS or FHEPS.

As the Council is well aware, the City's local food pantries were sorely tested by the thousands of new arrivals to our City who are struggling with food instability. **As HRA testified before the General Welfare Committee on December 15th of this year, HRA is failing to process Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits in a timely manner for over 53% of its cases.** As advocates testified, people can't eat retroactively- the benefit NEEDS to be timely to serve its purpose of keeping people nourished. **Vacancies at HRAP SNAP Centers must be filled to address these delays to relieve pressure on local food pantries and soup kitchens currently feeding both migrants and those awaiting SNAP benefits.**

Without sufficient levels of front-line staff at HRA to process applications and conduct interviews, households will not be able to get the assistance they need in time to stop an eviction, or even see their stable housing jeopardized because HRA failed to process their CityFHEPS renewal paperwork, causing the voucher to expire and rental arrears to accrue. Deputy Commissioner Berry confirmed these fears in her testimony before the General Welfare Committee on December 15th, noting that HRA does not process timely Cash Assistance benefits for 38.6% of its cases.

To open an active Cash Assistance case, clients must first submit an application either through ACCESSHRA or at an HRA Public Benefits Access Center, followed by a telephone interview which is

¹ As per NYC HRA Budget, according to NYC Council Finance



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conducted by staff from HRA Public Benefits Access Centers. Prevention and shelter providers both report clients are either not receiving a PA phone interview within the allotted 7-business day timeframe or any call whatsoever from HRA, which results in their Case Assistance case being rejected for **“Failure to Keep/Complete Interview: No Schedule Appointment”**. **This was the number one reason given why Cash Assistance cases were rejected by HRA, accounting for 17,557 out of 50,917 total rejections for April through June of this year.**² While some portion of these could be due to the client not picking up, it should be noted that the number often shows as blocked, and no timeframe is given for day or approximate time to expect the call. Clients have won fair hearings where “Failure to Keep/Complete Interview: No Schedule Appointment” was the reason for their case rejection by providing phone records proving they did not miss a call from HRA. This lack of Public Assistance telephone interviews does not just affect on-going Cash Assistance applicants. Tenants applying for a One-Shot Deal also must complete a Public Assistance telephone interview, and households cannot apply for rental assistance including FHEPS or CityFHEPS without a Public Assistance case open. **Public Assistance phone interviews should be on-demand, like SNAP interviews, and HRA should hire up enough staff to be able to meet that expansion of service delivery.** Failure to take such action will result in the City actively contributing to the crisis of homelessness by failing to issue timely preventive assistance.

Homebase providers are noticing up to **4-to-5-month delays for HRA Public Benefits Access Center staff to process CityFHEPS recertifications, resulting in tenants’ vouchers ending despite their submission of renewal paperwork within the allotted timeframe.** Renewal notices are mailed to CityFHEPS voucher holders 5 months before the annual deadline to renew, with instructions to renew via snail mail, email, or hand delivering to an HRA Benefits Access Center. Tenants submitted their completed renewal forms to HRA before the deadline, but they are not being processed by HRA Center staff before the deadline, resulting in CityFHEPS falling off their budget, causing their household to fall into rental arrears. Tenants try going to an HRA Center to no avail, and ultimately end up at Homebase who also tries to submit a CityFHEPS renewal to HRA’s Public Benefits Access Centers, flagging it for HRA staff to try to rectify the wholly avoidable housing instability. Homebase offices are struggling to keep up with demand, the contracted rates for providers have been largely stagnant and despite crushing demand, no new funding has been added to their programs to scale up to meet the increased needs in the community. **HRA urgently needs to address their staffing issues and must not continue to foist their responsibilities onto an already overburdened and underfunded Homebase program.**

2. Bolster eviction prevention and legal services to meet overwhelming demand

Renters in New York City are needlessly losing their homes and entering shelter because of the overwhelming number of households in arrears and the relentless pace of housing court cases set by the Office of Court Administration (OCA). Staff at Homebase programs are heroically trying to help as many households at imminent risk of homelessness as possible, but they are burning out in record numbers. Homebase programs are struggling with high vacancies and remaining staff have extremely high

² <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/news/11168-170/fy22q4/2022-Apr-Jun-CA-4-Case-Rejections-by-Council-District.pdf>



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caseloads often encompassing the workload and role of multiple people. **One Homebase program reported a 52% staff attrition rate from June 2021 to 2022.**

Homebase programs have been tasked with providing multiple additional supports beyond their original scope, with little to no additional resources to accomplish the work. Homebase now provides access to rental assistance vouchers like CityFHEPS and Emergency Housing Vouchers, but without funding in their contracts to hire specialized staff for those roles, existing staff must split their time between cases at urgent risk of losing their housing, and non-emergency cases. Currently Brooklyn and Bronx Homebase already report having appointment waitlists stretching 6 weeks or later for non-emergency cases.

At the same time, delays from HRA Benefit Centers are having a ripple effect for tenants to be able to get help from Homebase providers. Without HRA being able to process their benefits and rental assistance applications and paperwork in a timely manner, cases are churning through Benefits Centers, taking precious time for households in crisis and multiple applications and follow-ups by applicants and Homebase staff to finally get things approved. These delays also indirectly impact other tenants' ability to access Homebase services, as Homebase staff must spend more time following up with HRA to make sure HRA resolves the case (e.g., a CityFHEPS restoration, or FHEPS application or modification), time which could have been spent assisting other households.

To accomplish the Mayor's Housing Plan vision of upstreaming prevention to stabilize more households sooner, the City must invest additional money to hire additional staff to do the work.

Additional resources could be deployed in several ways, including: 1) revising the Homebase RFP to expand staffing and right-size wages to attract and retain qualified staff to fill vacancies, 2) opening new Homebase locations within parts of the City with greatest need, and 3) developing a dedicated unit within Homebase programs with staff focused on assisting tenants apply for rental vouchers and search for housing in the community, to allow other Homebase staff to refocus on assisting the most urgent cases at risk of losing their homes.

To stop more households from needlessly losing their housing, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) must slow down their pace of court cases to allow Universal Access to Counsel (UAC) providers to meet the demand for legal representation. **OCA has been deaf to pleas from legal providers pleas to slowdown which WILL mean households who are eligible for legal representation in housing court will be forced to represent themselves in court.** The Council recognized the importance of legal representation when it created the historic right to counsel for tenants in housing court, and it is unconscionable that households are being denied access to that right because the Courts refuse to proceed forth in a manageable manner. UAC providers are trying to hire as many new housing lawyers as quickly as possible, but it is not something which can be accomplished overnight. UAC providers are currently working at capacity and have been instructed by HRA to start utilizing waitlists without any guidance how to manage them. Legal providers are unable to provide estimated wait times because they are assigning cases to the next attorney that becomes available, with this all-hands-on deck approach further contributing towards burnout and staff vacancies. Without a way to give UAC providers enough time to work through the backlog of cases and reduce caseloads, the City's Right to Counsel is in serious jeopardy.

In addition, The Human Rights Commission's Source of Income (SOI) Unit saw a net reduction in the total headcount in the FY23 budget, and while we are grateful to the Council for pushing back against the City's more severe headcount reduction, the SOI unit needs additional funding to restore and expand its ability to bring cases against discriminatory landlords and brokers as well as enough staff to reach out to landlords in real-time to help make sure prospective tenants do not lose a unit because of discrimination. Without the ability to bring cases to trial, voucher holders will continue to be discriminated and unable to have a fair chance at housing.

3. Establish a reliable DHS shelter pipeline to create purpose-built service-rich shelters and normalize fiscal operations of DHS-contracted programs

As HSU previously testified, the City's shelter system capacity could have been better positioned to meet the initial impact of the migrant crisis had it committed to a reliable shelter development pipeline to maintain a 5% minimum vacancy rate. This would allow the shelter system the space to meet unforeseen upticks in DHS' front door while allowing them to shut down poorly designed and dilapidated sites. The City must stop allowing NIMBYism and political opposition to cancel the opening of new purpose-built shelters, or else the City will have to rely on costlier hotels with emergency procurement contracts to meet surge capacity. People experiencing street homelessness often cite security and building conditions as reasons to not enter shelter, and by creating new client-centered facilities located closer to their community, DHS can address those concerns and convince more individuals to come inside.

Our non-profit members want to be good partners to the City and provide quality, compassionate care to both new and lifelong New Yorkers, but to be able to do so, DHS-contracted non-profits must be in a healthy enough financial position to be able to absorb the risk that new contracts entail. While the Mayor recently declared victory against non-profit contract delays, DHS shelter providers are still struggling with contract registration and amendment delays, resulting in few bids submitted for the emergency RFP for 600-unit shelter for migrants and a number of providers wary of overextending themselves with additional emergency sites.

To help bolster the fiscal health of non-profits answering the call, the City should ensure funding for human service programs is aligned with actual costs including escalations over the life of the contract and, that administrative mechanisms to draw down funding are fast and efficient. The City should also leverage emergency procurement models from past crises during a formal State of Emergency, ensuring a first round of funding accompanied by a multi-year plan for fund renewals for community-based organizations. Moreover, funding for organizations must cover the full cost of services (not only salaries), including just compensation, a composite fringe rate sufficient to pay benefits comparable to our government counterparts, mental health support for clients, funding for accessibility tools, language access and other resources for workers.

Defining fiscal health of DHS-contracted non-profits is not limited to our need for timely contracting and payment but also, embodied by the strength of our non-profit workforce who are woefully underpaid

and overburdened. Just as our eviction prevention staff are struggling with high caseloads and burnout, our homeless services staff are also facing challenging situations with too few resources and headcount to meet the need head-on. Many shelter providers are also awaiting registered contract amendments to pay Prevailing Wage for their shelter security guards, as well as amendments for program services. While DHS shelters will be able to make targeted salary increases for some staff through the Citywide Workforce Investment Fund, large-scale workforce wage reform for City-contracted non-profit workers is needed. As HRA noted on December 15th, HRA is unable to fill frontline positions that pay \$40,000-\$47,000, plus City pensions and healthcare. DHS-contracted non-profit case managers often make considerably less. Social workers haven't seen meaningful wage increases in years despite rampant inflation and crushing student debt and are now questioning their decision to work in social services with all the associated stress and vicarious trauma. Nonprofit contracts need to be adjusted to pay competitive wages to all staff, at least to ensure rates of pay are comparable to those paid by DHS. In addition, to meet immediate needs for migrants, shelters could benefit from the flexibility of wage differentials to attract bilingual staff, in addition to longer term reforms to increase wages for these positions overall. The City must normalize the fiscal operations of homeless services programs and pay our staff, to ensure qualified and experienced non-profit providers stand ready to answer future calls for shelter services.

4. Expedite placements from shelter into permanent housing to shorten time spent homeless

Housing resources like rental assistance vouchers and supportive and affordable housing options are critical to addressing homelessness, but administrative delays and bureaucratic red tape needlessly prolong the time a household must languish in shelter before being rehoused.

Rental assistance vouchers like CityFHEPS and State FHEPS are fraught with processing delays, stringent eligibility criteria, and rules which erode the buying power of the voucher. Rental Assistance Vouchers can be improved for New Yorkers in the following ways:

- a) Commit additional funding to bolster headcounts within DHS and HRA units responsible for processing rental assistance applications and public benefits access and rebudgeting, and one-shot deals.**
 - i) DHS utilizes a pool of staff to review CityFHEPS applications, but individual staff are not assigned specific applications, meaning that there is no individual staff accountability on DHS' side to ensure that a packet progresses forward in a timely manner, and shelter staff lack the ability to reach out to the reviewer to workshop an equitable solution for individual cases which have complicated situations and considerations. Instead, packets are returned multiple times, sometimes for insignificant clerical corrections. We understand the immense workload of DHS reviewers given the number of applications being submitted on a daily basis, and **we strongly urge the City to fund DHS to bolster their headcount to process applications in a more collaborative way with shelter provider staff.**

ii) HRA needs sufficient headcount to process public assistance benefits and rebudgeting, as well as CityFHEPS and State FHEPS applications in a timelier manner.

(1) As previously mentioned timely decisions on applications for public assistance is necessary for rental assistance. State FHEPS requires an active public assistance case at all times, as rental payments are tied to it, and CityFHEPS applicants need to either have a public assistance case in active or “Single Issue” status when applying to be able add the voucher to the client’s budget and begin issuing payments to landlords. Without sufficient staff at HRA Public Benefits Access Centers to quickly process public assistance applications and interviews and rebudgets, households will be unable to move out of shelter with CityFHEPS vouchers.

(2) **HRA should be empowered to hire sufficient staff to be able to process CityFHEPS applications and complete lease-ups within a 30-day timeframe.** Shelter providers report being asked to resubmit CityFHEPS paperwork including updated signed leases because the package was not processed quickly enough by the City and documents grew “stale”. A household should not be forced to wait in shelter because DHS and HRA do not have enough hands to process applications in a timely manner nor should shelter staff have to do double work to compensate for agency delays. Moreover, these delays negatively impact landlord interest in renting to our clients because they are losing money once the application takes longer than the 30-day unit hold fee.

b) Correct the CityFHEPS rule to reflect the Council’s intent of Int. 146

i) Remove Rent Utility Deductions from calculating the maximum allowable rent.

HSU supports Int. 229, which seeks to remove rent utility costs from the maximum permissible rent for apartments. This change to the CityFHEPS rule chips away at buying power of CityFHEPS vouchers which were very intentionally set by the Council at the Fair Market Rent for New York City. As rents for many apartments do not include the cost of all utilities, this deduction reduces the number of viable apartments available for voucher holders. We further recommend that the City issue a utility credit to households who must pay out of pocket for utilities to avoid any household experiencing a cost burden, similar to the section 8 program.

ii) Remove Rent Reasonableness tests from CityFHEPS applications.

This test to determine if a proposed rent is reasonable to similar units in the community has already harmed households in shelter who lost viable apartments set below the Fair Market Rent. Just as concerning is that this process is completely opaque to a voucher holder and shelter staff who would be unable to verify whether an apartment is reasonable unless they purchase an account with a third-party website. Voucher holders would be left stumbling in the dark looking for housing, submitting applications only to be told to either negotiate with the landlord to lower the rent or keep looking. While the City has paused it temporarily to try to improve the calculations, we urge the Council to consider legislating its removal from the CityFHEPS rule altogether. DSS’ concern that a few unscrupulous landlords may try to ask for higher rents than deemed acceptable should not mean forcing all voucher holders to go through a completely opaque process which has already stopped households from moving into permanent housing.

c) Expand rental assistance eligibility to help more households

i) Remove the 90-day DHS shelter stay eligibility requirement for CityFHEPS.

We urge the Mayor and Chief Housing Officer Katz to make good on their promise to remove this outdated policy from the CityFHEPS rule. The rationale of forcing people experiencing homelessness to languish in shelter for 90 days to prove they needed housing is cruel and debunked rationale that believed that housing is a draw to shelter. DHS intake centers verify that people are indeed homeless and in need of shelter, which would weed out any supposed people that don't actually need the housing assistance.

ii) Explicitly extend CityFHEPS to households regardless of legal status.

Households lacking legal status are some of the longest-term stayers in DHS shelters because they are categorically ineligible for most types of assistance. As thousands of new migrant households come to New York City and enter shelter, thousands more households will be unable to exit shelter to permanent housing because of their inability to afford the cost of rent. The CityFHEPS rule should be changed to explicitly allow households to qualify regardless of their legal status, as it would help families and individuals without status to achieve the American dream, while creating a cost-savings for shelter services.

iii) Lift the maximum income limits for initial eligibility from 200% of the Federal Poverty Limit (FPL) to 50% Area Median Income (AMI) to allow the "working poor" to be able to afford rent. Too many hard-working New Yorkers are stuck in shelter because their paycheck isn't enough to afford rent but too much to qualify for a voucher. We appreciate the administration acknowledging the need to improve income limits for Single Adults by proposing flexibility slightly above the 200%, but we believe initial income limits should be changed to 50% Area Median Income (AMI) for both singles and families, to widen the income band for both, helping more households to exit shelters and attain permanent housing.

iv) Remove the work requirement for households in shelter.

While the proposed rule change would lower the minimum requirement from 30 hours of work per week to 14 hours, we feel that the work requirement should be eliminated altogether. Pregnant and new mothers who are heads of household cannot work, and should not have to wait in shelter until they are physically recovered enough to work to be able to move out of shelter.

v) Remove the shelter history requirement for households trying to access CityFHEPS in the community.

Housing vouchers should be provided to everyone at the risk of homelessness, not just those that already experienced the trauma of homelessness at least once before. Removing this requirement to access housing vouchers in the community would align with the Mayor's goal of upstream prevention services to stabilize households sooner, rather than waiting for them to destabilize before offering assistance.

While individual circumstances of the moment make homelessness and the rising shelter census appear like an intractable problem, with key investments in prevention, shelter programs, and access to public benefits and rental assistance, New York City can continue to make strides and serve as a shining



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example of a sanctuary city. Thank you, Speaker Adams and Deputy Speaker Ayala and the entire Council, for your unyielding commitment to families and individuals experiencing the trauma of homelessness, and we appreciate the opportunity to testify on the bills being discussed today. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at elee@hsunited.org



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee of the Whole

“Oversight - Examining the City’s Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants”

December 20, 2022

Submitted by: Human Services Council (HSC)

Introduction

We urge the City of New York to transform its approach to the 30,000+ people seeking asylum and other refuge in NYC, and to more equitably prepare for anticipated new arrivals. This calls for a shift from reactive initiatives towards meaningful investment in an exhausted human services infrastructure.

HSC is a membership organization representing 170 nonprofit human services providers in NYC, serving as a coordinating body, advocate, and intermediary between the human services sector and government. Our testimony follows consultations with 80+ human services providers representing community-based, citywide, statewide, and national nonprofits serving people seeking asylum and other reasons for migration.

These providers report acute needs for safe housing, food, clothing, and medical treatment. Clients need immediate and long-term care coordination, legal services, employment, affordable housing, healthcare, childcare, skills training, and language learning, among other services. Communities include older adults, young children, people of the global majority (non-white), LGBTQ/TGNC+ people, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, and more. Many navigate the complex traumas of unfathomable struggles to leave home, followed by racist forced migration within the U.S. that violate humans by “shipping” them interstate. Some face long roads ahead in aspiring for a new home, with providers projecting 5+ years of needs based on legal processing alone.

Many providers have programs tailored towards social services or geographic/identity-based communities in NYC that correspond with the many communities *within* newly migrating communities. These providers showed up to meet the rapid new needs in 2022, despite a lack of much-needed resources. Among the human services providers consulted by HSC in November and December 2022:

- 96% reported providing services to people seeking asylum entirely or partially out of pocket, extending existing funding and staffing to their best ability, despite being uncertain about possible reimbursement.
- 40% reported that a government entity asked them to provide services for people seeking asylum (predominantly Mayoral offices and City agencies). Less than 13% said that complete governmental funding was offered for these partnerships (with 80% of funds offered as reimbursements).
- Other providers reported that they would provide services if they had the funding or staffing.

Providers are over capacity and straining to meet existing needs, especially after prior enforcement policies, concurrent COVID-19 recovery, and overall migration trends.ⁱ And yet, human services organizations continue to help the City try to meet the reputation it boasts: a sanctuary for oppressed people here and abroad.

Advocacy

Cross-Cutting

1. **Create a dedicated, expedited funding stream for comprehensive human services, with funding amount and focus determined in partnership with human services organizations** (\$25 million in emergency funding at minimum).ⁱⁱ
 - Following the announcement of a State of Emergency, leverage dedicated emergency procurement models from past crises (e.g., COVID-19), ensuring that the first round of funding is accompanied by a multi-year plan for fund renewals and is accessible to community-based organizations.ⁱⁱⁱ

- Improve transparency by disclosing all coordination and spending in the City’s response to date, including all funded and unfunded coordination with organizations (recipients, amounts, and durations of funding) across Mayoral offices and City agencies.
 - Ensure that the full costs of services are paid to organizations (not only salaries), including just compensation, mental health support, coverage for accessibility tools, and other resources.^{iv}
2. **Design and resource a public education campaign for New Yorkers to better understand the situation faced by their newest neighbors, mitigate stigma/discrimination, and galvanize resources for families.**
- Compassionately and respectfully humanize this effort, sharing the stories that underline the deep risk that families took to get here, and the stigma now being experienced (especially by children).
 - Partner with community and faith-based organizations, and City entities like the NYC Commission on Human Rights, to thoughtfully implement and advise the campaign to avoid tokenizing clients.

Care Coordination

3. **Significantly expand resources for care coordination and sustained case management, especially with community-based organizations providing these services (often without funding).**
- Create a more comprehensive service directory for people seeking asylum, in different languages (especially in indigenous languages), for use by care coordinators and their clients.
 - Fund more care coordination programs to: hire more navigators/case managers and extend their employment; provide more comprehensive training across navigators and navigation sites; and supply families with what they need to access referred resources (e.g., phones, transportation support).
 - Expand navigation sites in more communities beyond the [current 10 sites](#), working with community-based providers to host and/or locate additional sites.
 - Design data collection and management infrastructure that can be centralized and used across programs, prioritizing very strong protections for clients who fear that inclusion in care coordination may result in enforcement (e.g., allowing for anonymized entries).^v
 - Advocate to the State for a sustained food assistance program, assessing what has been done in other jurisdictions (e.g., California).

Employment, Training, and Education

4. **Coordinate with State and Federal governments for more accessible and rapid employment, education, and licensing pathways.**
- Demand that the Federal government expedite Employment Authorization Document processes.
 - Ensure that NY State expands access to their Licensing Act regardless of immigration status.
 - Expand dedicated resources for sustained and accessible workforce development trainings, including interpretation support and donated technology (e.g., laptops, tablets, phones) pre-loaded with information on these processes.
 - Eliminate caps on street vending licenses/permits to provide opportunities for newly arrived immigrant entrepreneurs, and remove the NYPD from enforcement of street vendors.^{vi}
 - Ensure access to childcare for all newly arrived families, funding community and faith-based organizations to do tailored outreach.^{vii}
 - Create pathways for people seeking asylum to find employment opportunities with human services organizations, which will rely on the expedited authorizations referenced above.

Health

5. Ensure financially, culturally, and linguistically accessible healthcare for all people seeking asylum and other reasons for migration, regardless of immigration and/or employment status.

- Elevate existing advocacy efforts for Medicaid for all regardless of immigration status, and expand educational campaigns for organizations on Medicaid qualification.
- Increase funding for Access Health NYC community-based organizations, who provide culturally responsive critical resources and services, including connecting individuals to health coverage and care.^{viii}
- Expand human services organizations' access to trauma-informed medical professionals, counselors, and social workers offering appropriate mental health care.^{ix}
- Organize mobile vaccination clinics to provide free immunizations at all service sites.^x

Housing

6. Remove any barriers to shelter, transitional, and long-term affordable housing.

- Expedite extremely slow shelter, public housing, and rental assistance processes in agencies facing bureaucratic issues with backlogs of hundreds of applications, providing them with adequate resources.
- Notably, make CityFHEPS accessible to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status, fill vacancies in CHIP apartments, and address Sources of Income discrimination.^{xi}
- Secure resources for staffing to human services organizations offering housing, ideally hiring staff from communities.

Legal

7. Work with legal services providers to accurately identify funding for emergency, triaged legal needs (\$10 million in emergency funds at minimum),^{xii} and designate an additional multi-year fund for continued legal representation.^{xiii}

- Resources should include training campaigns and legal packets for all clients and their advocates (including lawyers, DOJ representatives, SIJS, case managers, shelter employees, etc.) on rights, processes, benefits, and more; coverage of legal fees; and long-term representation.
- Resources should also support advocacy for federal policy reform, e.g., executive orders to extend the timeframe to submit applications for asylum.

Conclusion

NYC has long expressed pride in its identity as a sanctuary city. But the City is struggling to prioritize its rich resources and relationships towards a well-coordinated, equitable, community-driven, and sustainable welcome for our newest neighbors. NYC has the infrastructure within the human services sector to fully address needs. But this can only happen when the sector is seen as an equal partner, and is funded as one by the City, State, and Federal government. We have the opportunity to show that the concept of a sanctuary city is more than a tagline on a fading billboard. Meaningfully invest in human services infrastructure now to fill the gaps that have already left thousands in the dark as they enter their first winter in NYC.

Contact

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ⁱ Source: Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC); HSC, "[Essential or Expendable? How Human Services Supported Communities Through COVID-19 and Recommendations to Support an Equitable Recovery.](#)"

ⁱⁱ Sources: I-ARC and New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)'s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#); based also on current and projected total costs of these City services in the "Impact of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers on New York City's Budget" Memo released November 13, 2022 by George V. Sweeting, Acting Director of the City of New York Independent Budget Office.

ⁱⁱⁱ NYC made an emergency procurement declaration on August 1, 2022 to bypass usual procurement processes to expedite contracting of services to support asylees. Source: "Declaration of Emergency for Asylee Services and Shelter," Commissioner Gary Jenkins, NYC DSS.

^{iv} See more on just pay for human services workers in the HSC’s [Just Pay Campaign](#).

^v Design equitable and protected data sharing models based on best practices of other jurisdictions, notably the [model used in El Paso](#).

^{vi} Source: NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

^{vii} Source: NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

^{viii} See NYIC’s Welcoming [New York Campaign](#) for more details.

^{ix} See NYIC’s Welcoming [New York Campaign](#) for more details.

^x See NYIC’s Welcoming [New York Campaign](#) for more details.

^{xi} Source: NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

^{xii} Sources: I-ARC and NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#); based also on current and projected total costs of City services in “Impact of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers on New York City’s Budget” Memo released November 13, 2022 by George V. Sweeting, Acting Director of the City of New York Independent Budget Office.

^{xiii} Sources: I-ARC and NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).



December 20, 2022

New York City Council Committee of the Whole:
Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

Immigrant ARC Testimony

My name is Funmi Akinawonu and I am the Advocacy & Policy Manager at Immigrant ARC (I-ARC). Immigrant ARC is a collaborative of over 80 organizations and professional associations providing legal services to New York's immigrant communities throughout the State. Born out of the legal effort at JFK Airport during the Muslim Travel Ban in 2017, our mission is to mobilize New York State's legal service providers by facilitating communication and information sharing to better support our immigrant communities; to organize and respond to issues as they arise by coordinating resources and fostering best practices among providers; and to resist and challenge anti-immigrant policies by shining a light on injustices and confronting inequalities faced by our communities in the legal system.

Immigrant ARC is grateful to the New York City Council for convening this important hearing examining the city's response and delivery of services to migrants. Given our mission and area of expertise we will focus our testimony on the immigration legal services needs. We urge the New York City Council to allocate \$10 million in legal services funding to provide rapid response legal representation for the recently arrived migrants in New York.

Since this summer, over 22,000 migrants have arrived in New York City's shelter system from the Southern Border. This is in addition to the regular flows of migration that bring newcomers to our City to reunite with family or pursue job opportunities. What sets this group apart, however, is that by and large they have no connections to the United States and arrived here fleeing conditions in their homelands. Many arrived in need of food, healthcare, education, and shelter, and mutual aid and advocacy organizations have stepped up to provide these services. While the bussing of migrants by the Governors of Texas and Arizona and the Mayor of El Paso, has drawn new attention to the movement of migrants within the United States, it is important to note that migration is a natural phenomenon and migrants have always and will continue to travel to New York City for many reasons, including to settle into established immigrant communities, reunite with family, and establish their lives in the United States.

New York City has been given an opportunity to show that it is possible to welcome those who come to our country seeking protection. But civil society cannot do this alone. It is critical that our city and State governments provide support and infrastructure, not only provide funding for the current rapid response immigration needs, but also to address future rapid response needs.

These responses must be designed in consultation with the non-profit immigration legal service providers in New York City, who's years of experience and deep understanding of the intricacies and current state of an ever-changing immigration legal framework give them a unique ability to advise the city on how to structure legal services delivery to reach a maximum number of people.

We were disappointed that after a \$5 million procurement for legal services, designed without provider input, failed to attract bids, the Administration simply shut down communication with the overall provider community. To date, there has been no investment by New York City to provide meaningful legal services to these arriving asylum seekers. A \$1 million investment by the State, committed to for three years for a total of \$3 million, will not be enough to cover the entire need.

For years, New York City and New York State have led the country in providing legal services funding to its immigrant communities. However, this new wave of arrivals in a short amount of time has overwhelmed providers and exacerbated a long-standing crisis of representation. Heightened enforcement under the Trump Administration, continuing delays because of the pandemic shutdowns, and Washington's continued inability to fix a broken immigration system have maxed out providers' capacities.

Twenty-seven immigration service providers in New York State were surveyed for Immigrant ARC's 2021 Justice for All report. A third of the organizations who responded reported maintaining a waitlist of individuals they did not have the capacity to represent, and that the need for services was so great that even supervisors had to maintain an average caseload of 21-30 cases per year, undermining their ability to lead, train, mentor, and supervise their staff.

We commend New York City for creating programs like NYC Action, Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE), and the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), a groundbreaking program that has served as the model for government funded immigration defense programs across the United States and in Upstate New York. However, these programs, developed in response to previous crises, are at capacity and are not structurally able to deliver necessary rapid response services.

Simply put, without new funding, there is no one to take on the cases of the 22,000 migrants that have come through New York's shelter system since this summer, or the thousands more who came to New York on their own and found other places to live. **We are in urgent need of funding to mount rapid response efforts to meet the current needs, and of additional long-term funding to ensure continued representation on cases that often take years to complete.**

Even before the arrival of the newest migrants to New York City there was a backlog in immigration court of over 180,000 cases, and it is estimated that at least 50,000 of these cases are unrepresented. At 26 Federal Plaza the lines to enter the DHS offices and immigration court are so long that migrants are lining up overnight so that they can report for a mandatory ICE check-in. The consequences for missing an ICE check-in could be placement in deportation proceedings.

Today, there is still no guaranteed right to counsel in immigration proceedings in the United States, despite the fact that immigrants in deportation proceedings face serious consequences such as family separation or deportation to a country where they may face persecution, abuse, or death. Having a lawyer makes a staggering difference in an immigration case. Studies show that immigrants with attorneys are 3.5 times more likely to be granted bond (enabling release from detention) and, if they are in detention, are 10.5 times more likely to not be deported than those without representation. For those who are not in detention, 60 percent with lawyers win their cases compared to 17 percent of those without a lawyer. Many forms of immigration relief are time sensitive, such as asylum applications, which must be submitted within one year of asylum seekers arriving in the United States.

To enact meaningful, long-term, systemic change, we also urge the New York City Council to support access to long term immigration legal services both for the newly arrived migrants and other immigrant New Yorker's by endorsing passage of the Access to Representation Act (S81B/A1961A) in the State Legislature. It is a first in the nation law that would create a right to counsel for immigrant New Yorkers and fund counsel in immigration deportation proceedings.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS- NEW YORK CITY CHAPTER (NASW-NYC)
Executive Director: Dr. Claire Green-Forde, LCSW

NASW-NYC IMMIGRATION and GLOBAL SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE
Chairs: Dr. Christiana Best-Giacomini, MSW and Dr. Eric Levine, LMSW

TESTIMONY TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
Committee of the Whole
OVERSIGHT - EXAMINING THE CITY'S RESPONSE and DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO MIGRANTS

December 20th, 2022

The National Association of Social Workers – New York City Chapter (NASW-NYC) and its Immigration and Global Social Work Committee submits comments in response to The New York City Council's Committee of the Whole's request for public testimony on ***Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants***.

NASW-NYC is one of the largest NASW chapters in the country. Founded in 1955, NASW is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies. NASW-NYC sees advocacy as the cornerstone of social work practice and is committed to ending racism through public education, social justice advocacy, and professional education. To that end, NASW-NYC's Committee on Immigration and Global Social Work, established in 2017, provides thought leadership and endeavors to change the narrative around immigration in the public's consciousness. Its main strategies have been to inform, educate, motivate, and mobilize the social work community and to collaborate with a number of advocacy coalitions, social work organizations, and schools of social work, among others.

This fall, the City faced a tidal wave of needs generated by the estimated arrival by October of "approximately 17, 429 individuals (migrants), comprised of 2,896 families with children; 6,014 adults; and 734 adult families. . ." ¹ [That number has surged since then](#). In examining the City's response and delivery of services to migrants, two priorities stand out:

- The importance of seizing this opportunity to transform the City's response into a model system of care for asylum-seeking migrants, and
- The entwined mission of eliminating fear and confusion blocking immigrant access to government services for which they are eligible.

First Steps in Building a Model System of Care for Asylum-Seeking Migrants

On the international scene, despite the existence of systems and structures with the purpose to protect displaced people, we are witnessing a massive global refugee crisis with the highest levels of displacement on record. Displacement creates refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless individuals, all cases of what we can label **urgent** immigration, as opposed to **non-urgent** immigration. Even prior to the war in Ukraine, by the end of 2021, at least 89.3 million people around the world had been forced to flee their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. Among them were 27.1 million refugees, half of whom are children. Some 53.2 million are internally displaced people and 4.6 million are asylum seekers. There are millions of stateless people who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment, and freedom of movement. Political and economic conditions in these countries are horrific and people are literally fleeing for their lives. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [an astounding one in every 88 people on earth has been forced to flee for their life](#).

We acknowledge and applaud the intervention of NYC government agencies as well as the many not-for-profit organizations serving newly arrived migrants bussed to NYC under false pretenses by the Governors of Texas and Arizona, about which [NASW-NYC, NASW-Texas, and NASW-Arizona jointly voiced concerns](#) in the summer of 2022. These asylum-seeking

¹ Emergency Executive Order No. 224, October 7, 2022. <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/224-003/emergency-executive-order-224>

migrants were fleeing their home countries due to severe economic hardship and violence. NYC rose to serve them, without prior notice, and without pre-existing resources from the Federal government, and provided a strong humanitarian emergency response. That heroic work has assisted newly arrived migrant to obtain a better life for themselves and their families. Still, the fact that arriving migrants to the US have been shipped as political pawns from Border States to northern states is a moral travesty and a national failure of epic proportion.

NYC's humanitarian response to urgent needs has not been a model system of care for asylum seeking migrants. Across the globe, there has been ample experience in absorbing large numbers of migrants. Key international and national organizations have developed models for migrant welcome and integration. These models have much to offer New York City. Building a model system of care which migrants deserve and that the City of New York wants to provide depends, in part, on the ability of the Biden-Harris administration to marshal resources as to how we receive and screen people at the border and, ultimately, is dependent on Congress and the political will to support legislation that ensures that lasting, structural changes are made to fix our immigration system. At this time of Congressional gridlock, it is essential NYC take the lead in obtaining the following funding and administrative commitments from the Biden-Harris administration in the following areas:

Forecasting - Migration at the southern border, particularly among children, is continuing to surge. Moreover, NYC must be prepared for future surges of migration. A comprehensive model comprising funding, infrastructure, systems, operations, services, agency and human resources for migrant welcome and integration must be developed, with a wide array of partners and stakeholders including government organizations, not-for-profit organizations, the private sector, and migrants themselves.

Family Unity - Family unity must receive priority in law and regulation and be the organizing principle in service provision.

Housing - Identify short-term and permanent affordable, transportation-accessible, appropriate and dignified housing arrangements for migrants in NYC with the goal of reducing residential segregation by socioeconomic status.

Access to the labor market and financial inclusion - USCIS needs to speed the processing of asylum applications.

As City Councilmember Gale Brewer stated on September 10, 2022 in the *Gothamist*, [“The economy is ready for these workers. They just need the working papers.”](#) An asylee applicant with a pending application may be eligible to seek authorization to work in the United States. While an application is pending -- the wait period may be six months or more -- the asylum-seeking migrant can't be legally employed in the United States. During this time, the migrant must rely on relatives and charitable support. Some may find work in the informal economy. However, engaging in unauthorized employment generally bars an immigrant from adjusting status to Legal Permanent Resident (obtaining a green card).

Access to education – NYC should aspire to provide tailored services based on education level, literacy, and mother tongue including targeted language and vocational skills training to migrants, including:

- Online training resources for areas such as language training and interpretation services.
- Enhanced integration services to unaccompanied and separated migrant children ranging from education, language, and socio-development opportunities.
- Capacity to serve migrants in schools, especially higher education through Immigration Success Centers located on all CUNY campuses. At present, CUNY has only one Immigrant Success Center located at John Jay College.

Social Services, Health and Mental Health – NYC should ensure the provision of comprehensive services such as:

- Ensure trauma-informed crisis intervention and prevention services must be made an integral part of homeless and shelter services.
- Provide services for psychosocial support of migrants that address the physical and mental challenges that migrants may experience throughout the migration cycle. Services should include capacity-building and training of local health professionals and educators and must be guided by a flexible and multidisciplinary approach to mental health.
- Ensure the training of health and mental staff to provide culturally sensitive support to migrant populations as well as interpretation services as appropriate.

Anti-discrimination Initiatives - NYC must stake steps to reduce and prevent anti-immigrant discrimination and oppression, especially anti-Black, anti-BIPOC, anti-LGBTQ+, and other oppressed populations, such as:

- Implement innovative tools such as storytelling platforms, artistic and cultural activities, and social media campaigns to disseminate messages about the positive contributions of migrants.
- Address obstacles relating to xenophobia, anti-black, LGBTQ+, and other forms of discrimination to migrants' access to health services, and mainstream resilience through adequate information, education, and empowerment for self-help.
- Ensure budget allocation to facilitate migrants' participation in artistic and cultural activities.
- Devise, reform, and implement, as necessary, legislation on countering discrimination against migrants, in line with international standards.
- Provide operational and financial support to implement training on implicit bias and anti-black violence for all staff working with refugees and asylum seekers.
- Provide financial support to develop public service announcements that humanize refugees and asylum seekers with the goal of bridging the gap between community members and the new immigrant population.

Civic and political participation – NYC should aspire to ensure civic commitment and engagement, denoting representation in the political arena to ensure the presence of migrants in decision-making processes. Other steps include:

- Promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity for customs, traditions, language, and religion.
- Create pathways to permanent residence and citizenship. Explore pathways to guarantee legal identity to migrants. Establish consultation mechanisms to build rapport with migrant communities and offer pathways to streamline migrants' political participation and their presence in the public debate on migration.

Eliminating Fear and Confusion Blocking Access to Government Services

It is also essential that we work at the local level to intensify support for vulnerable immigrants -- whether they are newly arrived or lifetime New Yorkers in the limbo of a deferred action status. As stated by President Biden, we must do our utmost to eliminate “sources of fear and other barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing government services available to them.”²

A new rule finalized by the Biden-Harris administration takes effect December 23, 2022 (interim 1999 field guidance similar to the new regulation is being applied until December 23, 2022).³ The new rule makes clear that noncitizens who receive health or other benefits to which they are entitled will not suffer harmful immigration consequences. The 2019 rule⁴ in effect under the Trump administration threatened denial of a green card or visa for even modest use of government cash benefits. Researchers at The Urban Institute⁵ report that “[w]hile reversal of Trump-era changes to public charge regulations is a step forward, the continuation of chilling effects is a major concern” blocking access to government services. Even in this City of welcome and sanctuary, **the Center for Migration Studies⁶ found widespread fear among immigrants affected by the 2019 rule** and

² Executive Order No. 14012, 86 Fed. Reg. 8277. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/05/2021-02563/restoring-faith-in-our-legal-immigration-systems-and-strengthening-integration-and-inclusion-efforts>

³ “Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility,” 87 Fed. Reg. 55472 (September 9, 2022) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/09/09/2022-18867/public-charge-ground-of-inadmissibility>

⁴ “Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds,” 84 Fed. Reg. 41292 (Aug. 14, 2019). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/08/14/2019-17142/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>

⁵ Bernstein, H., Gonzalez, D., Echave, P. & Guelespe, D. (2022). “Immigrant Families Faced Multiple Barriers to Safety Net Programs in 2021.” The Urban Institute. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Immigrant % 20Families% 20Faced% 20Multiple% 20Barriers% 20to% 20Safety% 20Net% 20Programs% 20in% 202021.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Immigrant%20Families%20Faced%20Multiple%20Barriers%20to%20Safety%20Net%20Programs%20in%202021.pdf)

⁶ Alulema, D., Pavilon, J. (2022) “Immigrants’ Use of New York City Programs, Services, and Benefits: Examining the Impact of Fear and Other Barriers to Access.” Center for Migration Studies. <https://cmsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Immigrants-Use-of-New-York-City-Programs-Services-and-Benefits-CMS-Report-013122-FINAL.pdf>

those who were exempt from it. “Large numbers of respondents feared the use of public benefits, including by their US citizen children, due to misinformation about the impact of the new public charge rule on their ability and the ability of family members to secure legal status or permanent residence. Social media has made it easier to spread incomplete information or misinformation about the presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in local neighborhoods, as well as about the details of the public charge rule.”⁷

To fight fear and misinformation, we in the City of New York should take the lead in a public charge messaging campaign geared to encouraging immigrants to enroll in services for which they are eligible. The Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) Coalition, which has more than 600 non-profit organizations members nationally, including the national office of NASW, has developed a toolkit of talking points, video explainers, news, and social media materials to support such a campaign. Most materials are available in nine or more languages and can be easily shared.⁸ Links to PIF materials appear in the footnotes in this document.

However, outreach and education campaigns will not be successful unless we end the confusion and misinformation that exists among benefit-granting agencies as to the eligibility of immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, for government services and benefits. The National Immigration Law Center states that: “Confusion about eligibility rules pervades benefit agencies and immigrant communities. The confusion stems from the complex interaction of the immigration and welfare laws,⁹ differences in eligibility criteria for various state and federal programs, and a lack of adequate training on the rules as clarified by federal agencies. Consequently, many eligible immigrants have assumed that they should not seek services, and eligibility workers have turned away eligible immigrants mistakenly”¹⁰

The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Services (MOIA) has gathered valuable guidance in its resource guide, [Services for Recently Arrived Immigrants Resource and Referral Guide](#) (July 2019). MOIA by itself cannot perform the detailed and complex analyses required agency-by-agency to determine whether confusion or ambiguity exists as to the multitude of newly created federal, state and local benefit programs that are silent about immigration-related eligibility criteria. We ask the City Council to request City benefit granting agencies to audit their programs and services from the lens of the newly arrived migrants, who are undocumented immigrants, and take steps to identify programs and services where the agency is itself unclear as to whether immigration-related eligibility requirements apply. Where there is confusion as to federal benefits, consultation with appropriate Federal agencies or departments should be sought, or if State and local benefits are ambiguous, State authority should be sought to provide for eligibility of undocumented immigrants. This review should be done annually and conveyed to MOIA for inclusion in a detailed and robust agency-by-agency resource guide for newly arrived migrants.

Among the many resources available to New York City is the professional social work community. The National Association of Social Workers- New York City Chapter and the broader social work profession is prepared to be a full partner with New York City government to develop and implement more comprehensive, more efficient, and more effective models of welcoming and integrating immigrants and migrants into New York City. Indeed, models that are developed in New York City can serve as examples for the rest of the nation and beyond. Whereas many social workers are already involved in serving the needs of immigrants as professionals and volunteers, we call upon the government of New York City to embrace the social work community as full partners to develop such a comprehensive approach as indicated above.

As we have witnessed, the plight of refugees has dramatically worsened with no solution to the crisis on the horizon. Still, it is imperative that we change the prevailing global and domestic narratives about migration and respond to the plight of refugees,

⁷ The public charge rule affects immigrants applying for lawful permanent residence based on immediate family relationships, or those attempting to extend their stay in the United States or who were making other adjustments to their immigration status. Federal regulations exempt many immigrants from public charge determinations. The complete list can be found at: [Federal Register :: Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds](#)

⁸ Protecting Immigrant Families. Public Charge Messaging Toolkit: [Partner Toolkit - Protecting Immigrant Families \(pifcoalition.org\)](#) and [Toolkit for State and Local Government Officials - Protecting Immigrant Families \(pifcoalition.org\)](#)

⁹ The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," P.L. 104-193 (August 22, 1996), as amended by the "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996," P.L. 104-208 (September 30, 1996).

¹⁰ Broder, T., Lessard, G., and Moussavian, A. (2021) “Overview of Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs“ National Immigration Law Center. <https://www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/overview-immeligfedprograms/>

asylum seekers, migrants, and immigrants with hospitality, benevolence, compassion, and action. Lives are at stake and future generations will judge us on how we welcome and care for the new neighbors among us. *“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,”* can’t be an empty phrase on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Here in the United States, the soul and spirit of our nation, indeed, the moral quality of our society and the future of our democracy hang in the balance. NYC can light the way.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments. NASW-NYC’s Immigration and Global Social Work Committee extends our willingness and readiness to be partner with the current Mayoral administration, NYC Council, and other stakeholders, to help address NYC’s immigration and humanitarian needs.

With appreciation,

National Association of Social Workers
New York City Chapter
Immigration and Global Social Work Committee
Contactus.naswnyc@socialworkers.org

NYSABE Advocacy Committee City Council Testimony on 12/20/22

Good morning/afternoon,

I am here on behalf of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education. NYSABE represents multiple language groups and educational sectors throughout New York State with the mission to promote services for multilingual learners (also known as English language learners) through instruction in their home language and English. NYSABE promotes high quality bilingual education programs to ensure the academic success and socio-emotional development of students as they develop bilingualism and biliteracy, which provides a path toward equitable participation in a global, multilingual and multicultural world.

The effectiveness of bilingual education programs for multilingual learners is widely supported in educational research. In part, this is because children will not learn academic subject matter or be able to stay on grade level in their learning if they cannot understand the language of instruction. Multilingual learners who have the opportunity to attend bilingual education programs where the use of their home language in instruction is sustained over time typically outperform their peers in monolingual programs.

We are here today for an urgent and pressing issue: to advocate for the placement of newly arrived migrant students in schools with bilingual programs and the capacity to serve their academic, linguistic, and socioemotional needs. Migrant students are being placed in city schools that are not necessarily prepared to serve them. The reality is that there was a shortage of bilingual education programs and bilingual educators in New York City that preceded the arrival of the latest wave of migrant students. Unfortunately, the proportion of multilingual learners enrolled in bilingual education has dramatically declined over the past decade, a problem which has been exacerbated by the ongoing shortage of bilingual teachers, administrators and support personnel.

We call upon the City Council to provide the budget necessary to ensure that every migrant child entering New York City schools has the opportunity to enroll in a school that offers bilingual education in their home language and that is prepared and experienced in providing high quality education and the academic, linguistic, and socio-emotional supports needed for multilingual learners to thrive.



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**Testimony of the New York Civil Liberties Union
to
The New York City Council Committee of the Whole
regarding
Examination of the City’s Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants**

December 20, 2022

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) respectfully submits the following testimony with regard to the New York City Council Committee of the Whole oversight hearing on the city’s response and delivery of services to migrants.

I. Introduction.

The NYCLU, an affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization with eight offices throughout New York State and more than 180,000 members and supporters. The NYCLU’s mission is to promote and protect the fundamental rights, principles, and values embodied in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution and the New York Constitution. We thank the City Council for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony.

The large-scale arrival of migrants to New York City over the past several months has shed light on how the city provides for and protects the rights of its immigrant residents. New York City has always been a magnet for people from across the world in search of new beginnings or better circumstances. The arrival of buses of migrants during the fall of this year – many chartered by out-of-state governors looking to score political points – has added another dimension to the city’s tradition of welcoming new Americans.

Over the past several months, we have watched as various city agencies grapple with how to meet the needs of large numbers of asylum seekers and other immigrants making their way to Port Authority, often with few resources or community connections. We have also witnessed the dedication and generosity of

mutual aid groups, grassroots activists, and other volunteers who have stepped up to ensure that arriving migrants are treated with dignity.

It is an understatement to say that the city's response to recent migrant arrivals has been far from perfect. From the time that buses began arriving in Manhattan late last summer, the NYCLU's organizing team has been in communication with mutual aid groups and other service providers who have been on the ground every day working to meet the needs of migrants, often with very limited resources and no help from the city administration. Housing and transportation for arriving migrants has been inadequate, as have on-site translation services necessary to navigate an unfamiliar landscape of public services. We have heard from people turned away from shelters for not having documentation that had been confiscated from them by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The New Yorkers who have devoted their time to filling gaps in the city's response have too often not received the support and acknowledgment they deserve.

Much has happened since the first buses of migrants began arriving earlier this year, and the range of issues raised by the city's response have numerous implications for public policy. While the arrival of buses carrying migrants into the city may have slowed since the fall, large numbers of people continue to enter the U.S. at the southern border,¹ many of whom will no doubt make their way to New York City. We urge the City Council to listen closely to the impacted people, volunteers, and service providers who will be testifying at today's hearing, whose experiences should guide any immediate action the Council takes. Today's hearing also offers an opportunity for the Council to take a broad look at the city's various laws, policies, and programs that serve and defend the rights of immigrant New Yorkers and consider how they can be improved.

In our testimony today, we focus on a few areas where the Council can use its legislative and oversight authority to not only respond to the influx of recently arrived migrants, but also make New York City a safer and more welcoming place for all immigrants.

II. Access to housing and public benefits.

Recently arrived migrants deserve the same access to stable housing and basic necessities as all New Yorkers. Many of those arriving on chartered buses

¹ Jose Luis Gonzales, *Some 1,500 migrants crossed Rio Grande into El Paso on Sunday – witness*, Reuters, Dec. 13, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/some-1500-migrants-crossed-rio-grande-into-el-paso-sunday-witness-2022-12-12/>.

come to the city with little, if any, money or personal belongings, and may have had critical identification documents taken from them along the way. It is imperative that city agencies accommodate these newly arrived New Yorkers and make critical services available notwithstanding these barriers and challenges.

Inadequate housing for recent arrivals has been a particular concern. Since the fall, the city has started construction on multiple emergency shelter facilities in less accessible areas of the city, only to shut those facilities down in a matter of weeks.² There have been multiple reports of migrants being turned away from city shelters for failure to provide documents that they did not have access to,³ while Mayor Adams mused about “reassessing” the city’s guaranteed right to shelter.⁴

The city must uphold its duty to make the right to shelter available to all New Yorkers, including recently arrived immigrants, and must work with families and immigrants who might lack the usual documentation required to ensure that nobody is improperly turned away and left unhoused. Shelters should exercise flexibility and remove unnecessary bureaucratic barriers that prevent or delay enrollment. More critically, though, the city must act to facilitate more permanent and stable housing options for immigrant New Yorkers. This should include expanding eligibility for rental assistance through CityFHEPS, regardless of immigration status, and exploring other avenues to provide affordable housing to people with different types of immigration status.

Some immigrants will not be eligible for certain services or benefits because of their immigration status. A person’s eligibility will depend on the specifics of their situation, and the city must take care to conduct individual eligibility assessments for public benefits and not make incomplete assumptions about a person’s eligibility. Yet where eligibility for state and federal benefits is restricted, the Council should also step in to create benefits that are available regardless of immigration status. To that end, the Council should call on the state legislature to

² Liam Stack, *Migrant Shelter on Randalls Island Will Close After Opening Last Month*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 10, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/nyregion/migrant-shelter-randalls-island-close.html#:~:text=the%20main%20story-.Migrant%20Shelter%20on%20Randalls%20Island%20Will%20Close%20After%20Opening%20Last.migrant%20center%20in%20Midtown%20Manhattan..>

³ Melissa Russo, *NYC Demanding Asylum Seekers Provide Papers That They Say Don’t Exist*, NBC 4 New York, Aug. 24, 2022, <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/investigations/migrant-crisis/nyc-demanding-asylum-seekers-provide-papers-that-they-say-dont-exist/3829636/>

⁴ Rachel Holliday Smith & Gabriel Poblete, *Mayor Adams Wants to Reassess New York’s Right to Shelter. Can He?*, The City, Sep. 19, 2022, <https://www.thecity.nyc/2022/9/19/23357320/right-shelter-eric-adams-asylum-homeless>

pass legislation⁵ that would remove any federal barriers to extending benefits to people without proof of status, giving the city full flexibility to meet the immediate needs of immigrant communities.

III. Access to education.

The arrival of new migrants to New York City has also brought new students to the city's public schools. According to one analysis conducted in November, nearly 6,000 new students had enrolled in more than 300 city schools through programs designed to help newly arrived immigrant families.⁶ The spike in numbers of immigrant students demands close examination of long-standing issues that immigrant students have faced in our city's public school system.

To ensure that the unique needs of newly arrived immigrant students are being met, the city and the Department of Education (DOE) must devote particular attention to language access. Every student and parent must have access to school information in a language they can understand, and all students must have access to fully bilingual education in all subjects, not just in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) courses. This is especially important for older students who have less time to earn enough credits to graduate; schools must not simply counsel these students out of school or into GED programs. We also know from experience that schools too often misclassify non-English-speaking students as having special needs, and conversely, actual special needs can be overlooked where assessments do not account for language needs. City schools must take care to avoid these mistakes.

In addition to providing students with an academic education, schools can be an important gateway for families to access other necessary services. NYC Community Schools are particularly suited to serve this function. However, many schools lack the resources to provide parents with necessary information and connect them to other city and community services. When newly arrived students are being enrolled, the DOE should consider not only a family's geographic location, but the ability of a chosen school to meet families' needs.

Finally, recognizing the trauma that many recently arrived students will have endured on their journeys to the U.S., students must never be met with police tactics when entering city schools. While no student should be confronted with metal detectors and NYPD security when entering a school building, the city should

⁵ A.1997 (Cruz) / S.481 (Persaud), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/A1997>.

⁶ Gwynne Hogan, *Thousands of asylum-seeking students in NYC spread out across more than 300 schools*, Gothamist, Nov. 8, 2022, <https://gothamist.com/news/thousands-of-asylum-seeking-students-spread-out-across-more-than-300-nyc-schools>.

take particular care to assign students who have experienced these unique traumas to schools without a heavy police presence and that have adequate counseling services.

IV. Access to legal services.

Among the most critical needs of newly arrived migrants is access to affordable, quality legal services to navigate the immigration legal system. The large numbers of new arrivals since last summer have created new challenges for immigration legal services providers that have long zealously represented their clients despite too little funding and too few resources. With more arrivals likely in the coming weeks and months, the need for increased funding and support for legal services is critical.

We urge the Council to heed the testimony of the legal services providers that have served New York City's immigrant communities for years, and are best positioned to make specific recommendations about funding and coordination of services. At minimum, the Council should commit to continuing and increasing funding for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), which has provided publicly-funded removal defense for immigrant New Yorkers at no cost to clients for nearly a decade. The Council should also call on the state legislature to pass the Access to Representation Act, which would create a right to state-funded counsel for people in removal proceedings, without supplanting locally funded programs.⁷

V. Protecting immigrant New Yorkers from aggressive immigration enforcement.

Just as the city must use its resources to proactively assist and serve immigrant New Yorkers, it must also do its part to protect them from overly aggressive and abusive enforcement tactics by federal immigration authorities. This means not colluding with ICE to have people funneled into the deportation pipeline by sharing information or transferring people who have been arrested into ICE custody.

New York City has for years had laws in place that prohibit the NYPD, Department of Correction (DOC), and other government agencies from using their resources to aid immigration enforcement.⁸ However, these laws are compromised by exceptions that continue to allow people to be funneled into ICE custody based

⁷ A.1961-A (Cruz) / S.81 (Hoylman), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/A1961>.

⁸ NYC Admin. Code § 9-131; NYC Admin. Code § 14-154; NYC Admin. Code § 10-178.

on past brushes with the criminal legal system or matches on dubious government databases. Moreover, when these local laws are violated and people are harmed, there is no prescribed method for the city to be held accountable or for people to seek recourse.

The Council must expeditiously pass Intros. 158, 184, and 185 to strengthen the city's disentanglement laws. Intro. 158⁹ would create a civil cause of action for violations of the city's detainer laws, allowing people who've been harmed to obtain remedies in court. Intros. 184¹⁰ and 185¹¹ would close loopholes in the city's detainer laws as applied to the NYPD and DOC, respectively, that permit continued collusion with ICE and invite mistakes. The Council should also press the state legislature to pass the New York for All Act,¹² which would disentangle local authorities from immigration enforcement statewide; and the Dignity Not Detention Act,¹³ which would ban detention contracts between ICE and local jails throughout New York State.

VI. Conclusion.

The arrival of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers to New York City in recent months has created new challenges for the city, exposed weaknesses in its support and services infrastructure, and highlighted the generosity of the many ordinary New Yorkers who have stepped in to provide aid. It has put to the test the city's claim to be a welcoming place for immigrants. We thank the City Council for holding this hearing, and look forward to working with city officials on these issues going forward.

⁹ City Council Intro. 158-2022 (Hanif), <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5555450&GUID=EB5A0266-15BD-42BE-8A76-7E8ED9827D9C&Options=ID|Text|&Search=158>.

¹⁰ City Council Intro. 184-2022 (Powers), <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5656856&GUID=8124102F-09D6-4C0E-A130-C0EAE1D7AC6&Options=ID|Text|&Search=184>.

¹¹ City Council Intro. 185-2022 (Powers), <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5555471&GUID=7EB53635-B66A-4F3E-A62F-FDB70D020B5F&Options=ID|Text|&Search=185>.

¹² A.2328 (Reyes) / S.3076 (Salazar), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/A2328>.

¹³ A.7009 (Reyes) / S.7373 (Salazar), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/S7373>

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group on
Examining the City’s Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
Before the New York City Council
December 20, 2022

Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, Council Members, and staff, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the New York City Council on the City’s response and delivery of services to migrants. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I am the Supervising Attorney of the Shelter Advocacy Initiative and the Public Assistance and SNAP Practice in the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”).

NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial, and social injustices. We address emerging and urgent needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving clients, whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality.

The Shelter Advocacy Initiative at NYLAG provides legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access public shelter in New York City, particularly the Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system. We work to ensure that every New Yorker has a safe place to sleep by offering legal advice and representation throughout each step of the shelter application process. We also

assist and advocate for clients who are already in shelter as they navigate the transfer process, seek adequate facility conditions and resources for their needs, and we offer representation at fair hearings. The Public Assistance and SNAP Practice represents clients having trouble accessing or maintaining Public Assistance and SNAP benefits. We represent these clients at Administrative Fair Hearings, conduct advocacy with the Department of Social Services (“DSS”), Job and SNAP centers, and bring impact litigation to ensure that our clients are obtaining and maintaining an adequate level of benefits.

I have worked with numerous single adults and families who have recently crossed the southern border to seek asylum in the United States. On their journeys, they have experienced horrors too numerous to count, and when they arrive in New York City, they are often re-traumatized by their treatment at the shelters to which they have been assigned. Based on my experiences working with them, I appreciate the opportunity to offer the following comments.

- I- Asylum-seeking Migrants Should Be Provided with the Same Level of Shelter and Services as all other People Experiencing Homelessness in New York City

Earlier this year, asylum seeking migrants who crossed the southern border into the United States and arrived in New York City were housed in the DHS shelter system, where they were (ostensibly) offered all of the same supports and protections as non-immigrant DHS residents. However, in September of this year, the Mayor determined that that these new New Yorkers were not to be absorbed into the existing DHS shelter system, and instead created a new shelter system that did not

comply with the minimum shelter guidelines mandated in New York City and did not provide the residents with assistance transitioning to permanent housing. These new shelters were called the Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (“HERRCs”) and were charged only with providing shelter to the newly-arriving asylum-seekers from over the southern border.¹ The HERRCs were tasked with “immediately offering shelter, food, medical care, case work services, and a range of settlement options including through connections to family and friends inside and outside of New York City, in addition to, if needed, the possibility of direct referrals to alternative emergency supports or city shelter.”² As explained below, HERRCs do not offer all of the protections and services of DHS shelter, and the city is failing these new New Yorkers by diverting them there.

The first HERRC was a literal tent complex on Randall’s Island, meaning that people experiencing homelessness from the United States were provided with shelter inside buildings, but people experiencing homelessness from Central and South America were provided with a tent.³ After intense criticism from immigrants’ rights advocates and many members of this Council, the city closed the tent complex within a month.⁴ The residents were then moved into non-tent structures.⁵

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/695-22/mayor-adams-humanitarian-emergency-response-relief-centers-further-support-asylum#:~:text=Humanitarian%20relief%20centers%20will%20become,City%2C%20in%20addition%20to%2C%20if>

² Id.

³ <https://citylimits.org/2022/11/10/mayor-adams-set-to-shut-down-randalls-island-tent-complex-for-asylum-seekers/>

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

However, even after the HERRCs were moved inside, they still fail to meet the minimum standards for shelter in New York City. NYLAG clients report that they were not being provided with adequate food, that they did not have assistance enrolling their children in school and that they did not have access medical care. While some of this has abated, clients still report not having case workers and not being served hot food. Also, and very troublingly, residents of the HERRCs are not eligible for the housing subsidies that allow families experiencing homelessness to transition to permanent housing, which they may be eligible for if they resided in DHS shelter.

One family NYLAG represents, the P. Family, has a 4-year-old daughter and a 1-year-old son. After a difficult journey to the United States from Nicaragua, followed by time spent in ICE detention, they arrived in New York and were placed at a HERRC on November 2. The P. family's birth certificates were taken by United States Custom and Border Patrol and not returned. Because of this, HERRC staff informed the family that their children could not be enrolled in school. The P. family was not provided with medical examinations and the P. children were not vaccinated. The P. family repeatedly requested HERRC staff help to enroll the 4-year-old in school and was told it was not possible without a birth certificate.

The P. family had been living at the HERRC for over a month before they were connected to me. They explained to me that they were particularly concerned with enrolling their daughter in Pre-K so that she would have the opportunity for proper schooling and not fall too far behind. Luckily, I was able to advocate for this family so

that they could enroll their daughter in school and obtain medical exams and immunizations. However, the HEERC was aware of this situation for over a month and did nothing to address these issues. In contrast, DHS has caseworker staff on hand in its shelters to support the residents. This failure would be very unlikely to occur at a DHS shelter. Moreover, the P. family plans to stay in New York and would greatly benefit from a housing voucher to transition to permanent housing, but is not eligible for one because they were funneled into a HERRC as opposed to a DHS Shelter upon arrival in New York City.

New York City takes the position that any person can present at intake for DHS shelter at any time if they want access to the benefits and services that DHS provides. None of my clients were told by staff at their HERRC that there was another shelter system available that would help them transition to permanent housing. Clients cannot access services that they do not know exist. HERRCs should offer all of the supports, services and protections that DHS shelters do, or, at very minimum, HERRC residents should explicitly be made aware that they are entitled to enter DHS shelter if they would like to access these additional services.

II- DHS Shelters Also Do Not Provide Adequate Care to Asylum Seeking Migrants

During the summer of 2022, numerous asylum-seeking families from Venezuela and Colombia contacted me for shelter advocacy. All of them traveled great distances, much of it on foot, to escape the unspeakable horrors they faced in their home countries. All of them waited extreme lengths of time at PATH, the DHS intake center for families with minor children, before they were assigned a shelter, some of

them sleeping there for days. All of them report very few employees at PATH who speak Spanish or are willing to use an interpreter or language line (instead, they speak to them in English, which they do not understand). All of them reported appalling conditions at the shelter they have been assigned, including a lack of water and diapers, and staff who subject them to harassment, mockery, and racial slurs.

One NYLAG client, Ms. M., was forced to flee Colombia with her husband and two small children because an aggrieved business associate of her brother's had threatened to set her street vendor business on fire and murder her and her children. The family had a harrowing journey through Mexico, during which they were robbed of all their money, and Ms. M had to run with her children strapped to her body so they would not be separated. When the family reached the United States border, Ms. M. and her husband were separated from their children and sent on separate planes to New York City. When reunited at the New York airport, an airport staff member found Ms. M. crying with her malnourished children, one of whom had a fever, and sent her to the PATH intake. Ms. M. and her family slept in the PATH intake office for two nights on chairs before they were finally assigned to a shelter. Once in shelter, staff refused to provide her with formula for her baby or soap for the family to bathe. On one occasion, when Ms. M. asked the staff for diapers for her baby, she was told that she should go to work and buy them herself. Ms. M. reports that such comments are a routine part of her life at the shelter.

Similarly, when NYLAG client Ms. Y and her husband and son arrived in New York after an agonizing journey, they spent three days and two nights sleeping in chairs at

the crowded PATH intake center. They report that no one at PATH spoke or understood Spanish and they were given very little information about the intake process. Ten days after they were finally sent to a shelter, they were then told they had been found ineligible and had to go back to the PATH intake center to reapply. They were not informed they could do so over the phone, so they spent another 16 hours at the PATH intake center before being reassigned to the same shelter. At that shelter, Ms. Y reports that she was often not provided with drinking water, particularly at night. She also reports that most of the staff does not speak Spanish and does not even try to get a translator when speaking to her, and that staff insensitively ask her for her green card every day (which she does not have, and she has told them she does not have).

Lack of drinking water and lack of diapers at DHS shelter are routinely reported at DHS family shelters. One NYLAG client, Ms. V., left Colombia with her baby because her family was being hunted down by a drug cartel in her hometown. Ms. V's husband is a police officer and he stopped one of the cartel's drug shipments. Ms. V's family moved to a number of locations in Colombia and the cartel continued to find them. Ms. V. determined that she could not risk her son's life by staying in Colombia, and she was forced to leave without her husband. She made her way to the United States Border by plane and then on foot, and took a raft with her baby across the Rio Grande/Bravo River. Once they arrived at the PATH intake center, Ms. V. and her baby slept there in a chair for one night before they were assigned a temporary shelter placement. The shelter frequently fails to provide diapers or sufficient water,

which is particularly problematic as Ms. V.'s baby is malnourished from his journey, and without sufficient water, she cannot nurse him. Ms. V. was found ineligible for shelter for failing to report to an appointment that she did not know had been scheduled for her. This misunderstanding caused her and her baby to have to return to PATH and wait again to be reassigned shelter, and then to have to move rooms when she was reassigned to the same shelter.

NYLAG clients report xenophobic harassment from staff and other residents at DHS shelter. NYLAG client Ms. P., her husband and their five children had a similarly torturous journey from Venezuela and eventually were given a temporary placement in a DHS shelter. However, a few days after being placed there, they were awoken at 1:00 AM and told they had to leave by staff who had been hostile to them since their arrival. They were not given written or oral notice of why they had to leave, nor any information on how they could reapply. This family wandered the streets in over 90-degree heat with their five children from 1:00 AM until 1:00 PM the next day, when I found them and sent them back to PATH to reapply for shelter. Upon returning to PATH, they found out that they were incorrectly ejected from shelter, and that the staff had taken it upon themselves to eject the family. Ms. P.'s family continues to face harassment from the staff at the shelter and is frequently subjected to xenophobic comments.

The client stories I have shared have much in common: a traumatic danger-filled journey to escape life threatening conditions in their home country, being forced to stay at a PATH intake center for extended periods of time waiting for shelter

placement, xenophobic treatment once the family enters shelter, and insufficient water and supplies within the shelter. DHS must immediately ensure that all families are promptly processed through PATH. Moreover, all shelters must have adequate Spanish-speaking staff or available translation services, and they must provide sufficient food, water, and crucial supplies such as diapers. Finally, staff must be trained on cultural competency and aggression toward shelter residents must be immediately rectified.

III- DHS Is Not Engaging in Eligibility Investigations For Asylum-Seeking Migrant Residents

Another tremendous failure on the part of DHS is that DHS is not engaging in eligibility investigations, so these families are never deemed “eligible” for shelter. While the families are not being physically ejected from shelter, families who are not deemed eligible for shelter are not eligible for the programs that assist homeless families transition to permanent housing (particularly the CityFHEPS rental assistance supplement). Without this assistance, families are unlikely ever to gain the means to leave the shelter system and thus not finding them “eligible” effectively traps them in the shelter system. Some of these families would otherwise be eligible for housing vouchers but for the lack of eligibility investigations, and failure to engage in the investigations based on the clients’ national origin is nothing short of discrimination.

We thank the Council for the work it has done to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers, and for taking this opportunity to continue to improve the conditions for our clients. We hope we can continue to be a resource for you going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group

**Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)
before the NYC Council Committee on the Whole regarding:**

Oversight: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

December 20, 2022

Chair Hanif, Council Members, and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to City's response in regards to newly arrived migrants. My name is Jodi Ziesemer, and I am the Director of the Immigrant Protection Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social, racial, and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the homebound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence victims, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, low-income members of the LGBTQ community, Holocaust survivors, veterans, as well as others in need of free legal services.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify to the Committee on the Whole regarding recently arrived migrants. NYLAG is proud to operate in a City that values its immigrant citizens and supports much-needed services to them and to respond to urgent needs as a 'sanctuary city' that models programming and services to the nation. NYLAG along with other legal service providers have engaged with newly arrived migrant families through our various community based sites, at our central offices, and by sending staff on a voluntary basis to the newly opened Asylum Resource Navigation Center. We have been hamstrung by the City's proposal for legal funding with untenable deliverables which we felt would not allow us to provide quality, ethical services to truly respond to the needs of this population. We ask that the City Council support legal services and advocate for newly arrived migrants in the following ways.

Request Resources and Reasonable Proposals for Legal Services

In the absence of viable resources from the City to serve this population, there has been a small input of funding from the state and private funders. However, these sources are not sufficient to build sustainable programming to properly address the overwhelming and ongoing need. NYLAG in collaboration with two of our existing partners, received a small increase in existing funding from the state of New York Office of New Americans.¹ This allows us and our partners to serve newly arrived migrants who already have removal orders due to the chaos at the Immigration Courts and the failings of due process for this population. However, comprehensive funding to build new programs and sustainably serve the full needs of this population is still desperately needed. Small influx of new dollars helps legal service providers pilot programs or serve discrete needs but is no substitute for holistic, multi-year funding to establish robust and programming to address the evolving and growing need over the next few years.

NYLAG, along with 10 other city-based immigration legal service providers, signed a recommendation letter regarding City programming and resources for newly arrived migrants. I have attached that letter to this testimony but want to highlight a few critical points. First, it is essential that the City engage with legal service providers when assessing the needs on the ground and allow for innovative and flexible proposals from legal service providers to address those needs. Dictating rigid programming with high deliverables does not appreciate the range of strengths, capacity, and models that our organizations bring the city and disrespects our collective expertise on responding to the legal needs of the communities we have served for decades. Second, we recommend permitting and encouraging flexibility in the delivery of legal services which promotes creativity in the effective use of public resources. Third, because the city's diverse array of legal service providers each bring different models and strengths to the table, we recommend that the City encourage multiple bids. As we have demonstrated through many other City contracts, our organizations work well together and we build coalitions

¹ <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-legal-services-program-aid-newly-arrived-immigrants-new-york-city>

and partnerships to draw on each other's expertise. The city should encourage multiple bids to reduce administrative costs and allow us to funnel resources towards service instead of bureaucracy. Moreover, it will allow legal service providers and their partners to bring what they are best at to the table, to encourage broader and more responsive programming.

Build Programming to Properly Address the Legal Need

The legal need is twofold and must be addressed with two distinct programs and funding structures. The first need is for information, individual engagement to provide guidance on the posture and next steps on the immigration process, and assistance in changing addresses and venue. Because of deep confusion about the process, and inconsistencies and nuances in the legal postures of individual cases, broad group orientations and general information packets alone are insufficient to address this information gap. Noncitizens want and need individual guidance and counsel on their options, next steps, and process. The need is too great and too broad for staff line attorneys at non-profit legal service organizations to cover and it is not an effective use of the limited human resources in our city. Ideally, this initial triage and information would be provided through innovative programming which could incorporate mobilized volunteers, both in person and remote screening clinics, and one-on-one consultations by empowered and trained community-based organizations with oversight by legal service organizations.

Second, legal triage must be accompanied by a renewed investment in robust advice and counsel, *pro se* application assistance, and ongoing removal defense representation. The need for attorneys to screen, and advise individuals and families in removal proceedings has been growing exponentially in the past five years. The New York Immigration Court expanded from one location to three and from 35 judges to 69 judges (with 8-10 additional judges to be onboarded in the next two months).² Likewise, the number of immigrants in removal proceedings has skyrocketed to more than one million pending cases nationwide while funding for removal defense legal services has largely remained static.

² <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/eoir-immigration-court-listing#NY>

As has often been reported, having representation makes a significant difference in the outcome of an asylum claim. It is critical that the city re-invest in attorneys to provide robust advice and counsel and full representation to not only this population of newly arrived asylum seekers but the thousands of other New York-based asylum seekers who have been on the waitlists of non-profit organizations for years. These are not legally distinct populations, and the need should be addressed holistically. Additionally, with the imminent fall of Title 42 border policy, there are likely to be additional waves of migrants coming into the U.S. and to New York in the upcoming months and years and any programming and services should be forward looking and flexible to address future needs as well as the needs from migrants who migrated to New York City this summer.

These legal needs for a large and expanding population of newly arrived migrants cannot be met by attorneys alone. A full response requires an expansion of knowledge and empowerment of communities to provide education, information, support, and assistance. Attorneys and legal services can provide technical assistance, guidance, and collaboration but should not be the gate-keepers and should not bear the sole burden of addressing these needs. We need to create flexible structures that are funded by the city to empower communities to work alongside advocates to expand representation.

Finally, legal triage and full representation will not be able to immediately or comprehensively meet the need. There needs to be investment in *pro se* models of legal assistance for those who cannot be represented. *Pro se* application assistance clinics, with capacity built through volunteers, law school students, and pro bono attorneys, with quality control from legal services organizations are critical to fill in the gaps, provide bridge programming while services ramp up, and to flex as the needs shift and change. Moreover, the model of what is traditionally considered *pro se* must also evolve to include robust programming that includes more than just the filling out of applications, but to include education about claims, prepared support materials, and fuller support for non-citizens to prepare them to advocate for themselves effectively. Coalition building and coordination amongst these various entities is

essential to ensuring streamlined service delivery and effective deployment of resources. Funding innovative programming and incubating new models is important to shift and evolve with the need.

I want to once again take the opportunity to thank Chair Hanif and the members of the Committee for their exceptional leadership and commitment to overseeing issues related to immigration in New York City, and for working to schedule this hearing today. I welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these matters with the Committee further.

Pass a Resolution for Re-Designation of Venezuelan Temporary Protected Status

This current crisis is largely a failure of the federal government to develop humane policies for processing vulnerable migrants and there is no simple fix. However, the policy decision to subject all newly arrived migrants at the border to surveillance and removal proceedings has overwhelmed already strained systems within the federal government and will result in tens of thousands of migrants who will not be able to apply for asylum or request immigration status. Most of the recently arrived migrants are from Venezuela, a country which was recognized as a dangerous and untenable place to which migrants should not be forced to return to when it was initially designated for TPS on March 9, 2021. A re-designation of Temporary Protected Status for Venezuela would allow many of these recent arrivals to apply for employment authorization documents and would at least pause, if not end, their removal proceedings. This Administration designated Ukraine and Afghanistan (and re-designated Haiti) for TPS and that has significantly reduced the legal burden on those populations and has given populations the ability to quickly obtain identity documents and benefits. The City Council should pass a resolution to push the Biden Administration to re-designate TPS for Venezuelans.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group

November 17, 2022

To:

Commissioner Gary P. Jenkins
New York City Human Resources Administration
Commissioner Manuel Castro
Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs

cc:

Councilmember Shahana Hanif
Immigration Chair, New York City Council

Dear Commissioner Jenkins and Commissioner Castro,

For years, our city has led the way in improving access to representation for immigrants. Robust programs like ActionNYC, the New York Family Unity Project, and others have improved the lives of so many immigrant New Yorkers. We, the undersigned, New York City immigration legal services providers who have helped or supported these programs offer the following reflections and recommendations in light of the recent request for proposal (“RFP”) concerning newly-arrived migrants. We urge you to consider our recommendations prior to the issuance of any subsequent RFP to provide legal services in response to this emerging need, as well as for any future RFP for immigration legal services. We welcome the opportunity for collective engagement with you to discuss our perspectives in the spirit of constructive problem solving and our mutual commitment in serving migrants and asylum-seekers as effectively and efficiently as possible.

While the City may be considering a subsequent RFP for emergency immigration legal services for recent arrivals, we also recommend that the City seize the opportunity to address structural issues with the current city-contracted immigration service delivery systems. Given the state of migration and the national political context, we all share a collective goal of improving a legal services delivery system that responds nimbly to sudden, urgent emergencies and also one that meets the significant backlog of existing and eligible cases. We address first our recommendations concerning any subsequent RFP for newly-arrived migrants and then recommendations for ongoing funding for these and other immigrants in New York City.

The previously issued RFP only anticipated about \$110 per immigration legal screening of an entire household, and included an untenable number of 100 households screened per day; we could not responsibly provide services in this manner.

As a threshold matter, newly-arrived migrants are often seeking asylum or other protections in the United States and are being universally routed through a removal process. We urge the City to:

- Recognize that applying for asylum-based immigration relief is a complicated and time-consuming endeavor. As opposed to limited immigration relief options, such as Temporary Protected Status, the standards for qualifying for asylum are more complex. Due to long-existing processing delays with federal Asylum Offices and the Immigration Courts, asylum applications may not be decided for years. Further, applying for work authorization for asylum seekers takes time; as a general matter, an asylum seeker with a pending asylum application must wait at least 150 days before applying for work authorization. The actual processing of these work permits may take a significant amount of time as well.

For any subsequent RFP for newly-arrived migrants, we recommend that the City consider permitting flexibility in the delivery of legal services to promote effective and efficient utilization of public resources. More specifically:

- Consider permitting immigrant legal screenings: (1) by non-attorney staff under the close supervision of expert attorney staff; as well as (2) by appropriately trained and effectively supervised attorney and non-attorney volunteers. This model would take into account the current reality of the legal services' workforce. Like other employers and sectors, providers are facing historic levels of vacancies. Current hiring practices show that recent graduates are an important pool for staffing new legal programs. Hiring of experienced and/or supervisory staff is extremely difficult and often takes many months. It is also inefficient, as it draws mostly from one pool of experienced attorneys, who end up rotating from one non-profit to another, leaving behind caseloads that then have to be transferred to their colleagues. The unprecedented challenge in recruiting and retaining staff is due, in part, to high caseloads caused by court and USCIS backlogs, and by constant reshuffling of cases when vacancies occur.
- Consider permitting screening to occur at multiple locations, with providers determining community partners with whom to collaborate for onsite service programs. We also recommend floating clinics that change location based on need and other logistical considerations determined by the providers themselves.
- Consider allowing immigration legal service providers discretion to provide immediate *pro se* or full legal representation to certain newly-arrived migrants. These migrants are in different legal postures – some are already in Immigration Court removal proceeding, others are not, and some combination may have parallel obligations to report regularly with Immigration and Customs Enforcement– and immigration legal service providers need to be able to utilize their expertise to assess exact legal needs. This would include addressing the timely filing of asylum applications, work authorization applications, motions to change venue, and change of address notifications.

- Provide access to appropriate and adequate language interpretation and translation services, particularly in the context of *pro se* assistance.
- Include provisions for social worker assistance. These recently-arrived migrants may have substantial trauma histories that are most appropriately addressed by a social work professional. Immigration legal service providers' ability to effectively assist a trauma survivor requires social worker support.
- Consider how technology could enhance access to legal information, *pro se* resources, and Know-Your-Rights presentations, as well as more coordinated screening.
- Consider, as one component of the RFP, funding a provider to coordinate service delivery for the other providers selected to provide services, without requiring a subcontracting model. We believe that operationalizing large-scale screening requires extensive coordination and administration.
- Consider other effective contract models for immigration legal services, such as those for rapid response and naturalization services through statewide and/or national consortia. These contracts permit providers to exercise discretion in how to deliver services strategically, informed by deep connections to impacted communities. These models set price points based on levels of service rendered, a proven approach, rather than through individual negotiations.
- Consider communicating directly with legal services organizations concerning the development of programming to serve recent arrivals, as opposed to umbrella organizations such as the Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC) and/or the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) because of our experience in providing direct legal services.

For any subsequent RFP for newly-arrived migrants, we recommend that the City consider selecting multiple bids. We believe that responding to the current crisis cannot be accomplished efficiently or effectively by a single organization and that the administrative burden of that requires a sole lead provider to subcontract to other services providers needlessly taxes limited legal services resources. New York City has the advantage of numerous, diverse legal services providers with varied areas of expertise and strengths--many of whom work closely with one another and have long-standing partnerships.

For any subsequent RFP for newly-arrived migrants, we recommend that the City acknowledge that conflicts in family units are often present and that multiple family members of the same family unit need their own individualized screenings and service provision and referral mechanisms. Domestic violence and/or other family-based issues may be present between spouses and/or between parents and children, and these sensitive dynamics are often the bases for humanitarian relief. Asylum-seeking families often have members with distinct and sometimes conflicting legal claims, such as minor members who may be eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Investing in provider capacity to conduct individualized screenings and provide directed referrals relating to conflicts within households is essential for the success of any emergent legal response.

For any subsequent RFP for newly-arrived migrants, we recommend that the City consider providing for immediate legal support and wraparound services in addition to screening and referrals. In meeting the immediate needs of newly-arrived migrants, it would be more efficient and effective for the City to fund capacity for appropriate follow-up for clients served. Thousands of asylum seekers are already in removal proceedings and require either full representation or *pro se* assistance. For the thousands who are not currently in proceedings, they will need timely support filing for asylum and then applying for work authorization. In addition, effective service delivery necessarily includes appropriate and adequate language interpretation and translation, particularly in the context of *pro se* assistance and should be accounted for in overall funding allocations

For any subsequent RFP for newly-arrived migrants, we recommend that the City consider dialoguing with providers regarding the resources needed to properly serve clients. Based on our experience, we have recommendations we would like to share regarding the timeline for delivery of services and rate per case that realistically reflects the staffing necessary to carry out various services. We anticipate that, appropriately structured, \$5 million might fully serve only 10% of the estimated 22,000 recent Venezuelan arrivals.

We recommend that the City consider securing additional funding as current levels do not meet the ongoing needs of recently-arrived migrants. Without access to representation in removal proceedings, screening and referral alone will exacerbate the existing strained immigration legal services networks and result in additional inefficiencies. The immigration legal services provider community is at a critical juncture and, indeed, in crisis. The current structure is unsustainable and grossly under-resourced. Without structural reforms, the provider community and the City itself will be unable to address both the current and future immigration legal services demands of our city's migrant population. While we acknowledge that \$5 million reflects commitment by the City to address the needs of recent arrivals meeting the legal services needs of newly-arrived migrants with viable cases will require a greater investment of funds. The City's largest investment in removal defense representation, the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI), cannot meet increased need. As full representation on removal cases can often last many years (e.g., 3-7 years), legal service providers receiving IOI funding cannot absorb the thousands of additional viable cases that will require representation in removal proceedings.

We recommend that the City consider establishing multi-year rapid response immigration legal services contracts and commit to collaborative advocacy at the federal level in those tailored procurements. The emergencies faced by local governments, including here, stem from the federal government's intent to maximize deportation as much as possible. This regrettable reality is unlikely to change. It is imperative that the City's legal services delivery system anticipate and plan for inevitable recurring emergencies and surges in need for legal services.

Presently, immigration legal services providers have no excess reserves or capacity to effectively respond to such events and meet their other existing contractual obligations.

We recommend that the City consider structuring contracted service delivery requirements so that legal services providers are supported in maintaining ethical professional responsibilities. Procurements associated with removal defense representation must be multi-year bids because full representation of removal defense cases last years, which makes accepting cases risky as providers may be left with large numbers of unfunded complex matters.

We offer these additional recommendations for consideration for any RFP to follow IOI.

- Grantees' experience with IOI has led us to request flexible contracts that allow providers to shape the delivery of services including responding to emerging needs and crises while balancing staff retention and ethical service.
- We also recommend that the City consider permitting multi-year contracts to adjust numerical goals, year-to-year, given how long many cases take to fully resolve.
- We recommend that the City grant contracted providers discretion with regard to screening by, for example, permitting the screening of referrals based on capacity and priority. Such discretion would promote the efficient use of limited staff resources and equity in selection of cases given the significant demand and waitlists for services.
- We recommend that the City permit contracted providers to re-enroll cases and clients at our professional discretion and without burdensome reporting requirements. We recommend that intensive case review of matters transferred from departed staff members to their colleagues be considered sufficient for the purpose of case re-enrollment. Unfortunately, due to backlogs, the lengthy lifespan of immigration cases, and staff turnover, cases change hands, necessitating time-consuming reviews, client meetings, and strategy re-assessment.
- We recommend that the City consider a phasing in of legal services delivery systems and effective referral partnerships that acknowledges the time it takes to hire and build systems.

Our network of immigration legal services providers is on the front lines of serving immigrant communities and is uniquely positioned to respond to the ever-evolving and inevitable crises that engulf our city, time and again. Our commitment to doing so through high-quality, client- and community-centered services is unwavering, and we appreciate the City's commitment to supporting our work and the immigrant communities we serve. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss our recommendations with you to help bring forward these mutually-shared goals.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Terry Lawson
Executive Director
UnLocal

Piibe Jogi
Managing Attorney, Refugee Representation
Human Rights First

Heather Axford
Legal Director
Central American Legal Assistance

Jojo Annobil
Executive Director
Immigrant Justice Corps

Raluca Oncioiu
Managing Attorney, Immigration Program
Catholic Migration Services

Deborah Lee
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Jodi Ziesemer
Director, Immigration Protection Unit
New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Harold Solis
Deputy Legal Director
Make the Road New York

Monique Francis

Deputy Director
CUNY Citizenship Now!

Antonia House
IOI Program Manager/CILEC Coordinator
Take Root Justice



Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee of the Whole
December 20, 2022

Dr. Miranda von Dornum
Chief Medical Officer, Project Renewal

My name is Miranda von Dornum, and I am the Chief Medical Officer at Project Renewal, a New York City homeless services nonprofit agency. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

For 55 years, Project Renewal has provided shelter, housing, health care, and employment services to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, with special focus on those affected by mental illness, substance use, and criminal justice involvement. We are grateful to the City Council for your support of our programs.

We appreciate the Council's efforts to address the needs of the 21,000+ migrants who have arrived in New York since last spring. We operate seven City-funded shelters, and like many providers in the City, we have welcomed asylum seekers into our programs and worked to address their needs. With the potential expiration of Title 42 and anticipated influx of additional asylum-seekers, the City must ensure providers like us receive the support we need to meet rising demand.

As a result of the trauma and life changes these individuals have experienced, their needs are myriad and complex. We have primarily focused on providing shelter and health resources. 12 asylum-seeking individuals are residing at our men's shelter, and six are at our shelter for LGBTQI+ young adults.

Project Renewal operates a primary care clinic at the HELP Women's Shelter in Brooklyn, which was recently converted into a temporary intake shelter for single adult male migrants. We provide nursing triage services for 20 to 30 asylum seekers each day. All of them receive tuberculosis testing and screening for depression and chronic medical conditions. Clients with identified medical needs see a health care provider for additional care. These individuals often require medical interpreter services, and referrals to more specialized care.

We also offer other support, including limited benefits enrollment assistance, case management, and basic supplies like winter coats and grocery gift cards. The services we are able to provide within the constraints of our contracted funding and staffing are the minimum; additional funding would allow us to provide more comprehensive screening, evaluation, and treatment for these clients, who have endured very difficult conditions and have not had regular medical care. It would also help offset the cost of laboratory services, medications, and vaccines for these clients, who are typically not enrolled with insurance at the time that they see us at intake.

On a related note, from our observation these clients would greatly benefit from the expansion of the navigation center services to ensure they are connected to the benefits they are entitled to and legal and immigration services they need at the earliest possible opportunity.

Shelter providers like us are often the first line of response for newly-arriving migrants, providing not only housing but health services and other basic needs, all while continuing to serve thousands of other shelter residents and program participants.

With a potential new influx of migrants expected in New York City, the City should ensure that providers have the resources they need to be able to support migrants' transition to their new home. With the potential expiration of Title 42, we agree that state and federal support is also needed.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to submit testimony.



Testimony of Public Health Solutions

Before the New York City Council

Committee of the Whole

Oversight - Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

T2022-2463

December 19, 2022

My name is Veronica Smith, I am the Senior Director for Health Policy and Community Affairs at Public Health Solutions (PHS).

To Committee Chairs Speaker Adams and Deputy Speaker Ayala, and members of the full City Council, I thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide testimony today about our experience assisting newly arrived migrants to New York City. As you all know, health disparities in the city are significant, persistent and increasing. Here at PHS, our mission is to support underserved New Yorkers and their families in achieving optimal health and building pathways to reach their potential. We improve health outcomes and help communities thrive by providing services directly to low-income families, supporting community-based organizations through our long-standing public-private partnerships, and bridging the gap between healthcare and community services. We focus on a wide range of public health issues including food and nutrition, health insurance, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, tobacco control, and HIV/AIDS.

The burgeoning humanitarian crisis our city is currently working to address has further strained New York City's already overburdened social safety net. Our mission at PHS is focused on uplifting under resourced populations and the new migrant population arriving here are extremely vulnerable. Without access to critical resources to fulfill basic needs to address the health of their families, these newly arrived migrants are in danger of falling through the cracks. According [the NYTimes](#), recent city data shows more than 21,000 migrants have arrived in the city since the spring, a majority from Latin America (e.g., Venezuela) and roughly 14,000 are living in shelters and hotels.

PHS has deep-rooted experience serving immigrant and undocumented populations as many of our sites are located and operate within these communities. Forty percent of our participants are foreign-born, and we proudly employ staff that are culturally fluent with over a dozen languages spoken to better support their needs. We offer the following services that newly arriving individuals and families are eligible for including:

- Community Resource Navigation using our WholeYouNYC network of 400+ organizations and 800+ health and human services

- Connects more than 1,500 NYC residents per month to legal services, food and nutrition, education and employment, housing and shelter, benefits, family support services, free and low-cost healthcare, and more
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) - Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens
 - Helps pregnant and nursing women, infants, and children with nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and WIC checks
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as Food Stamps) – all five boroughs
 - Assists low-income families with enrollment to purchase food from grocery stores and other approved food outlets
- Assistance with health insurance navigation – all five boroughs and Long Island
 - Provides one-on-one assistance with applications and renewals
- Maternal and child health home visiting programs – Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island
 - Offers a variety of programs to support pregnant and parenting families so they have the tools they need to achieve optimal health
 - For new mothers, PHS’ Maternal and Child Health unit also provides resources from our Queens Diaper Bank
- Sexual and reproductive health services - Brooklyn
 - Provides affordable, comprehensive, and confidential reproductive healthcare for women, men, and adolescents

Our Response

Over the last several months, we have observed a steady and appreciable influx (approximately 100 new participants per month) of new migrants at various PHS sites in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens that offer food and nutrition services, WIC, and health insurance enrollment services. We were surprised to learn that many migrants coming to our sites were coming via shelters and hotels, instead of through the midtown Manhattan Asylum Resource Navigation Center the City established earlier this fall. The migrants we saw came with little or no connections or support systems, and even less understanding of the various benefits and services they were eligible for. As a result, our staff have served as navigators for migrants for a broad range of services.

PHS shared a bilingual flyer designed for newly arrived migrants with city agencies and community-based organizations involved in responding to this crisis and conducted screening and enrollment support for services (WIC, and family support in particular) at hotels and shelters, assisting dozens of families while being present on-site. We also participated in community events aimed directly at supporting migrant families to share information about our services. We also established a drop-in navigation center in Queens where we encountered a large number of migrants.

Recommendations

Over the course of the coming weeks and months, we anticipate the influx of migrants arriving in New York City to continue to rise. Many would agree the city’s initial response to this crisis has been severely fragmented and reactive. Early intervention is critical to ensure equitable access to health and social care. PHS’ network of nearly 400 healthcare and social organizations connected via technology could be

leveraged to meet migrant needs and we are ready to assist and provide support for this growing community. Last month's [announcement](#) by the Adams administration to open eight additional Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation sites, to be opened across the five boroughs is welcome news and can build on the ongoing work of the first Center.

Through our program participants, elected officials, agencies, community-based organizations, and partnerships with shelters, we have been able to make some connections to share information about our direct services. However, we would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the city to reach families in local hotels and shelters. In support of this action, PHS would need real-time information and points of contact at these hotels and shelters. We would also like to strengthen our relationship with existing navigation centers as well as with hotels and shelters accommodating families. We look forward to the continued expansion of navigation resources for new migrants with diverse groups of qualified human service organizations.

Lastly, we strongly urge officials and policy makers to develop a coordinated strategy alongside its non-profit partners that moves the city's response away from crisis management and proactively strengthens the safety net for all New Yorkers.

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About Public Health Solutions

Health disparities among New Yorkers are large, persistent and increasing. Public Health Solutions (PHS) exists to change that trajectory and support underserved New Yorkers and their families in achieving optimal health and building pathways to reach their potential. As the largest public health nonprofit serving New York City, we improve health outcomes and help communities thrive by providing services directly to low-income families, supporting community-based organizations through our long-standing public-private partnerships, and bridging the gap between healthcare and community services. We focus on a wide range of public health issues including food and nutrition, health insurance, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, tobacco control, and HIV/AIDS



Thank you to the City Council for inviting testimony today. My name is Alexandra Rizio and I am the Managing Attorney for Policy and Partnerships at Safe Passage Project, a non-profit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation. We serve over 1,200 children who live in the five boroughs of New York City and in the two counties of Long Island. The support of the City of New York has been instrumental in our work. Safe Passage Project stands ready to assist the city as it deals with the arrival of an increasing numbers of migrants, including those bussed here in cynical attempts to disrupt their lives and to challenge our status as a sanctuary.

No immigrant, not even a child, is appointed a lawyer in immigration court. If a child cannot afford to hire a lawyer, they will be forced to defend themselves alone, against a trained government prosecutor and a judge, with deportation back to dangerous conditions as the likely outcome. Safe Passage Project helps correct this injustice by providing free attorneys to kids. Beyond legal services, our social work team addresses the broader needs of clients, such as school enrollment, homelessness, access to health care, psychological services, and public benefits. The City Council has supported our work through the Unaccompanied Minors Initiative and the IOI grant stream.

The City of New York does its best to live its values as a city of immigrants, and as a sanctuary for those looking for a better life; we must not allow recent events to throw us off course. A federal judge was right to strike down Title 42: it was never a public health measure, but a back door around the legal rights of immigrants to request asylum at our borders. It has never been clearer that our immigration system needs a full overhaul, but there are steps the City can take, along with New York State, to live up to our values. In addition to meeting the immediate needs of migrants, we must also need to deal with the multi-layered, and often intentionally cruel, legal barriers that these migrants face, and that requires long-term, fulsome investment in legal services. Complex asylum cases like the ones many Venezuelan political refugees present can take years to wind through the immigration system. We need full-scale investment in legal services to address these issues. It cannot be accomplished through a *pro se* representation model or Know Your Rights presentations alone.

Legal service providers are already at capacity, with caseloads that approach the unsustainable. We need resources to develop long-term hiring plans, time to scale up services and recruit and train attorneys. We have the expertise to accomplish this, but need increased investment from government entities and funders to make it happen.



Again, I applaud the City for stepping up to this extreme, politically-manufactured challenge. Nonprofits like Safe Passage Project are ready to continue providing human-centered, trauma-informed services for our clients. Together, we can ensure that migrants are treated with dignity and respect, and that they receive the process they are due under law.



To: New York City Council Committee of the Whole
From: Robert Lewis Briggs, Staff Attorney, The Door's Legal Services Center
Re: Oversight: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

Date: December 20, 2022

The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization that has been supporting vulnerable youth in New York City since 1972. Each year, we provide services to nearly 11,000 young people, many of them immigrants, between the ages of twelve and twenty-four. The services we provide include healthcare, education, supportive housing, food and nutrition, career development, arts and recreation, mental health counseling and legal assistance—all under one roof. At The Door, we emphasize empowering and engaging the young people we serve, and we are committed to creating a safe, equitable and inclusive space for young people and staff.

The Door's unique and all-inclusive membership-based approach to youth services has become a template for other like organizations locally, nationally, and internationally. We believe in our comprehensive model and urge the City to approach its delivery of services to young migrants in a similar fashion.

The Current Trends of Migrant Youth in New York City

Because we serve thousands of Door Members every year, we are keenly aware of the various trends concerning young people in New York City. Over the past several years we have witnessed a steady increase of immigrant youth seeking supportive services, both legal and non-legal, at The Door. While we have done and continue to do our best to find creative ways to use our limited resources to meet the increasing needs, our staff is consistently at capacity and cannot keep up. Over the past several months, the amount of immigrant youth seeking services has skyrocketed to crisis levels.

The Door's Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (RHY) has been front and center in addressing the needs of young immigrants during this crisis. Two years ago, it was rare for immigrant youth to be seeking emergency housing referrals at The Door. But around April 2022, RHY was assisting approximately one to three young immigrants each week. By August 2022, that number increased to approximately four every week and has continued at that rate since then. The Door's Legal Services Center (LSC) has experienced very similar trends. Since last year, the number of young immigrants seeking legal services at The Door has increased by approximately seventy percent. On a monthly basis, the LSC routinely receives forty to fifty requests for help by young immigrants—a number already far beyond our capacity. But last month, more than one hundred young immigrants sought legal help from our office. The LSC's waitlist currently holds the names of close to five hundred young immigrants in need of legal assistance.

Serving New York City Youth Since 1972

121 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013 ♦ T: (212) 941-9090 ♦ F: (212) 966-1840
www.door.org

The Most Critical Needs of Young Migrants in New York City

Newly arriving young immigrants seeking services at The Door are predominately from Venezuela, Columbia, Honduras, and Guatemala. They struggle to navigate the services available to them in New York City because of language inaccessibility and bureaucratic obstacles. Many of them are referred to The Door by City agencies or immigration courts to request legal assistance. Legal services are certainly a pressing need, but such cases can take years. In the meantime, these young people are hungry, without housing, without health insurance, and not enrolled in school. Thankfully, we have developed the infrastructure to meet many of these needs at The Door on the spot. But due to the recent increase of immigrant youth seeking our services, we have been forced to turn many away. We ask the City and the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) to provide more resources for such critical comprehensive services to immigrant youth.

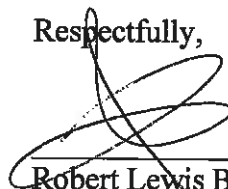
When young immigrants are referred to The Door, too often they have little to no understanding of why they were referred to The Door and what services they can access here. This should not be the case. Beyond funding, the City must also provide trauma informed and culturally competent interpretation services to immigrant youth to ensure that they fully understand their rights, what services are available to them, and why such services are important. Then, young immigrants will be better equipped to advocate for themselves and access what they need when they need it as they navigate a new and disorienting environment. In the same vein, we ask that the City fund youth services organizations like The Door to hire more bilingual staff. While our staff diligently tries to provide young immigrants with information and services in Spanish and other languages, we do not have enough bilingual staff to address this ongoing crisis. We are forced to rely on telephonic translation services, which, although better than nothing, are not sufficient for young immigrants to fully access our programs and services. At The Door's Counseling Center, for example, we have only one counselor who speaks Spanish. None of our therapists speaks any other language. Due to the intimate nature of therapy, telephonic translation services cannot practically be used. This leaves many young immigrants who have experienced severe trauma without access to critical mental health services.

As mentioned previously, we are witnessing unprecedented levels of young immigrants experiencing homelessness in New York City. Many newly arrived young immigrants are here alone with no supportive adult figures in their lives. The overwhelming majority of them lack work authorization. Although they may be eligible for legal status and a corresponding work permit, it can take months and years for such documents to be approved. In the meantime, they are left without any way to support themselves and have no way to afford rent. Sometimes this forces them to accept exploitative living arrangements, other times it forces them to take shelter on the street. While emergency shelters do exist, they are extremely limited and often not safe for immigrant youth, a particularly vulnerable group. There is an urgent need for more housing for immigrant youth, especially longer-term housing. We applaud DYCD for its implementation of Transitional Independent Living (TIL) facilities, and we ask the City to invest in and expand similar housing programs. Many immigrant Door Members have found stability in the TIL program and have graduated with stable jobs and housing.

A Comprehensive Response

The needs of young immigrants arriving in New York City are complex and warrant a comprehensive response. Though access to legal services is important, access to nutritious food, stable housing, ongoing education and medical and mental health services is just as critical. We urge the City and DYCD not only to invest in such comprehensive services, but also provide trauma informed and culturally competent interpretation services so young immigrants fully understand their rights and the resources available to them. The Door has a long history of partnering with the City and DYCD to meet such complex needs. We have the infrastructure in place. But we need more resources and more bilingual staff to meet the increased demand from immigrant youth for our holistic services.

Respectfully,



Robert Lewis Briggs, Esq.
Staff Attorney

The Door's Legal Services Center

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Submitted on December 23, 2022**

My name is Deborah Lee, and I am the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit at The Legal Aid Society (LAS).

LAS is built on one simple but powerful belief: that no New Yorker should be denied the right to equal justice. We seek to be a beacon of hope for New Yorkers who feel neglected, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they identify. From our start over 145 years ago, our growth has mirrored that of the city we serve. Today, we are proud to be one of the largest and most influential social justice law firms in New York City and nation-wide. Our staff deliver justice in every borough, working tirelessly to defend our clients and dismantle the hidden, systemic barriers that can prevent them from thriving. As passionate advocates for individuals and families, LAS is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of our City.

LAS handles nearly 300,000 cases annually through our Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights Practices. Our work across these Practices together provides us with unique insights into the challenges facing marginalized communities in NYC and an unparalleled ability to effect change on a greater scale. The Civil Practice works with low-income New Yorkers experiencing a broad range of civil legal issues that, without assistance, can escalate into situations with cascading effects that threaten their stability and keep families locked in cycles of poverty. Our specialized units cover the full spectrum of civil legal needs, including housing and homelessness; homeowner stabilization, family law and domestic violence; immigration; special education; health; community development; consumer issues; employment; government benefits and disability; taxes; and holistic services for vulnerable populations including the elderly, adults and children with disabilities, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

LAS welcomes this opportunity to address the City's response to the recent influx of asylum seekers, and more broadly its delivery of services to noncitizens. The politicization of these vulnerable migrants, including the compelled mass bussing of these individuals from the Southern border to New York and other cities across this country, has tragically dehumanized them and created extreme barriers for them in achieving safety and protection in this country.

As a proud sanctuary city, New York City has embraced newcomers time and time again; however, with this most recent influx of migrants, LAS' attorneys and staff note unique challenges that require the City to improve its legal, social, and educational services.

Here are LAS' recommendations, in the areas of immigration legal services, shelter, education, and government benefits:

Justice in Every Borough.

- **Immigration**¹ - The LAS' Immigration Law Unit has a long history of providing a multi-faceted approach to immigration legal services, emphasizing the value of full legal representation,² community education and legal screenings, policy advocacy, and impact litigation.
 - We strongly believe that full and zealous representation is our core strength and ultimately yields the most justice to our clients and immigrant communities. LAS has deep expertise in responding to community needs with full legal representation and litigation.³ High volume, light-touch models of immigration legal services can be appropriate in less complicated situations but not, from LAS' perspective and experience, for those seeking asylum. If the City issues a new procurement for these recently arrived migrants, it must acknowledge the ultimate need to provide for full legal representation services.
 - LAS also knows that the current community need for our legal services is vastly larger than our funding and related staffing allow. There are many New Yorkers

¹ Since the 1980s, LAS has maintained a citywide Immigration Law Unit (ILU) within the Civil Practice. ILU, now comprised of nearly 100 staff, is a recognized leader in the delivery of free, comprehensive, and high caliber immigration legal services to low-income immigrants in New York City and surrounding counties. Staff represent immigrants before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), in Immigration Court removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review, on appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), and in federal court on habeas corpus petitions and petitions for review. In addition to representing clients, staff conduct outreach clinics at community-based organizations throughout New York City, intake clients at immigration detention centers, and conduct trainings in various venues throughout the city. Over the most recent year, ILU assisted in over 5,200 individual legal matters benefiting over 12,300 New Yorkers citywide. In addition to providing direct legal services, ILU staff provide regular training to immigrant-serving advocates from community-based organizations, State and local agencies, and judicial and legislative staff. Partnerships with other non-profit organizations and coordination of a successful pro bono program with 30 participating law firms enable the ILU to maximize resources to meet the increasing demand for representation.

² Full representation here means entering an appearance as the attorney of record before immigration authorities and appearing before any and all tribunals to protect the legal rights of one's client.

³ Competent representation is critical for every noncitizen in removal proceedings so they can avail themselves of relief from removal. Recent reporting suggests that 85% of all children without lawyers are either ordered deported or take voluntary departure, while approximately 73% of children who have lawyers are allowed to remain in the U.S. See Syracuse University, Transnational Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), Juveniles – Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings, at <http://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/juvenile/>.

For adults in immigration detention, the benefits of representation could not be clearer: according to a study by the Vera Institute of Justice, 48% of detained cases represented by the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), of which LAS is a partner, end successfully at the Varick Street Immigration Court in New York, compared to only 4% of unrepresented cases at the court before the advent of NYIFUP – an astonishing 1,100% increase in positive outcomes. See Vera Institute of Justice, "Evaluation of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project: Assessing the Impact of Legal Representation on Family and Community Unity," Nov. 2017, at p.6. (<https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/new-york-immigrant-family-unity-project-evaluation.pdf>)

- who would greatly benefit from learning about their immigration options and receiving honest and thorough legal consultations. LAS needs funding to create a dedicated community response team within our Immigration Law Unit, to be able to pivot quickly to emergencies such as the recent bussing of migrants to New York City from border states. Our Immigration Law Unit has already been doing this type of responsive work since our inception, as emergency needs have arisen, but that has always been on top of the responsibilities our staff currently have to their full legal representation caseloads. This has proven to be unduly burdensome. Through our proposed new community response team, we would provide critical legal information, develop legal clinics as needed, and conduct legal screenings. It would also help us identify community members most in need of full legal representation by our Immigration Law Unit.
- Regarding our policy advocacy and litigation work, LAS has been a local and national leader in calling for reforms and due process rights on behalf of our immigrant clients. This unique work benefits not only our clients or New Yorkers but also immigrants throughout the country. For example, in *R.F.M. v. Nielsen*, we won a class action lawsuit challenging the Trump Administration’s policy of barring 18-21 year-olds from obtaining Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), ensuring that the rights of 8,000 New York resident youths to regularize their status and eventually pursue citizenship remain protected. In *Make the Road v. Cuccinelli*, LAS took on the Trump Administration’s public charge rules in litigation that made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, benefiting an estimated 23 million noncitizens and citizens in immigrant families across the country. And in *Velasco Lopez v. Decker*, we successfully argued that the government should bear the burden in justifying prolonged detention, creating binding precedent in the 2nd Circuit in a precedential decision that was then followed by the 1st Circuit. We are eager to continue pushing the federal government to provide more for immigrants in need but require additional funding for these efforts.
 - Regarding policy advocacy efforts on behalf of recently arrived migrants, the LAS is already working to push the federal government to consider granting migrants humanitarian parole, pursuant to 8 U.S.C. §1182(d)(5)(A)/INA §212(d)(5)(A), which would provide them immediate eligibility to apply for employment authorization (a “work permit”). This would help these migrants avoid the burden of applying for asylum immediately before they have time to access necessary immigration legal services, and also avoid having to wait at least 150 days after filing for asylum before becoming eligible for a work permit. *See* 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.7 and 274a.12(c)(8). Humanitarian parole for recently arrived and soon-to-arrive migrants would help these individuals achieve self-sufficiency and stability more quickly than what is currently available. In addition, the LAS plans to ask the Biden Administration for a

- redesignation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuela, which would open up another avenue for recent migrants to apply for employment authorization; the current Venezuelan TPS designation covers only Venezuelan nationals who arrived on or before March 8, 2021.
- While we are grateful for the generous funding from the City for immigration legal services, current funding does not allow the LAS to have sufficient essential staff -- including attorneys, paralegals and social workers -- that our clients desperately need.
 - Given the increased complexity of asylum, U visas, removal defense, and other case matters during the Trump Administration and into the Biden Administration, we need additional funding for increased training for staff.
 - We need funding for vicarious trauma support for our staff who are handling these challenging matters, which would help with both retention and eventual promotion into supervisory roles.
 - We need additional funding to support our supervisors, to help in their management of our staff's complex caseloads and to make our staff-to-supervisor ratios more reasonable.
- ***Housing and Homelessness***⁴ – The City's response to recent arrivals has been confused and needs to be more transparent. The City must instead:

⁴ LAS is uniquely positioned to speak on issues of law and policy as they relate to homeless New Yorkers. The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the *Callahan* and *Eldredge* cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the McCain/Boston litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of 19 lawful shelter to homeless families. LAS, in collaboration with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLC, filed *C.W. v. City of New York*, a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of runaway and homeless youth in New York City. LAS, along with institutional plaintiffs Coalition for the Homeless and Center for Independence of the Disabled-NY (CIDNY), settled *Butler v. City of New York* on behalf of all disabled New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, and Legal Aid is currently using the Butler settlement to prevent DHS from transferring disabled homeless New Yorkers to congregate shelters without making legally required reasonable accommodations. During the pandemic, LAS along with Coalition for the Homeless continued to support homeless New Yorkers through litigation, including *E.G. v. City of New York*, Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure WiFi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic. Extensive advocacy by LAS has led to the passage of numerous reforms, including expansion of eligibility for City FHEPS rental vouchers in 2021 to include runaway and homeless youth and youth exiting foster care, facilitating access rental assistance without requiring them to first enter adult homeless shelters, which pose safety risks, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth.

- Provide migrants and the public with a clear statement about who is eligible for placement in a Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Center (HERRC).
- Provide migrants and the public with a clear statement about the rights of people with disabilities in HERRCs and how to assert them.
- Make housing vouchers available to people with a wider range of immigration statuses.
- Prioritize permanent housing placements for people who have been in shelter the longest.
- Maintain a 5% vacancy rate in the census for each DHS shelter subpopulation.
- Continue to use hotels rather than congregate sites/tents to house recent arrivals.
- Publish daily report on HERRC census, intake, vouchers provided and exits.
- ***Homeless Youth*** – Runaway and homeless youth (RHY) providers throughout the City report hundreds of recently arrived migrant youths accessing services and the providers being ill-equipped to provide adequate services. The below are areas of immediate and long-term needs:
 - The New York City Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) needs to ensure that all their contracted programs have no-cost access to automated translation services through Language Line and that DYCD issues funding to RHY providers to support the hiring and retention of bilingual staff.
 - The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) needs to allow DYCD programs to access Project Reconnect, and Health & Hospitals (H&H) needs to create a simple process for DYCD programs to utilize the transportation resources available through the HERRCs to reunify recently arrived migrant youth with family members outside of the city.
 - DYCD and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) need to share available legal resources with RHY providers, coordinate trainings for the RHY community regarding immigration law issues, and support on-site legal support at RHY programs.
 - H&H must work with DYCD to ensure that the HERRCs have specific support in place for unaccompanied migrant youth and that coordination exists between the

HERRCs and RHY providers as well as the New York City Administration for Children's Services.

- DHS must allow youth the option to be referred for placement in a non-youth specific DHS shelter through the DYCD to DHS referral process
- The City must fund additional youth-specific shelters in both the DHS and DYCD systems.
- The City should eliminate the 90-day eligibility criteria for CityFHEPS vouchers.
- The Administration and DYCD need to work to identify landlords that have vacant units to match youth with Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) to free up beds within the RHY shelters.
- ***Education and Special Education***⁵ – As school-age children are amongst the recent arrivals to the City, we must ensure that its Department of Education provide equal access to education in these areas in particular:
 - *Language Access Issues*
 - New York City's Department of Education (DOE) must increase its bilingual and English as a New Language (ENL) programs.
 - DOE must ensure that bilingual students with disabilities get timely evaluations.
 - All parents must be notified of their rights to have language assistance including having interpreters at meetings and translated documents.
 - *Transportation*
 - DOE must provide transportation for students in foster care and other vulnerable students.
 - *Training and Hiring*

⁵ LAS' Criminal, Civil, and Juvenile practices engage in educational advocacy for our clients, in the areas of special education, school discipline, and school placement and programming. In addition to representing these children each year in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients. Our Juvenile Rights Practice's Education Law Project provides essential legal advocacy to families of children with disabilities in need of special education support and services. The Project assists families with navigating the complex New York City special education system through parent training, consultation, and direct representation at due process hearings. The Project also assists non-disabled children with issues relating to enrollment and consults on school discipline and suspension issues.

- DOE must increase training and hiring of teachers, service providers and other professionals in schools with diverse backgrounds, including people of color and who are multilingual.
- **Government Benefits⁶**
 - *The City should improve access to benefits eligibility for recent arrivals by:*
 - Offering recent arrivals benefits eligibility screening and assistance applying for benefits. Eligibility for cash assistance, the Supplemental Needs Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid benefits is dependent on the new arrivals' immigration status; based on their status, they should be screened for benefits eligibility and be given assistance enrolling. Assistance enrolling is necessary so that recent arrivals do not face the barriers that our other non-citizen clients have historically faced when going into a Benefits Access Center alone, e.g., flat out diversion, being asked if they have a Social Security Number, or whether they are already a lawful permanent resident.
 - Giving people help with verification needed to prove eligibility for benefits. Rules require applicants for New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) benefits to have certain documents that will be hard for many new arrivals to come up with. The City has a legal duty to assist with verification including accepting self-attestation and, where necessary, assisting with securing needed documentation.
 - Ensuring recent arrivals are provided the opportunity to be counseled on common concerns presented by non-citizens that could otherwise serve as barriers to applying for the help they need. The two primary concerns likely to come from this population are public charge (President Biden just issued new rule, but people still fear the old one); confidentiality of their information (will it be shared with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, etc.).
 - Continuing to train shelter providers but ensuring that providers know how to connect residents with benefits eligibility review and assistance.

⁶ Our Civil Practice's Government Benefits Practice helps the New Yorkers with the greatest economic needs obtain and maintain the government benefits to which they are entitled, such as public assistance and Medicaid. Together with our Law Reform and Health Law units, the Government Benefits Unit addresses income inequality through advocacy and class action litigation, and ensures that the agencies administering public benefits programs do so with the fairness and due process required by law. During the pandemic, the Practice has supported thousands of New Yorkers, many eligible for benefits for the first time, in accessing vital benefits and public assistance.

- Setting up stand-alone sources of assistance on the benefits eligibility piece. While shelters build their capacity to help clients with benefits, HRA can also locate "out-stationed workers" in or near shelters where people can go to determine benefits eligibility and get assistance filing their applications rather than sending folks to already overwhelmed Benefits Access Center staff.
- Ensuring "Welcome Centers" offer all of these services, including out-stationed HRA workers who screen for benefits eligibility and assist with applications, and that there are also New York State Department of Health staff who can help with state-funded health insurance enrollment.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with City Council and the Administration on these pressing issues. LAS remains hopeful that the City will fully embrace our role as a sanctuary city and as a national leader in welcoming newcomers, by providing them with the equal protection and access to justice they deserve.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deborah Lee", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Deborah Lee
Attorney-in-Charge
Immigration Law Unit
The Legal Aid Society



NYC Council Hearing Testimony on Requiring Air Monitors at Major Intersections

Transportation Alternatives

Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection

December 15, 2022

For nearly 50 years, Transportation Alternatives (TA) has led the movement for safe, equitable, and healthy streets in New York City. We write today in support of the Council's efforts to address critical air quality needs in our city, in particular through Intro 707, which would install air monitors at major intersections designated as heavy use thoroughfares and require mitigation plans for areas reported to violate existing air quality standards.

Data show the link between air pollution levels and health concerns and highlight the importance of clean air. New York City continues to fail to meet federal air quality standards, largely as a result of PM 2.5 and other fine particles in the air – and communities of color have long faced the unequal brunt of toxic air quality. These particles are small enough to enter the bloodstream, and are directly linked to serious health concerns such as asthma, increased risks for strokes and heart attacks, and reduced lung function, among others. PM 2.5 is considered to be one of the most harmful known air pollutants.

Unsurprisingly, these toxins are concentrated around truck routes and high traffic areas, a result of harsh car-centric infrastructure that has divided and devastated neighborhoods for decades. [17%](#) of New York's PM 2.5 comes from the transportation sector, primarily from the large volume of truck traffic (one stretch of the Long Island Expressway near 108th St in Corona, Queens saw an average of [18,372 trucks each day](#) in 2019 – 13 trucks a minute for a full year).

Additional air monitors would allow the City to better mitigate the negative health effects of gas-vehicle transportation on air quality and the wellbeing of New York's youngest residents and use an equity lens in addressing critical remediation measures. Children exposed to traffic pollution are [more likely](#) to have asthma, permanent lung deficits, and a higher risk of heart and lung problems as adults, and children who regularly exercise in polluted areas have [three times greater](#) chances of developing asthma compared to those in areas with cleaner air. As such, we recommend this legislation be amended to include installing air monitors around schools in New York City, to target remediation solutions for our most vulnerable public space users.

TA also recommends that the legislation delineate clear guidance on remediation measures for each major thoroughfare and high traffic area. Rates of high air pollution and asthma are well known – what we need now are concrete steps to address it. We have the tools to meet our sustainability and clear air goals, and they include fewer highway lanes and vehicle storage, more tree canopy and parks space, and a mode shift to public transportation, biking, and walking.

It is clear where our focus for cleaner air needs to be: gas-powered vehicles like cars are [responsible for 80% of the city's transportation emissions](#). As such, TA also supports efforts to address air pollution from truck idling, as through Intros 606 and 684. Our shift away from trucks must also be a full mode shift off our current freight system. While exhaust fumes are visible air pollution, other contributors include tire/brake wear and road surface dust that occur whether or not a vehicle is gas-powered or an electric vehicle (EV). Electric vehicles still emit high levels of particulate matter, through tire and break shedding and still have a significantly higher carbon footprint than e-bikes, e-scooters, and public transportation. EVs cannot be the sole answer to decreasing transportation pollution, and is why TA's 25x25 campaign is dedicated to converting 25% of our space dedicated to cars to space for people by 2025.

With Intro 707, the City has a chance to address long-standing air quality equity needs and also protect the learning environment of our youngest New Yorkers. Schools are an important air quality focus, because too many young people cannot escape the impacts of traffic pollution. [In 2018](#), 55 of every 10,000 school-aged children in Central Harlem/Morningside Heights, Manhattan were hospitalized for their asthma compared to just 4 per 10,000 in Borough Park, Brooklyn. A person's zip code should not determine their health or their future. We urge the Council to advance this legislation today.

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

Trinity Church Testimony - City Council Committee on The Whole

Tuesday, December 20, 2022 | **Subject:** Examining the City's Response & Delivery of Services to Migrants

Dear Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and members of the New York City Council.

My name is Natasha Lifton and I am the Director of Government Relations at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to submit testimony for this important hearing and for all of your efforts to ensure that the City is supporting the recently arrived migrants. This testimony provides updates on efforts Trinity Church has undertaken to support asylum seekers arriving in New York City, as well as recommendations for additional steps the Administration and City Council should take to better meet their needs.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners who represent all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out our mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Guided by the teachings of our faith, Trinity Church has remained steadfast in our commitment to supporting the thousands of migrant families and individuals who have arrived over the past year, doing our part to support their overall well-being as they adjust to life in New York City. This includes providing over **\$2 million in funding to 22 community-based organizations** serving recently arrived asylum seekers citywide. Our grantees, including African Communities Together, Bailey House, Center for Urban Community Services, Coalition for the Homeless, Bronx Community Foundation and Hour Children, are providing shelter, access to health care, education, and other services. In addition, Trinity has distributed over \$500,000 in supplies such as clothing, feminine hygiene products, and toys to community-based organizations directly serving these families and individuals.

Our grantee partners have developed innovative solutions to address the needs of asylum seekers:

- The **Girl Scout Council of Greater New York** is expanding its successful Troop 6000 program to serve asylum seekers between the ages of 5 and 17 housed in the Row NYC Hotel.

TRINITY CHURCH

WALL STREET

- The **Interfaith Center of New York** is coordinating houses of worship across all faiths to develop a network of overnight emergency shelters for newly arrived migrants.
- **New Alternatives for LGBTQ+ Homeless Youth** is using their space near the Port Authority Bus Terminal as a first stop for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers.

We appreciate the Administration's efforts to respond to this crisis, including partnering with these and other community organizations and converting over 40 hotels to serve as emergency shelters. And we commend the Mayor's recent announcement of "[Promise NYC](#)" to provide child care subsidies for migrant families and other households with undocumented children.

However, we believe additional steps must be taken to address the physical, psychological, and economic well-being of these new New Yorkers more fully.

1. **Housing - Expedite access to housing and reduce the overall shelter population:**
 - a. Lift the "90-day rule" and ensure providers receive clear, consistent guidance about this change so recipients of CityFHEPS vouchers can leave shelter and secure permanent housing faster.
 - b. Advocate for the Governor and State Legislature to enact legislation ([S2804B/A3701](#)) to create the Housing Assistance Voucher Program, which would provide housing subsidies to those ineligible for other housing programs.
 - c. Make the Fair Chance for Housing Act law so individuals with criminal records living in shelters can find housing.
2. **Employment - Advocate for Congress and the Biden Administration to enact legislation that would permit asylum seekers to legally work immediately in the United States.**
3. **Legal and Social Services - Expand legal and other supports for asylum seekers:**
 - a. Immediately release the \$6.7 million allocated in New York City's FY23 budget to increase interpretation and translation services through the creation of language cooperatives and a citywide interpreter bank.
 - b. Allocate \$10 million to fund emergency immigration legal services.
 - c. Provide an additional \$10 million to shelter operators for culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate wraparound services using trauma-informed approaches.

TRINITY CHURCH

WALL STREET

- d. Create and fund an initiative—in partnership with New York City social work schools—to enable service providers, including small community-based organizations, to hire, train, and retain social workers.
4. **Education - Meet the educational and emotional needs of newly arrived migrant children:**
- a. Invest \$4 million to expand the successful Linking Immigrant Families with Early Childhood Education Project to help immigrant families enroll their children in Pre-K.
 - b. Provide schools with funding to hire and retain additional school counselors, social workers, and English as a New Language teachers.
 - c. Ensure the DOE places newcomer youth in schools with staff best equipped to meet their needs such as those that have bilingual mental health supports, English as a New Language teachers, and ability to connect them to immigrant-serving community organizations, prioritizing schools in their new neighborhoods.
 - d. Call on the State to claim the Public Education Exemption under the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant for all state-funded applicable early care and education programs to guarantee access for all children, regardless of citizenship status.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to submit testimony.



United Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

United Federation of Teachers Testimony
to the New York City Council Education Committee's Oversight Hearing
on Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
Dec. 20, 2022

My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I'm the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). On behalf of the union's more than 190,000 members, I would like to thank the members of the New York City Council for holding today's public hearing on New York City's response and delivery of services to migrants.

We support the city and the school district's mission to welcome these new arrivals to New York as part of our city's long history as a place where immigrants and migrants from around the world have found tolerance and opportunity. The effort to ensure that these migrants and their families have safe and secure housing, access to medical care and social services, and the ability to continue their children's education in our public schools is worthwhile and urgent. In terms of the support for the more than six thousand migrant students who have arrived in our city's schools over the past months, we appreciate the challenges of the situation, but we are concerned that the Department of Education's response has not fully met the level of need. As we noted in our testimony on school funding in November, the situation is especially dire at the many schools across the city that have welcomed these new students without enough new funding to meet their needs. The \$2,000 per new student initially allocated to many of these schools was far less than what was necessary to provide services. And prohibiting schools from spending these funds to hire additional full-time staff to work with these students — even when that is the greatest need - remains a concern.

Another source of concern is the support for the migrant students who are English Language Learners, a vast majority of the newcomers. Services for students who are learning English were already inadequate, and the current situation has exacerbated the problem. The suggestions we have received from the field for concrete solutions include better onboarding and orientation for new English as a New Language teachers; access to [Audible.com](https://www.audible.com) and digital versions of books to empower students and families to use accessibility and translation tools;

specific scaffolds to support DOE core curricula; and additional bilingual books and materials in Russian, Ukrainian and Arabic. It's also important to make sure all schools are aware that the DOE's Passport to Social Studies workbooks are available in multiple languages. While the DOE quickly released a compilation of resources to support migrant students' language learning needs, we are hearing from schools that it's a challenge for teachers to read through multiple documents and implement the resources by themselves. Over the last several years, the UFT has repeatedly asked for a point person from each district to reach out to each school to support educators of ELLs, listen and provide guidance, even if it's not possible to meet every need. Most teachers we have heard from feel they are on their own as they try to support these students every period of every day. They are not aware of any DOE outreach regarding instruction. The bottom line is, the human touch has been missing.

The lack of certified teachers for bilingual education is an ongoing issue with no quick solution and has taken on greater urgency as our schools seek to support the newly arrived students. The recent mistreatment of the small group of bilingual teachers recruited from the Dominican Republic is one example of the district's failure to remedy this issue in a systematic and timely manner. As we have argued in the past, the DOE needs to think outside the box in terms of temporary supports for these students and other English Language Learners — for example, funding programs to hire additional paraprofessionals who speak the home language and who could be shared among different classes. Other options are pre-service or retired teachers who speak the home language or who can work one-on-one or with small groups, and high school or college students who could tutor as community service.

Placing so many of the migrant families and their school-age children into our city's system for homeless students is also problematic. Again, while we appreciate the urgency of the situation and the need to find immediate solutions to the challenge of safe and secure housing for these families, the reality is that the resources available for our city's students in transitional housing were already grossly inadequate. Our union has provided support for homeless students for many years through traditions such as our annual Thanksgiving dinner and coat drive and our holiday gift program, and we have welcomed the opportunity to connect with and support migrant families as part of these traditions. However, systemic issues such as confusion around connecting shelters and schools, limited transportation options, and a lack of technology and other resources in shelters and other housing for homeless families predated the arrival of these young people. Unfortunately, these issues have made their transition into our classrooms difficult and frustrating for families and schools alike.

Finally, so many of the children who have recently arrived here have gone through unimaginable trauma during their journey to our city. We have worked closely with the DOE and other organizations to increase our schools' capacity to provide social-emotional supports to students and families, including through the recent expansion of the MindUp program in schools throughout the city. However, this is another area in which the systemic shortage of bilingual staff, especially among our school counselors and psychologists, severely limits our schools' capacity to fully serve the needs of these newly arrived students and their families.

We urge the City Council to continue to advocate for these families and to monitor their situation as they and their children adjust to life in our city and its schools. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make their lives here stable, safe, and successful.



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**New York City Council Committee of the Whole Oversight Hearing re: Examining the
City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
Speaker Adrienne Adams, Chairperson
Deputy Speaker Diana I. Ayala, Chairperson
Tuesday, December 20, 2022**

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Submitted by Lena Cohen, Senior Policy Analyst**

Thank you, Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and members of the New York City Council for the opportunity to testify. My name is Lena Cohen, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing 46 neighborhood settlement houses, 40 in New York City, that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement Houses Stepping Up

Since April 2022, New York City has seen an influx of [more than 31,000](#) refugees and asylum seekers – many from Venezuela fleeing the country's brutal dictatorship and economic collapse – who have been bussed up from southern border states. The majority of newcomers arrive in NYC with little to no English language capabilities or ability to navigate city or state systems. An estimated 14,000 are living in the city's shelters, accounting for [nearly one out of every four people](#) in the system. Mayor Eric Adams recently declared a state of emergency, predicting that it would [cost \\$1 billion](#) to

house and provide social services for these newcomers. Comptroller Brad Lander also estimated that the city's schools should receive, at minimum, an [additional \\$34 million](#) in funding to adequately serve an estimated 5,500 new students seeking asylum who have enrolled and will need intense academic and social supports. The sharp increase in border crossings over the past year has created a surge in demand for social services at settlement houses and other community based organizations; and with the potential end of Title 42 – a pandemic-era emergency order used to expel asylum-seeking migrants from the U.S. – it is likely that demand will continue to soar.

UNH's network of 40 New York City-based settlement houses anticipate serving an increased number of children and families who recently migrated to New York seeking asylum, as many of them have done before during past refugee crises including the recent influx of Ukrainian refugees. Already, settlement houses are providing asylum seekers with support in navigating the many complex systems that these individuals will need to access, including education, adult literacy, childcare, afterschool programs, housing assistance, senior centers, and legal services.

To meet the urgent and shifting needs of these newcomers, settlement houses have pivoted their community outreach and support services. For example:

- At the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park (CFL), over 130 families of new arrivals have come through CFL's food pantry to receive emergency food assistance. As people wait in line for food, CFL staff speak with them in Spanish and help them enroll in a benefits access screening project. CFL staff have visited asylum seekers staying in local shelters, working with an estimated 400 people to date.
- In the South Bronx, BronxWorks opened a new migrant shelter. Funded by DHS, this shelter allows BronxWorks staff to provide temporary housing to individuals, one-on-one case management, and referrals to other program offerings. BronxWorks' team of immigration attorneys have worked with more than 300 asylum seekers to date, including 110 who are children.
- Shorefront Y of Brighton and Manhattan Beach runs a DYCD-funded adult literacy program with an 800 person waiting list. The program currently serves 360 adults in English Classes for Speakers of other Languages, with 158 of these students having recently arrived from Ukraine.
- As CAMBA's Refugee and Asylee program continues to serve granted asylees from over thirty countries of origin, there has been a recent influx in Haitian and Venezuelan Humanitarian Parolees seeking help. They currently house 70 asylum-seeking families and 31 migrant individuals in their homeless shelters. Additionally, over 500 newly arrived Ukrainian refugees have sought their services

since May 2022. CAMBA's most requested Refugee and Asylee services include job assistance, financial assistance, assistance with applying for employment authorization documents, health insurance and the supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps), Social Security cards, English as a second language instruction, child care, school enrollment, and housing assistance. CAMBA also provides emergency food support, a range of health and wellness programs, and legal services.

- Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement has begun offering ESOL classes for parents of Venezuelan asylee children enrolled in three local schools, most of whom are being housed in local shelters. These classes focus on beginner-level English, particularly navigating services, benefits, transportation, education and healthcare and are accompanied by basic case assistance.

The Need for Additional Support

Despite these innovative efforts, settlement houses and other nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) that have stepped up to welcome and serve newly arrived asylum seekers are doing so out of necessity and must receive additional funding or support from the City. The City's network of CBOs will overextend itself without sustainable and equitable funding to support the critical work they are doing in their communities to serve asylum seekers.

To date, the City's response to the influx of asylum seekers has been fragmented, and has lacked consistent, proactive communication with settlement houses and other community-based organizations. To better support the rapidly growing population of asylum seekers in NYC, all levels of government will need to collaborate and commit to immediate investments that sustain aid work already happening on the ground and build upon it. Systems will need increased capacity to serve the new arrivals, but providers will also need the right tools to support the unique and complex needs that these children and families have. Specifically, UNH offers the following set of recommendations for New York City to support asylum seekers:

Guarantee legal services for asylum seekers. The City must fund emergency immigration legal services to support the growing population of asylum seekers that may be subject to legal proceedings. As states at the southern border continue to mishandle the lives of these individuals, NYC must respond by making sure these new arrivals can access the legal support they need to navigate the court system. In addition, the City must prioritize language access and expand the supply of trained, vetted immigration legal interpreters to be provided to community-based organizations.

Strengthen and expand Adult Literacy Programs. The City should expand and strengthen its network of DYCD-funded community-based adult literacy programs to increase investments in services, supports, and resources for current and new English language learners. This increase would not only allow programs to meet the new demand for services but would also bolster adult literacy programs' capacity to provide asylees with one-on-one support with systems navigation, digital access, and case management while accounting for the rise in costs for classroom space and staff salaries.

Create a Nutrition Assistance Program for Undocumented New Yorkers. The Council should pass Council Member Ayala's Resolution 305, which calls on New York State to provide food benefits for all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Given that asylum seekers are not eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), this new program would provide thousands of individuals and families now living in our city with access to food and nutritional assistance. New York State legislators and agencies are currently considering this program and we anticipate legislation being introduced in 2023. We urge the Council to lend their support to this effort to help meet the nutrition needs of asylum-seekers and to help take pressure off of the emergency food system.

Eliminate barriers to child care. Scaling up child care programs will be necessary to serve the influx of children coming to New York City. In addition to funding for appropriate expansions, the City should work toward eliminating citizenship requirements for certain extended day/year child care programs. Due to federal and state funding restrictions, the only public programs that children can currently attend are 3-K, Pre-K, and federal Head Start. This leaves a major gap in care for asylum seekers, and the City should invest its own funding to support child care for undocumented children and families. In the FY23 Budget, the City invested \$10 million (at ACS) to begin to address this need for undocumented families. The City recently announced that four providers, including three settlement houses, will be distributing these funds via vouchers under the new Promise NYC program. Notably, this funding was secured before the majority of new asylum seekers arrived in NYC, and it was not baselined, so the City should work to secure additional resources.

Expand the Children Under Five Initiative. The City's estimated [cuts of \\$469 million](#) to DOE's budget have put an additional burden on schools that are struggling to cope with the increase of new asylum seekers. DOE Chancellor David Banks has noted that the City has expanded its programming to support migrant children with high needs,

including more bilingual instruction, mental health treatment and access to social workers. But more can be done to reach newly arriving young children. The Children Under Five Initiative (CU5), provides early childhood mental health services to infants, toddlers and pre-school aged children and their families in community-based settings. A Council Initiative under the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the program funds organizations to work with children to develop psychosocial and educational skills. CU5 currently supports 13 organizations, (including two UNH members) and the City should ensure that these services are available to immediately support the increased number of children coming to New York City who have unique mental and emotional health needs.

Engage regularly with CBOs and create feedback mechanisms to track progress. The arrival of thousands of asylum seekers needs community coordination of services and care. In an effort to better support migrant students, the DOE recently [sent a memo](#) to citywide and community education councils, the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council and an organization of PTA presidents. The memo called on parent volunteers to participate on borough response teams that would help organize food and clothing drives, resource fairs, and listening sessions. Yet, the City has not reached out to settlement houses in such a targeted way, despite their deep expertise in serving many of the neighborhoods where migrant families have been sent throughout the City. Settlement houses, along with other community-based organizations, can help inform the City on newly emerging needs and necessary interventions. The City should create a formal communication stream between CBOs and appropriate City agencies to share information in real time. Specifically, the City must ensure interagency coordination between MOIA, DYCD, DOE, DHS, ACS, and DFTA.

In closing, UNH appreciates the leadership the City Council has taken to hold the city accountable for meeting the needs of our newest New Yorkers. New York City has always and will continue to be a sanctuary city. We are proud knowing our city continues to welcome new individuals seeking asylum. However, this situation cannot be fully addressed without the addition of State and Federal funding to cover the significant costs of providing these services to support new migrants.

Looking ahead, UNH hopes to partner with the City alongside our member settlement houses and other community based stakeholders in a coordinated effort to sustain relief and secure State and Federal aid for asylum seekers. We look forward to continuing to be a part of this conversation in the coming months.

For additional information, please contact Lena Cohen at lcohen@unhny.org.

Testimony Submitted by
Elizabeth Angeles, Vice President, Advocacy, United Way of New York City
Oversight - Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants.
December 21, 2022

About United Way of New York City

For 85 years, United Way of New York City (UWNYC) has worked to support low-income New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. We partner across the business, government, non-profit and philanthropic sectors to fight for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in New York City. Our mandate is to stem the root causes of poverty and create systems-level change so that everyone can access quality education and the opportunity to lead healthy and financially secure lives.

Response & Community Needs

It is estimated that over 30,000 people have arrived in New York City since May 2022. UWNYC responds rapidly to the emerging needs of our neighbors, providing needed resources to communities of color and strengthening nonprofit organizations that serve people who are traditionally underserved. UWNYC has supported ongoing efforts to ensure that asylum-seekers, or new New Yorkers, who have arrived over the last several months are greeted with the care and welcome they deserve.

In September 2022, UWNYC launched the Emergency Assistance and Community Needs (EACN) Fund to assess the most urgent needs of community partners working with asylum seekers and rapidly disperse funds to help them take care of these newest New Yorkers in a dignified way. The EACN Fund was designed to meet emergency situations that arise in New York City and allow UWNYC to provide grants to organizations at the community level to ensure that they have the resources they need to effectively serve their clients.

To date, UWNYC's EACN Fund has awarded over \$150K to seven community-based organizations (CBOs) within specific areas lacking adequate funding:

- **Food** - Our partners need immediate funds to purchase hot meals, on-the-go meals, non-perishables that can be transported or stored in shelters, and other nutritious, culturally appropriate foods.
- **Local Transportation** – Funds are needed to provide 30-day unlimited Metro Cards as well as automobile transportation / Lyft/ Uber. In addition to providing support through the EACN, UWNYC has coordinated an allocation 500 Lyft codes worth \$25,000 to support asylum seekers. There is additional need for coordinated transportation for those arriving to New York City from local airports and sites beyond Port Authority.

- **Out-of-State Transportation** – Many asylum seekers need funds to be reunited with family out of state. Community partners and advocates providing direct services on the ground are currently depleting their budgets to finance flights and bus rides.
- **Cash Assistance** - Partners need to be able to distribute cash assistance between \$20 and \$50.
- **Phones** - Funds are needed to purchase and distribute smart phones or SIM cards, as well as charging cables, so that asylum seekers can contact friends and family and potentially identify opportunities for shelter/ lodging. This is also critical for connecting people seeking asylum with services, employment, and other essential resources. Phone numbers are important for appointments, reservations, and interviews.
- **Shelter** - Funds are needed for temporary shelter for some asylum seekers who are waiting on a more permanent option.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has supported UWNYP's Choose Healthy Life initiative, which has created a network of Public Health Navigators affiliated with local Black Churches to conduct community outreach and education for the purpose of securing COVID vaccinations and testing to vulnerable community members. **With HRSA's approval, UWNYP will direct up to \$25,000 to support education and outreach for COVID vaccinations to asylum seekers in New York.**

UWNYP receives Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) legislative grant from New York State. **Over the course of the year, UWNYP will direct more than \$500K in unallocated funding to HPNAP-funded organizations in communities most impacted, as emergency food providers continue to address higher demand due to inflation, sunseting COVID relief programs, and other factors.**

Through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, \$150 million was appropriated nationally to the Humanitarian Relief Fund for organizations providing services to migrants crossing the southern border. **UWNYP has offered workshops and other support to New York City organizations to facilitate access to available funding to help address the migrant crisis.**

UWNYP urges the City of New York to enact immediate and long-term reforms in its response to asylum seekers and other migrants seeking refuge in New York City. The City must address the expansive current needs and more equitably prepare for continued arrivals. This demands a shift from reactive, often short-sighted initiatives towards meaningful, multi-year investments in an exhausted human services infrastructure.

Increased Demands on Food Providers

Through provision of food and operational support to hundreds of food organizations across New York City, UWNYP serves approximately one million New York City men, women, and children struggling to make ends meet, and supports the human service agencies and institutions that

serve them. UWNYP's Food & Benefits Access program strengthens 500+ food pantries and soup kitchens with healthy and nutritious food, operational capacity building supports, and funds for capital equipment. The Emergency Food and Shelter Program, a federally funded program administered by UWNYP, funds community-based organizations to meet a range of costs associated with emergency food, rental arrears, and utilities service. Food Support Connections enables caseworkers to outreach and screen thousands of New Yorkers every year. Through HPNAP, UWNYP strengthens the capacity of our citywide network of emergency food providers, helps distribute culturally appropriate, healthy foods, and prepares and serves meals in underserved neighborhoods, ensuring that food is distributed where the greatest need lies. UWNYP also operates Local Produce Link, through which local small-scale farmers deliver fresh vegetables to food pantries across New York City. UWNYP's HPNAP program structure informed the design of the City-administered Pandemic Food Reserve Emergency Distribution Program (P-FRED).

UWNYP also works in collaboration with food system stakeholders across New York City. New York City emerged as the first American epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic and two years later our communities are still reeling from the twin economic and public health crises caused by the pandemic. In response, UWNYP joined the NYC Food Policy Alliance: a multi-sector alliance of 40+ food system stakeholders from across New York City, including frontline CBOs directly impacted by food insecurity. The Alliance's mission is to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that promote access to healthy and affordable food to both respond to today's crisis as well as address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system.

Over the past few months, we have learned that our food providers are expanding their services to meet greater needs. Pantries are serving in new ways to meet demand, and they are stretching their capacity with very limited resources to serve people seeking asylum. For example, one of our pantries in Bedford-Stuyvesant has "adopted" a nearby shelter to better serve asylum seekers and are working to understand and meet their needs. One of our pantry partners in the Bronx pantry affiliated with a hospital shared that they typically limit pantry clients to visit only once a month. However, people seeking asylum have needed and been allowed to come in more often. The pantry is connecting them with additional care and services because they need more than regular clients. Many pantries that have not provided this service in the past have now started providing clothing. Pantries tell us they are no longer "just a pantry" as they strive to meet the needs of new New Yorkers seeking asylum. Finally, pantries report that asylum seekers are seeking rice cookers, which allow them to prepare culturally relevant food as well as healthy vegetables and other items. Without this piece of equipment, they are often unable to take advantage of the bags of pantry items they receive.

Support Cross-Cutting Needs

As New York continues to welcome people seeking asylum, it is essential to support their needs holistically. **It is crucial for New York City to create a dedicated, expedited funding stream for comprehensive human services, with funding amount and focus determined in partnership with human services organizations (\$25 million at minimum¹).** This should follow announcements of a state of emergency, leverage dedicated emergency procurement and other funding models from past crises (e.g. COVID-19), and ensure that the first round of funding is accompanied by a multi-year plan for fund renewals that includes community-based organizations². It is also important for New York City to improve transparency by disclosing all coordination and spending in the City's total response to date. Share all funded and unfunded coordination with organizations to date (including recipients, amounts, and durations of funding), and ensure coordination across Mayoral offices and City agencies. Additionally, the full cost of services must be paid to organizations, including just compensation, mental health support, coverage for accessibility tools, and other resources for current and new workers serving asylees³.

To combat misinformation and support a welcoming environment for people coming to New York City and seeking asylum, **it is paramount that New York City work collaboratively to design and resource a public education campaign for New Yorkers to better understand the situation faced by their newest neighbors, mitigate stigma/discrimination, and galvanize resources for families.** This will humanize this effort and share the stories that underline the deep risk that families took to get here, and the stigma now being experienced, especially by children. This effort should engage the NYC Commission on Human Rights and community/faith-based organizations to implement and advise the campaign.

Coordinate Care

In UWNYP's efforts to assess and address the emerging needs of people seeking asylum arriving in New York City, it is clear community partners are operating with limited capacity and that coordination of information, services and resources is essential. **New York City must expand resources for care coordination and sustained case management, especially with community-based organizations already providing these services, often without funding.** This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Create a more comprehensive directory for asylum seekers in different languages (especially for those speaking indigenous languages), listing services for use by care coordinators and asylees/other migrants.

¹ Sources: I-ARC and New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)'s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#); based also on current and projected total costs of these City services in the "Impact of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers on New York City's Budget" Memo released November 13, 2022 by George V. Sweeting, Acting Director of the City of New York Independent Budget Office.

² NYC made an emergency procurement declaration on August 1, 2022 to bypass usual procurement processes to expedite contracting of services to support asylees. Source: "Declaration of Emergency for Asylee Services and Shelter," Commissioner Gary Jenkins, NYC DSS.

³ See more on just pay for human services workers in the Human Services Council's [Just Pay Campaign](#).

- Fund care coordination organizations to: hire more navigators/case managers and extend their employment; provide more comprehensive training across navigators and navigation sites; and supply families with what they need to access referred resources (i.e. phones, transportation support, etc.).
- Expand navigation sites in more communities beyond the [current 10 sites](#), working with community-based providers to host and/or locate the best additional sites.
- Design data collection and management infrastructure that can be centralized and used across programs, prioritizing very strong protections for clients who fear that inclusion in care coordination may result in enforcement (for example, allowing for anonymized entries).
- Advocate to the State for a sustained food assistance program for asylum seekers and migrants, assessing what has been done in other jurisdictions (e.g. in California) and ensuring that clients have kitchen access and/or receive cooked meals while in housing without space to prepare food.

Expand Access to Legal Services

Immediate access to legal services is paramount for people seeking asylum, particularly given the strict application timelines needed to be granted asylum. Access to a legal consultation within the early days of arrival will also contribute to positive mental health for people seeking asylum, as it highlights that they have someone supporting them and their case. **New York City must work with legal services providers to accurately identify the funding amount for emergency services (\$10 million as a minimum⁴) for legal services for triaged legal needs and designate an additional multi-year fund for continued legal representation for asylum seekers and other migrants⁵.** Resources should include training campaigns, legal packets for all asylees, their support (lawyers, DOJ representatives, SIJS, case managers, shelter employees, other advocates) on rights, processes, benefits, and more; coverage of legal fees; and long-term representation. Resources should also support advocacy for federal policy reform, such as executive orders to extend the timeframe for asylum seekers to submit applications.

Employment, Training, and Education

Our newest New Yorkers are joining our communities not only seeking safety, but also opportunity. They are eager to work, and we must prioritize developing pathways for people seeking asylum to enter the formal workplace economy. This includes accessing educational opportunities. **New York City must coordinate with State and Federal governments for more accessible and rapid employment, education, and licensing pathways. This includes but is not limited to the following:**

- Demand that the Federal government expedite Employment Authorization Document (EAD) processes

⁴ Sources: I-ARC and NYC's [Welcoming New York Campaign](#); based also on current and projected total costs of City services in "Impact of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers on New York City's Budget" Memo released November 13, 2022 by George V. Sweeting, Acting Director of the City of New York Independent Budget Office.

⁵ Sources: I-ARC and NYC's [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

- Ensure that NY State expands access to their Licensing Act regardless of immigration status.
- Expand dedicated resources for sustained and accessible workforce development trainings and other support, including: legal counsel access, more liaisons who speak the needed languages, and donated technology (laptops/tablets) pre-loaded with information on these processes.
- To support the above reforms, eliminate caps on street vending licenses/permits to provide opportunities for newly arrived immigrant entrepreneurs, and remove the NYPD from enforcement of street vendors.
- Ensure access to childcare for all newly arrived immigrants, funding community-based organizations to do targeted outreach to newly arrived families. Promise NYC, announced by Mayor Adams on December 14, 2022, is a start to provide families more flexibility and accessible care while they search for housing and new jobs.
- Create pathways for members of the asylee community to find opportunities with human services organizations, which will rely on the expedited authorizations referenced above.

Health

Financially, culturally, and linguistically accessible healthcare for all asylum seekers and other migrants regardless of immigration and/or employment status is vital. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Hire more health navigators/advocates to support new immigrants and asylum seekers in access medical and health services.
- Elevate existing advocacy efforts for Medicaid for all regardless of immigration status, and design educational campaigns for organizations and asylum seekers/other migrants on Medicaid qualification.
- Include connections to care coordinators such as [Health Homes Care Coordination](#).
- Immediately increase funding for Access Health NYC CBOs who provide culturally responsive critical resources and services, including connecting individuals to health coverage and care.
- Ensure trauma-informed medical professionals, counselors, social workers etc. are present to provide culturally & linguistically appropriate mental health care at shelters and in the long term.
- Organize mobile vaccination clinics at shelters to provide free immunizations and vaccination shots.

Housing

New York City must remove barriers to shelter, transitional, and long-term affordable housing that are due to immigration status, bureaucracy, and/or discrimination. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Expedite extremely slow shelter, public housing, and rental assistance processes due to bureaucratic issues with agencies sitting on hundreds of applications, providing them with adequate funding.

- Notably, make CityFHEPS accessible to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status, fill vacancies in CHIP apartments, and address Sources of Income discrimination.
- Secure resources for staffing to human services organizations offering housing, ideally to staff from communities, including more support from the State given its right to shelter requirements.
- Translation services at shelters to properly serve the populations.

Conclusion

New York City has long expressed pride in its identity as a sanctuary city, a welcoming refuge for all migrants. **However New York City must further prioritize the wealth of our resources and relationships for a well-coordinated, equitable, community-driven, and sustainable welcome for our newest neighbors.** The City has the infrastructure within the human services sector to fully address the needs of its residents, but this can only happen when the human services sector is seen as an equal partner and is funded as one by the City, State, and Federal government. We can show that the concept of a sanctuary city is more than a tagline on a fading billboard: we must meaningfully invest in human services infrastructure in New York City for a more compassionate and comprehensive welcome to our newest neighbors. These changes must be swift, as these gaps in information and services have already left thousands in the dark as they enter their first winter in New York City.



Make the Road New York
Testimony to NYC Council – Committee of the Whole
*Examining the City’s Response and Delivery of Services to
Migrants*
12/20/2022

My name is Harold Solis, and I am the Deputy Legal Director at Make the Road New York. On behalf of our 25,000+ members and staff, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today about the needs of asylum seekers who have arrived in New York City and the city’s response. We believe that New York must continue to serve as a welcoming city for all immigrants, and that includes ensuring that individuals can access and participate in our society regardless of their immigration status. We all know that states like Texas have cruelly used deceptive practices to displace migrants just to score political points and without any consideration for the wellbeing of these individuals. To prevent further harm, the City must further develop community-based infrastructure and services that will allow them to rebuild their lives here.

Make the Road New York (MRNY) is the largest grassroots immigrant organization in New York City, with a membership of over 25,000 low-income New Yorkers. We have 25 plus years of experience serving New York’s communities of color, immigrant and working class families. Across all our 5 sites, we provide essential health, legal, education and survival services, while also continuing to organize our communities to innovate policies that will improve their lives. We submit this testimony to highlight how our organization has responded to the critical needs presented by the migrants being relocated to our city from Texas, and to underscore to the Committee the critical importance of using all resources available to meet their specific needs in this challenging and often confusing moment. Based on our long history and deep experience working with and alongside immigrant populations, we offer our insight to underscore that the City must immediately step up its efforts to provide resources in a number of key areas to minimize the extended trauma these newly arrived families have endured; to ensure they have what is needed to stabilize their lives; and to provide opportunities which will allow them to fully integrate into our rich, diverse NYC community.

A. Our Rapid Response Efforts

Our fight to ensure dignity and justice for New York’s low-income and working class communities of color has always included rapid efforts to provide resources and support for the most marginalized in New York City and beyond, and our efforts have continued to meet this current moment. Since August, MRNY has helped lead efforts to support asylum-seeking immigrants sent to our city by the governors of Texas, Florida, and Arizona. Most of the newcomers have arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Over the summer, when hearing about an arriving bus, we would dispatch staff to Port Authority to greet new arrivals and distribute: cash to purchase food and other essentials, Metrocards, phones, and information about our services. More recently, since the City opened the Navigation Center in September, we shifted our operations there and are focused on distributing prepaid cell phones to our newly arriving neighbors. Our staff and volunteers are there three days a week, and we have distributed 1,700 phones total, with three months of service, in the weeks we have serviced the navigation center. Because of demonstrated need for this kind of assistance, we also organized distribution days at our community centers as circumstances required, away from the Navigation Center, where we welcomed these individuals with a meal, two Metrocards and a phone.

To further support these individuals, we have held thirteen orientation sessions in our Jackson Heights and Bushwick offices since September. We have connected with hundreds of people at these orientations. Welcoming these folks into our office is a great way to receive them with open arms—introduce them to our mission, walk them through the resources we provide and answer their questions around legal and health services as well as other key services such as: information about our OSHA classes, school registration, and obtaining a driver’s license—critical questions for new arrivals who often have no family support. Our MRNY health team has been helping enroll newly arrived migrants into health insurance and connecting them to key health services, including clinical providers for vaccines and regular ongoing care. These orientations will continue to help us stay in touch with and best support our newest community members.

B. Our Growing Understanding of These Migrants’ Experience

Our concern is the manner in which many migrants are being deceived into taking a cross-country journey without any care for their health or personal circumstances. For instance, no state should be allowed to use its power to trick individuals into jeopardizing their immigration proceedings. Yet, that is precisely what we have heard and learned during our community sessions with many of the migrants that Texas has sent here. Some of them, for example, shared with us that they were offered free rides to New York—even though they had

appointments with immigration authorities in places like Utah. Many of them were surprised to hear that New York was nowhere near where they needed to be in order to attend critical appointments with immigration authorities. Making matters worse, many were dismayed to hear that they now needed to file motions and other paperwork to transfer their immigration cases to New York to avoid dire legal consequences, such as in absentia deportation orders—all without having the resources to obtain legal representation.

Using deceptive tactics to relocate unwanted migrants is troubling enough. But deceiving them while knowing that they may be ordered deported in absentia is cruel and inhumane. We are committed to ensuring that members of our immigrant communities are treated fairly, with dignity, and with respect. To that end we will continue to work with these families to ensure their rights are protected and vindicated.

C. The City Must and Can do Better

We recognize the challenges that the City is facing as a result of this situation. True, Texas is not coordinating these buses with our City, the federal government has not intervened, and it is unclear how long Texas and other southern states will continue to relocate migrants to New York. Despite these challenges, the City can and must continue to improve the infrastructure to help our immigrant communities.

Immigration Legal Services: The City rightly decided to incorporate triage services as part of the Navigation Center it opened earlier this fall. That made sense as an initial intervention. But as we approach the end of the year, we urge the City to develop a community-informed long-term plan to ensure our working-class communities, including our newest neighbors, have the legal assistance they require now and into the future.

As things stand now, the immigration legal services infrastructure across the City lacks the resources to meet the needs on the ground. To be sure, this is not a new phenomenon caused by the arrival of additional migrants in the City. For a while now, many community members have struggled to secure legal representation in their immigration proceedings due to a mix of [capacity-related issues within the immigration legal services infrastructure](#) and various federal policies that have, at times, favored the use of deportation proceedings against more and more of our community members. In New York City alone, for example, there is a growing [backlog of court cases totaling over 122,000](#).

The City needs to develop a better long-term plan. To do that, the City must do better than the recent Request for Proposals issued, which proposed to allocate merely \$5 million for two years to offer a suite of services—from intake to full representation—to *100 individuals per day*, which amounted to roughly \$100 per individual case. It is impossible to realistically serve that many

people with such a small investment, especially when so many legal providers are already struggling with capacity issues. We urge a more robust multi-year investment in these critical services that is informed by the needs of our communities and the existing challenges facing legal service providers.

Housing Services: The city must immediately expand the capacity of the shelter system to make space for those who require it, and ensure that the shelters are adequately staffed to meet this new population's needs. Newly arrived asylum seekers, like any New Yorker, have a right under the law to safe and adequate housing. Along with the provision of shelter, the City must ensure access to a range of services that are culturally appropriate and language accessible.

The City is currently operating Humanitarian Emergency Response & Relief Centers (HERRC), to serve the increase of individuals and families being bussed to our city—sites which are designed to provide a full range of assistance, including shelter, food, social work services, etc. We were glad to hear that the original plan to erect a HERRC at Orchard Beach was abandoned by the administration. At the time, we commended City Council Speaker Adams, General Welfare Chair Ayala, and the members of the Council's Immigration Committee for their call for the Adams administration to use all available resources, including exploring additional indoor locations such as hotels, to house and welcome new migrants. We continue to call on the City to utilize available indoor hotel facilities for the operation of HERRC. But the City must provide more clarity and issue a statement as to the eligibility standard for a placement at a HERRC, as well as a statement as to the rights of any disabled person seeking a placement in a HERRC.

Also, the City must better facilitate the movement of all shelter occupants from temporary to permanent housing, ensuring that the longest-term shelter residents are moved out through existing programs such as CityFHEPS. The City has an opportunity to address the crisis in the shelter system and prioritize housing for all New Yorkers, including new migrants. Immediate tools are available to help alleviate this shelter crisis: 1) It must eliminate the requirement that individuals and families stay for 90-days in shelter before becoming eligible to receive assistance to move into permanent housing. This rule does little to ensure the integrity of the available housing subsidy programs, and instead results in families languishing for extended periods of time. By the City's own account, on average, families are staying 534 days in the shelter system. The City should swiftly utilize these tools to alleviate some of the pressure on the system overall, and provide a path towards long-term stability for families and individuals currently in shelter. 2) It can make CityFHEPS available for all immigrants, including those asylum-seekers who have yet to be considered PRUCOL for purposes of receiving public assistance benefits and who have to date have been excluded from eligibility. Mayor Adams has proposed some small changes to make CityFHEPS more accessible, but they do not come close to meeting the full need and addressing the issues we've just highlighted.

Workplace Justice Legal Services: The City must continue to prioritize and baseline funding for the Low Wage Worker Support initiative to support critical legal services and outreach to workers in low-wage industries. These migrants arrive and are particularly vulnerable to exploitative conditions as they seek work. Wage theft, sexual harassment and other forms of exploitation remain rampant in low-wage workplaces across the city. They are often unaware of their legal rights or how to enforce them. An estimated 2.1 million New Yorkers are victims of wage theft annually, cheated out of a cumulative \$3.2 billion in wages and benefits they are owed. And this also cheats the City and State out of significant tax revenue that are desperately needed to keep New York running. We shouldn't have to fight for this initiative to be funded every year; the City should prioritize and baseline this support.

Education Services: The City must use all available resources to fund our schools and prevent any reductions previously contemplated. With the addition of thousands of [asylum-seeking students](#) to our K-12 population that will need a range of resources to acclimate and thrive, the city must prioritize resourcing mental health supports, language access, and academic supports. Even before the scale of asylum-seeker arrivals was becoming clear, we and allies were urging the administration to restore the funding cuts to the public education system. We continue to urge the administration to reverse course to ensure that the public school system has the resources it needs to meet the needs of all students, including asylum seekers. Additionally, many of the newly arrived migrants are seeking ESOL classes in order to improve their English and find employment. However, community based ESOL classes are at capacity. The city should invest over \$19 million in the upcoming DYCD RFP, increase the rate per instructional hour providers receive from the RFP, support diverse instructional models, and allow programs to offer whichever delivery methods serve their populations best, including ample remote and hybrid instructional options.

Health Services: Many of the newly arrived migrants are coming with severe health issues, some are even arriving with newborn babies or are very far along in their pregnancy. The city should expand funding for community based organizations to enroll these migrants into health insurance, if eligible, and help them navigate the complex health system, to ensure they can access the critical care they deserve. The city should also expand its COVID testing vans across the city to ensure that individuals can easily access COVID and flu tests in their communities.

Food and Transportation: The City must ensure that those who are placed in all types of shelter settings have access to food and / or hot meals. Many of these newly arrived families are not eligible for federal forms of food support, and it is imperative that families have access to healthy meals. In addition to ensuring these families have access to food, the City must develop a plan to provide transportation assistance so that families are able to access school, work, and other needed appointments as they integrate into our city life.

In sum, we urge the City to take the steps outlined above in order to move towards more inclusive, thriving outcomes for all working-class New Yorkers, including our newest neighbors.



Community Immigration
Legal Services & Education

**Testimony submitted to the Committee of the Whole, New York City Council
Re: Oversight - Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
Tuesday, December 20, 2022, 10:00am**

Good afternoon. My name is Terry Lawson and I am the Executive Director of [UnLocal](#), and we provide community education, outreach, and legal representation to New York City's undocumented immigrant communities. I am also the co-founder and steering committee member of the Bronx Immigration Partnership. We thank Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, the Committee of the Whole for convening this oversight hearing over these two days and for the efforts of every committee in your coordinated efforts for this City's immigrants.

In collaboration with our partners at Central American Legal Assistance, Catholic Migration Services, Masa, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA), NYLAG, and the Robin Hood Foundation, UnLocal will be launching the Pro Se Plus Project this January and we call on the New York City Council and this Administration to support our efforts. The vast majority of the recent arrivals in New York require critical information, logistical support, and legal assistance to file for asylum and work authorization. There are simply not enough immigration legal services lawyers in New York City to represent every individual who must file their asylum application before their one year filing deadline. This is the reality that we are all grappling with.

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Community Immigration
Legal Services & Education

This moment calls for creativity, collaboration, and new resources, which is what the Pro Se Plus Project, a pilot program that we invite the City Council and the Administration to invest in, will prioritize. We believe that many of the migrants who are making New York City their home will greatly benefit from detailed and updated information on how to file their asylum applications, what should be included in those filings, what evidence should be submitted, and what to expect at their ICE check-ins and court hearings. The Pro Se Plus Project will equip recent arrivals with critical resources in order to maximize their success in representing themselves. We will conduct legal screenings and consultations, deliver educational presentations, give advice and counsel, and provide *pro se* assistance to help recent arrivals meet requirements in a complicated and ever-changing immigration legal landscape. We will also train community partners and volunteers on the detailed requirements of filing for asylum and employment authorization, which cannot be filed until 6 months after the asylum application has been filed, so that they will be better prepared and resourced when asylum seekers come through their doors seeking *pro se* assistance.

In designing this project, we have consulted with New York City's experienced immigration legal and social services provider community and have shared our proposal with

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Community Immigration
Legal Services & Education

City Council staff because we believe that open-minded collaboration is the only way to create meaningful solutions in times of great need. At the same time, we recognize that we must be intentional about what we can realistically accomplish with a finite number of lawyers, paralegals, advocates, educators, and community partners. We also want to clarify that the Pro Se Plus Project is meant to complement full representation in removal proceedings, and does not and cannot replace the need for the city and state to adequately fund full representation by immigration legal services providers, which cannot be met by the *pro bono* bar. We agree with all those who have testified yesterday and today that substantially more resources must be made available to sufficiently compensate those seeking to provide meaningful assistance to immigrant New Yorkers, whether they arrived last week or in the last decade. We look forward to an opportunity to meet further with the Council on how to realize our ideals as a City that welcomes immigrants humanely and competently. Thank you.

Terry Lawson
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terry@unlocal.org

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December 5, 2022

Robin Hood Foundation
826 Broadway, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10003

The New York Community Trust
909 Third Avenue, 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10022

Re: Pro Se Plus Project

Dear Robin Hood Foundation and New York Community Trust,

We are pleased to submit a joint proposal for funding a Pro Se Plus Project that would create a service delivery structure that can easily pivot in response to emergent developments that affect our city's immigrant communities.

Please feel free to contact us by phone at (917) 520-1956 or by email at terry@unlocal.org, haxford@centrallegal.org, or roncioiu@catholicmigration.org with any questions or comments. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours Truly,

Terry Lawson, Executive Director, and Rebecca Press, Legal Director, on behalf of UnLocal

Aracelis Lucero, Executive Director, on behalf of Masa

Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones, Founders, and on behalf of Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid, Inc. (VIA)

Magdalena Barbosa, Legal Director, and Raluca Oncioiu, Managing Attorney, Immigration Program, on behalf of Catholic Migration Services (CMS)

Anne Pilsbury, Executive Director, and Heather Axford, Legal Director, on behalf of Central American Legal Assistance (CALA)

Jodi Ziesemer, Director, and Melissa Chua, Associate Director, Immigration Protection Unit, NYLAG

Pro Se Plus Project

Submission to Robin Hood Foundation and New York Community Trust
December 5, 2022

Project Narrative

I. Problem to be Addressed

We seek funding to create the **Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP)** in order to better respond to the legal needs of the thousands of recently arrived migrants in New York City. Our proposal is grounded in the stark reality that legal service providers are largely unable to provide necessary legal help to the thousands in need of immigration legal assistance, as well as the belief that when provided with the right tools, many migrants are capable of advocating for themselves. We seek to pilot a project that is both innovative and flexible, capable of pivoting in response to the oft-changing urgent legal needs of immigrant New Yorkers.

Beginning in April 2022, record numbers of asylum-seekers began arriving in New York City, with estimates at more than 23,000 recent arrivals to date, most of whom are or will be placed into immigration court removal proceedings, and many of whom may be eligible for asylum. With an estimated nine buses of new immigrants arriving in New York each day, the need for free and competent immigration legal advice and representation has skyrocketed and legal services providers in New York have been in constant communication about how to meet the need.

While immigrants facing removal to their home countries have a nominal “right to representation,” that right is qualified as “at no cost to the government.” Unlike people who find themselves in criminal proceedings, immigrants facing removal who cannot afford an attorney will not be provided with one at government expense. Recently arrived and without work authorization, migrants rely on free legal services provided by non-profit organizations. Over the years, New York City, New York State, and private foundations have invested in providing competent and compassionate representation to individuals in removal proceedings but the recent dramatic increase in newly arrived migrants seeking asylum has laid bare what legal services providers have known for years: there are simply not enough legal service providers to meet the need in the traditional full representation model. This lack of sufficient representation for immigrants in removal proceedings becomes especially urgent because asylum seekers, aside from very few exceptional circumstances, must apply for asylum within one year of entering the United States. In addition, because newly-arrived migrants have been processed haphazardly by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) upon apprehension at the border, their immigration cases are in an array of complicated procedural postures. Some have been paroled for various periods of time, some have been issued Notices to Appear, but not all of these notices have been served on the court, some have been scheduled for court hearings in other states, some have been given appointments with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in various locations, and some who have not been placed in removal proceedings will

have to submit their applications for immigration benefits to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) instead of the immigration court. This presents additional challenges, as migrants need assistance understanding and addressing their specific legal posture and the implications carried with them.

Many recently arrived immigrants are not aware that their right to apply for asylum, or defend themselves in immigration court, is not dependent on their ability to obtain representation. While full representation remains essential and, in an ideal world every asylum seeker would have a zealous advocate working with them, this is not the current reality. *Pro se* assistance that is robust and delivered by lawyers and non-lawyers who have meaningful training and supervision can provide immigrants with the tools to advocate for themselves. PSPP proposes to do this by ensuring that *pro se* (individuals representing themselves) applicants, family members, community members, and service providers have the information and guidance required to navigate the complicated immigration systems established by DHS and EOIR (Immigration Court). To help immigrants avoid *in absentia* removal orders, *notario* fraud, missed deadlines, and exploitation, PSPP will train applicants, volunteers, *pro bono* attorneys, partners, and community members to understand the requirements for screening and filing for asylum, relief under the Convention Against Torture (CAT), employment authorization, prosecutorial discretion, certain motions in immigration court, etc. PSPP believes that this model can increase legal services providers' capacity to assist immigrants to navigate the application process before USCIS and EOIR *by empowering them to advocate for themselves* and to train community members to best support them through the process. To do so, PSPP builds upon existing *pro se* models such as the Immigration Court Helpdesk (ICH)¹ to add robust preparation sessions that explain our immigration system, the collection of corroborating and country condition evidence, various application processes, and preparation for asylum interviews and individual hearings.

II. Project Description

We seek **\$750,000** to develop and pilot the **Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP)** to provide thorough legal orientations, robust screenings, triage, and community access to assistance with applications for asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other immigration-related relief for unrepresented immigrants. PSPP will be designed to be scaled up—with volunteers and additional providers—to meet increasing and changing needs. We believe that this model of service provision builds capacity and gives us a framework that is nimble enough to pivot to meet future needs and opportunities for New York's immigrant community as it mobilizes *pro bono* attorneys, paralegals, and community members to do this urgent work.

¹ ICH is federally funded to provide group legal orientations, individual screenings, and *pro se* assistance with certain applications and motions (I-589 asylum applications, I-765 applications for work authorization, motions to change venue, and motions to rescind *in absentia* orders). ICH is contractually limited to providing services to those with active cases in immigration court. The majority of new arrivals have not been issued Notices to Appear and thus, because their cases are not before the immigration court, they cannot be served by ICH.

This model is not intended to replace full representation and litigation by experienced staff attorneys. That work remains essential for many reasons, including litigating complicated cases and types of cases that do not lend themselves to the *pro se* model (for example, Special Immigrant Juvenile Visas), advocating for vulnerable migrants who cannot proceed *pro se*, creating case law that benefits all immigrants in removal proceedings, etc. However, given how labor and resource intensive full representation is, it must be coupled with a *pro se* model that allows those who are not able to find a free attorney to effectively represent themselves.

A. Goals, Objectives, and Planned Activities

Goal 1: Educate unrepresented immigrants and their supporters about the most relevant issues regarding immigration law and processes, currently identified as asylum, employment authorization, the immigration court process, and related information.

Objective 1: Conduct community-based presentations, to cover topics such as how to best present one's own asylum claim, apply for employment authorization, and file immigration court motions, with relevant multilingual educational materials.

Planned Activities:

- PSPP staff will provide community-based presentations for unrepresented immigrants and their supporters in collaboration with our partners. Community presentations will be delivered in person and remotely. Based on our on-the-ground experience and conversations with *pro se* community members, PSPP staff will identify the topics most pertinent to the community and will craft detailed and digestible community-focused trainings that will provide community members with tools to advocate for themselves.
- PSPP staff will develop and distribute multilingual written materials that will help community members effectively advocate for themselves. Written materials will be coupled with community presentations in order to provide a robust and nuanced explanation of the law and processes. Examples will include the difference between first time employment authorization applications and renewal applications, eligibility criteria and how to set forth successful claims. To reduce duplication of efforts, PSPP will work with our partners in the broader legal and social services provider community to utilize resources previously or in the process of being developed. We will also share materials to be utilized by others. We anticipate that materials already developed or in the process of being developed by NYLAG, Catholic Charities, and I-ARC to be utilized by PSPP staff and volunteers.

- PSPP staff will distribute surveys to participants to collect feedback on the information provided, areas for improvement, and ways to enhance outreach.

Anticipated Timeline and Metrics:

- Monthly presentations will begin in January and we estimate that we will be able to reach at least 1500 people in 2023.
- We anticipate hosting 12 trainings in 2023.

Goal 2: Train partners and community members on relevant issues relating to immigration law and processes.

Objective 2: To teach community members on how to support unrepresented immigrants through the asylum and other immigration-related processes.

Planned Activities:

- PSPP staff will train community partners, volunteers, law students, and *pro bono* lawyers on eligibility requirements, best practices for supporting document collection, and the asylum process. PSPP staff will teach partners and *pro bono* lawyers to conduct immigration relief eligibility screenings and work with unrepresented immigrants to fill out and file relevant applications, such as asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions.
- PSPP will work with volunteers from our existing volunteer pools, and will recruit others to be trained via our existing partnerships with community-based organizations and with law schools.
- PSPP will work with law firms and the New York City Bar to identify and provide *pro bono* opportunities. We have already identified one firm that is interested in working with us on this pilot project and expect to identify other partners as this project develops.
- PSPP will plan to provide different volunteer opportunities for volunteers who wish to provide different levels of services.

Anticipated Timeline and Metrics:

- Bimonthly trainings of community partners, volunteers, law students, and *pro bono* lawyers will begin in January and we estimate that we will train 95-130 individuals in 2023.
- We anticipate conducting 6 trainings, which will begin in early 2023 (though we are actually conducting a training of this type next week).

Goal 3: Expand community-based screening and triage opportunities for those seeking help with asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other applications for immigration assistance.

Objective 3: To screen and triage immigrants for eligibility for asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other applications for immigration relief.

Planned Activities:

- PSPP staff, volunteers, *pro bono* lawyers, and partners will conduct in-person and remote screenings and triage with immigrants regarding their immigration legal options. In-person screenings and triage will be based throughout New York City in the communities where immigrants live. Remote screenings will be conducted by phone and in coordination with community partners to maximize participation and outreach.
- We plan to coordinate with legal and social services providers throughout New York to prevent duplicate screenings, referrals, and filings and to create cross-referral mechanisms and efficient tracking, to the extent possible.

Anticipated Timeline and Metrics:

- We will begin screening individuals and families immediately to identify those who would benefit from PSPS services. We anticipate that we will screen and triage 2200 people in 2023.

Goal 4: Provide free high-quality *pro se* assistance, legal advice and representation to immigrants in New York.

Objective 4: To provide *pro se* assistance, advice and/or representation for immigrants in their applications for asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other immigration applications.

Planned Activities:

- PSPP staff, volunteers, law students, and *pro bono* attorneys will provide *pro se* assistance, advice, and/or representation for unrepresented immigrants seeking assistance with asylum, removal defense, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other forms of relief.

Anticipated Timeline and Metrics:

- We anticipate that we will assist with approximately 800 matters, including at least 600 *pro se* applications in 2023. We anticipate

that the bulk of *pro se* applications will be filed between March 2023 and December 2023, though we expect to begin providing *pro se* application assistance to some individuals as early as January 2023.

- We anticipate hosting 4-8 clinics, with the clinics beginning after the first three months of 2023.

B. Target Population

The target audience for the PSPP will be unrepresented immigrants processed by DHS after apprehension at the southern border and supporting members of their communities who reside in New York. Those served first by PSPP will be those who have recently arrived and have had some interaction with ICE who have a one year filing deadline within 2023 and would benefit from *pro se* assistance. We will also plan to coordinate with the Immigration Court Helpdesk program run by Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) to ensure that we are not overlapping services with the individuals they are serving.

C. Plan for Measuring Results, Expected Outcomes, Deliverables, and Timeline

Our plan for measuring PSPP's results will involve keeping close track of all presentations given, audience members, partners, volunteers, and *pro bono* attorneys trained, and materials developed and distributed. PSPP staff will closely track all individuals screened, assisted with *pro se* services, advised, and represented in our internal databases, such as LegalServer.

PSPP partners have extensive experience working with developers from LegalServer to create online tools for non-attorney advocates and volunteers to use in screening and assisting immigrants, as well as to create efficient tracking and reporting mechanisms. We plan to use PSPP funds to work with LegalServer to develop a robust PSPP screening tool that will feed directly into our existing databases, to reduce duplicative data entry.

PSPP staff at participating organizations will meet regularly to compare what is working and what is not working with an aim to analyze how this model of service can be scaled up to address the need.

PSPP staff will distribute surveys to unrepresented individuals, their supporters, and community partners to collect feedback on information and services provided, areas for improvement, and ways to expand outreach.

PSPP’s objectives, expected outcomes, deliverables, and timelines are summarized in the following table:

PSPP Objective	Expected Outcome	Deliverables	Timeline
Objective 1: To provide accurate information on the most relevant immigration law and processes, such as how to navigate the immigration court process, file asylum applications and initial employment authorization.	Important, accurate, asylum-related information delivered to communities across NYC. Expanded access to free resources.	Community presentations reaching at least 1,545 participants 12 trainings Multilingual education materials	Jan - Dec 2023 To be developed and translated into relevant languages in first 3 months (Jan - Mar 2022)
Objective 2: To teach community members on how to support themselves and other unrepresented immigrants through the asylum and other immigration-related processes.	<i>Pro se</i> applicants and other community members are better able to support themselves and other unrepresented immigrants.	Community members trained: 95-130 6 trainings	Jan - Dec 2023
Objective 3: To screen and triage immigrants for eligibility for asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other applications for immigration relief.	Unrepresented immigrants receive free legal screenings in their communities by trained advocates.	Immigrants screened: at least 2,200	Jan - Dec 2023
Objective 4: To provide <i>pro se</i> assistance, advice and/or representation immigrants in their applications for asylum, employment authorization, immigration court motions, and other immigration applications	Unrepresented immigrants receive free high-quality <i>pro se</i> assistance, legal advice and/or representation on relevant applications.	<i>Pro se</i> application assistance, advice & counsel, and/or full representation : 800 (including at least 600 <i>pro se</i> applications) 4-8 clinics	Jan - Dec 2023

III. Partners

The partners, UnLocal, Central American Legal Assistance (CALA), Catholic Migration Services (CMS), Masa, NYLAG, and Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid Inc. (VIA) will work together to create the PSPP model. We will collaborate to develop presentations, educational materials, and trainings. We will maintain a common calendar of events, which will include presentations, trainings, screening and *pro se* assistance days,, and which we will use to refer community members and volunteers across agencies. Community members who attend educational presentations will be triaged and referred to be screened in-house at partner agencies, or at collaborative screening clinics. Those who are screened and who are facing immediate deadlines - for example, the one year filing deadline for asylum, or an approaching court date in another jurisdiction - will be referred for *pro se* assistance. Partner agencies will meet regularly to review procedures, discuss issues, develop solutions, and make improvements.

A. UnLocal

1. Mission

UnLocal aims to address the fundamental injustices and structural inequities that disproportionately impact immigrant communities. We are a community-centered non-profit organization that provides direct immigration legal representation, community education, outreach, and advocacy for New York's undocumented immigrants. UnLocal is dedicated to creating sustainable structures that build collective power and allow us to flourish.

2. Experience

UnLocal has extensive experience providing free direct legal representation for immigrant New Yorkers in removal proceedings and for applications for affirmative relief before USCIS. We also represent immigrants at the Board of Immigration Appeals and in federal court appeals and habeas petitions. We conduct year-round presentations and workshops on various immigration topics and updates at schools, community spaces, and partner sites throughout New York, host seasonal community programming in our office, develop and distribute educational materials, and hold monthly partner calls to keep our community informed.

We are founding members of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC), along with NYLAG and Make the Road New York, which provides advice and representation to individuals with final orders of removal at imminent risk of deportation. Our Queer Immigrant Justice Project (QIJP) represents LGBTQIA+ immigrants in immigration court, at the Asylum office, and before USCIS. In addition, QIJP provides technical assistance to a monthly volunteer-based clinic hosted by Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST) for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers filling out I-589 asylum applications. UnLocal is also a steering committee

member of the Bronx Immigration Partnership, a collaboration of legal and social services providers working together for Bronx immigrants.

3. Role and Responsibilities

In collaboration with our partners, UnLocal will develop training curriculum and materials for volunteers, community members, and applicants seeking assistance with asylum and related immigration matters. UnLocal will train volunteers, community members, and applicants on the asylum process at events hosted at our office and at partner sites. As resources and capacity allow, we will partner to screen individuals and families and provide *pro se* assistance for those seeking asylum, employment authorization, and related forms of relief. We will also provide direct representation for a limited number of individuals and families whose cases require more than *pro se* assistance.

In addition, UnLocal will work with our partners and LegalServer to collect and report data and outcomes and to develop technology to streamline data collection. UnLocal anticipates reallocating existing staff for this project and possibly hiring a part-time paralegal to assist with screening, triage, and *pro se* application assistance.

B. Central American Legal Assistance

1. Mission

Central American Legal Assistance (CALA) provides free or low-cost legal services to New York's immigrant community. Our mission is to protect and defend Central and South American asylum-seekers and to expand the civil rights of all immigrants. CALA has had an open door to newly-arrived immigrants since 1985.

2. Experience

CALA has extensive experience representing Central and South American immigrants in removal proceedings seeking asylum and related humanitarian relief, appearing in court with hundreds of clients each year and litigating claims up through federal court where necessary. CALA operates on a primarily direct services full representation model and, in service of its mission, conducts a large number of one-on-one legal screenings each month and provides a limited amount of *pro se* assistance. CALA staff attorneys and Legal Director are also regularly invited to conduct trainings on asylum law for lawyers, law students, and non-lawyer medical professionals working with asylum seekers.

3. Role and Responsibilities

CALA will be directly involved in conducting initial screenings for recently arrived immigrant New Yorkers who have had some interaction with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and, through these screenings, will identify individuals and family units who

would benefit from robust *pro se* assistance and education about the asylum application process.

CALA staff will also recruit and train *pro bono* attorneys and others to assist in providing *pro se* assistance, particularly the urgent need of preparing *pro se* I-589 applications for asylum so that recently arrived immigrants can file within one year of their arrival in the United States and I-765 Applications for Work Authorization which they will become eligible for five months after filing their asylum application.

C. Catholic Migration Services

1. Mission

Catholic Migration Services (CMS) seeks to empower immigrant communities to assert their basic rights, and to access effective and culturally appropriate legal representation. Our mission is to serve low-income immigrants in Brooklyn and Queens, regardless of religion, national origin, or immigration status.

2. Experience

CMS' legal team has provided immigration legal services for more than 50 years. Our Removal Defense Program - staffed by ten attorneys, an accredited representative and a Mercy Corps volunteer - represents hundreds of immigrants facing removal proceedings or applying affirmatively for asylum and provides brief services (advice and counsel, and assistance with Freedom of Information Act requests) to hundreds more.

In recent years, CMS has partnered with New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) and AIG to train *pro bono* attorneys to provide application assistance at naturalization and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) workshops. CMS attorneys and accredited representatives also conduct community presentations on a variety of immigration topics, including the naturalization process, paths to permanent residence, and Temporary Protected Status. Most recently, CMS has conducted legal orientations for the new arrivals bused to New York City from the southern border. Since August 2022, CMS has partnered with Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens (CCBQ) to provide seven legal orientations at churches located near shelters with large numbers of new arrivals, that were attended by 335 individuals. In addition, CMS has sent legal teams composed of staff attorneys, accredited representatives, administrative staff and volunteer attorneys and interpreters to the City's Navigation Center for Asylum-Seekers on three occasions over the last two months, where they provided legal orientations to more than 90 new-arrivals, followed by more than 60 individual screenings, and *pro se* assistance with changes of address and changes of venue for more than 50 people.

3. Role and Responsibilities

CMS proposes to hire a full-time attorney and a full-time paralegal for its PSPP team. Its PSPP team will work towards each of the proposed goals and objectives as follows:

Community education: Our legal staff will continue to partner with CCBQ to provide legal orientations about the removal defense process, types of relief from removal, the asylum application process, and other relevant topics at churches and other locations accessible to new arrivals in Brooklyn and Queens. CCBQ is subcontracted to provide case management services to newly-arrived immigrants in the two boroughs, at four different locations, including 191 Joralemon Street, in Brooklyn, where CMS is co-located. CCBQ is thus well-positioned to coordinate attendance for the legal orientations.

Training: CMS will build on existing partnerships with NYLPI and AIG to recruit and train *pro bono* attorneys to provide *pro se* assistance with various motions and applications, under the supervision of CMS' legal staff. It will also train volunteer interpreters to aid attorneys with screenings, *pro se* assistance, workshops, etc.

Triage and screening: CMS' legal staff will triage to identify individuals and families who can be referred to PSPP. CMS receives hundreds of requests for immigration assistance each month; we will develop a triaging process to identify recently arrived immigrants who were apprehended by ICE at the southern border and who intend to reside in New York City, and refer them to legal orientations and in-depth screening through PSPP. In-depth, individualized screenings will be provided by dedicated CMS staff and trained *pro bono* volunteers supervised by our staff.

Advice and *pro se* assistance: The screenings will be followed by the provision of legal advice, referrals for *pro se* assistance with certain motions or applications through PSPP, and the distribution of self-help materials.

D. VIA

1. Mission

VIA's primary purpose is to help Venezuelan forced migrants and asylum seekers in New York City by informing and empowering them. VIA advocates for people affected by the deep crisis in Venezuela, especially those seeking international humanitarian protection, and builds bridges between them and local organizations that can assist find better opportunities to establish in the United States.

2. Experience

After they left Venezuela with their son, VIA's co-founders, Héctor Arguinzones and Nirurka Meléndez, launched VIA in 2016 to share information and connect Venezuelan displaced people and asylum seekers to existing organizations in New York, with the goal of making the process more accessible, safer, and bearable.

In the first six months of 2022, VIA reached 64,000 people through our social media, trained 128 people through our Peer Support program, assisted 100 people through our online English and pronunciation programs, and informed over 800 individuals through legal,

educational, and cultural orientation sessions, where people are also assisted with enrolling in health insurance.

Estimates reveal that the number of displaced Venezuelans rose to 7.2 million, with an estimated 20,000 recent Venezuelan migrants arriving in New York in 2022. VIA assists Venezuelans through its #TogetherforVenezuelans campaign, launched in May 2021, to support and serve Venezuelan families and individuals who are forced migrants and asylum seekers in New York through community education, outreach, and advocacy.

3. Role and Responsibilities

VIA will collaborate with PSPP legal service providers to provide culturally and linguistically competent legal training to its members and volunteers. VIA will facilitate these trainings, which will be held virtually, in-person, or in a hybrid fashion. These trainings will go beyond orientation and will provide VIA members and volunteers with the tools needed to advocate for themselves and others in their asylum processes. VIA will also collaborate in the development of linguistically competent training materials.

E. Masa

1. Mission

Masa partners with Mexican and Latino immigrant children, youth, and families in the South Bronx to develop strong learners and leaders who fully contribute to the broader community. Our model engages whole families, grounded in a commitment to strengthening literacy, leadership, and power for Mexican, Central American, and Indigenous People. We foster a culturally responsive learning community in which families engage with direct services and advocacy, seeking to dismantle the systems of oppression that perpetuate the injustices they face every day.

2. Experience

Masa has close to two decades of experience supporting immigrant community members in building the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to advocate for themselves and their communities. This includes, but is not limited to conducting extensive community outreach to thousands of hard-to-reach immigrant community members, providing hundreds of Know Your Rights sessions to thousands and creating culturally competent and linguistically accessible materials to the Spanish and Indigenous speaking community, building a robust and trustworthy referral network that includes culturally responsive legal and social service providers, and providing individual case management and wraparound family support services to the immigrant community, including the most recently arrived asylum seekers.

In 2015, Masa was also part of the City's DACA outreach initiative and the Mexican Initiative for Deferred Action (MIDA) project, where we screened more than 500 people for

DACA eligibility – more than 50% were found to be eligible for some form of relief, and helped 130 people apply for DACA. Subsequently, Masa has hosted Immigrant Justice Core Community Fellows in partnership with legal service providers in order to meet the legal service needs of our community members onsite. Masa is also a steering committee member of the Bronx Immigration Partnership, a collaboration of legal and social services providers working together for Bronx immigrants.

3. Role and Responsibilities

In collaboration with PSPP partners, Masa will provide support in creating culturally responsive and linguistically accessible materials in Spanish, support community outreach and education efforts, provide logistical and staff support in organizing *pro se* clinics and provide space in our South Bronx office for in-person triage/screening and case management support.

F. NYLAG

1. Mission

The New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a leading non-profit civil legal services organization located in New York City with services focused in the five boroughs as well as Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties. Founded in 1990, NYLAG's mission is to use the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial, and social injustice.

2. Experience

To achieve this mission, NYLAG staff of nearly 350 provides comprehensive, free legal services across a range of practice areas, as well as financial counseling, impact litigation, policy advocacy efforts, and community partnerships. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving clients, whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality. NYLAG's work impacts over 100,000 people each year.

3. Role and Responsibilities

NYLAG will support implementation by providing technical support on the design and logistics of large scale in person and remote clinics. NYLAG will help design a system for scheduling of applicants for the clinics, including outreach methods to the target population and pre-screening questionnaires. NYLAG will develop and present a training for staff and volunteers on operating a clinic. NYLAG will assist partners in developing materials for clinic including pre-screening questionnaires, registration for applicants and volunteers, screening forms, limited scope of services, exit packets with information for people served at the clinic, and cover sheets to assist with post-clinic follow up. Finally, NYLAG will help design post-clinic protocols for tracking data, ensuring quality control in filing and following up on applications and screenings conducted at the clinics.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/20/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Stefanski

Address: 110 William Street 14th floor NY NY 10038

I represent: New York City Independent Budget Office

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/20/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Funmi Akinnewonu

Address: _____

I represent: Immigrant ARC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/20/2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Harold Solis

Address: 301 Grove Street, Brooklyn, NY 11232

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12.20.22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lena Cohen

Address: 45 Broadway, 22nd fl, NY NY 11216

I represent: United Neighborhood House

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 12/20/2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Miranda / Covenant House

Address: 460 W 41st St, NY, NY 10040

I represent: Covenant House

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/20/2022

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALANA TORNELLO

Address: 22 ARLINGTON PL, Brooklyn NY

I represent: HUMAN SERVICES COUNCIL

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 12/20/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cindy Cabrera

Address: 55 Exchange Pl Suite 501 New York, NY 10005

I represent: Hispanic Federation

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christine Quinn

Address: _____

I represent: Women in Need

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Larkin Galloway

Address: 545 Prospect Place Brooklyn, NY 11230

I represent: Coalition for homeless youth

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms