

NYC Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs

March 25, 2026

Testimony of Faiza Ali, Commissioner, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Before the New
York City Council Committee on Immigration and the Committee on Finance

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Encarnación and members of the Committee on Immigration, as well as Chair Lee, Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams, and members of the Committee on Finance, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Faiza Ali, and I am the new Commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, or MOIA. I am joined by Lorena Lucero, Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Policy, as well as Jasniya Sanchez, Acting Chief of Staff and Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Strategic Initiatives.

As the proud daughter of immigrants from Azad Kashmir, Pakistan, my intersecting identities have shaped how I think about the role of government and the responsibility it carries to serve every community in this city fairly and with dignity.

As Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") has sowed fear and chaos in diverse cities across the country, I want to make clear that New York City remains committed to the protection of all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status. But this moment requires more than words—it also requires local government to provide us with a budget, operational capacity, and support that help us meet this goal.

For today's testimony, I will provide a brief update on MOIA and highlight four key areas of our work: Immigration Legal Services, MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline, Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, Language Access, and our Community Engagement Programs.

Challenges Brought by Current Enforcement State

We have all watched—some of us in shock or disbelief—as an aggressive and indiscriminate detention and deportation campaign played out on our screens. Over the last fourteen months, we've seen the horrific reality of that agenda. Routine immigration court dates now often result in arrests by masked agents waiting outside courtroom doors. Temporary Protected Status and other pathways for dignity and work authorization have been closed off without taking into account the dangerous conditions that precipitated the arrival of people to our country in the first place. ICE is being deployed to quell free speech, with its officers launching indiscriminate raids, like those that targeted street vendors on Canal Street in October. The color of someone's skin, the language they speak, and the religion that they practice have become justification for arrest and detainment.

Our immigrant communities and local economies are suffering from these inhumane actions. Many of our neighbors worry about taking the subway to work or school. The usually bustling streets of our most vibrant neighborhoods are eerily quiet. Students in our public school system see the empty seat in their classroom and worry that they'll be next.

Given this moment, immigrant communities need reassurance that their City government will protect them. Mayor Mamdani was elected by New Yorkers, in part, to address the growing apprehension and anxiety among immigrants regarding their place in our society. It is our mission to affirm our city's support, rebuild public trust, and ensure continued access to schools, healthcare, housing, and city services.

New York City is powered by immigrants. Through this year's city budget, we have the opportunity to show that we will protect and prioritize our immigrant communities by investing in the services and support they deserve.

Overall Update

MOIA's City Charter mandate is to serve immigrants and non-English-speaking New Yorkers by developing and implementing policies designed to assist them – a responsibility we remain steadfast in fulfilling. My team, which is currently resourced with a budget of approximately \$42.3 million for Fiscal Year 2026, will continue to go above and beyond to elevate the needs of immigrant communities.

We currently have more than 70 contracts with nonprofit organizations that service immigrant communities throughout the city. Given the recent rise in ICE activity, MOIA has stepped up to provide more investment in legal immigration services than ever before.

Immigration Legal Services

Over the past year, MOIA has risen to the challenge to strengthen our legal infrastructure during this time of greatly increased need. MOIA's Immigration Legal Programs include Immigration Legal Support Centers (LSCs), the Immigration Legal Support Hotline, the MOIA Legal Technical Mentorship program (LTM), and the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC). Together, these programs and initiatives expand access to immigration legal support, which has increasingly grown in demand.

Last summer, we launched MOIA's Immigration Legal Support Centers, supported by more than \$18 million in investments over three years to support up to 25 community-rooted organizations providing culturally and linguistically responsive immigration legal assistance. Our immigration legal services infrastructure consists of 29 unique providers across the five boroughs. Since the program's launch in July 2025, the network has conducted nearly 9,000 comprehensive legal screenings, supporting immigrants on a variety of legal needs.

All MOIA Centers' program providers have free access to select online trainings and webinars to a nationwide legal technical assistance program through Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC). The MOIA Legal Technical Mentorship program provides dedicated support to the Legal Support Center network. And in Fiscal Year 2026, the Immigrant Justice Corps, or IJC, is also offering additional legal technical support for the Legal Support Centers.

Having access to multiple legal technical assistance programs and resources is important for immigration legal professionals to maintain their professional ethical duties, train, and support the professional growth of their staff and volunteers, and to advance informed decision-making on advocacy and program operations. Providers are also connected to trainings and resources that allow them to respond appropriately to federal policy changes.

MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline

Another critical resource available to our immigrant communities is the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline, which is also operated by Catholic Charities Community Services and helps New Yorkers explore their options to access comprehensive immigration legal screenings. So far, this fiscal year, the Hotline has received over 14,700 calls.

For Fiscal Year 2026, MOIA increased funding to expand and strengthen the Immigration Legal Support Hotline to improve accessibility, responsiveness, and support for callers with increasingly complex immigration needs.

The Hotline expanded staffing capacity, including the hiring of additional counselors and a staff member specifically designated to respond to time-sensitive Rapid Response needs. The hours of operation were also extended beyond the previous schedule of Monday–Friday, 9:00 AM–6:00 PM, so that callers have more opportunities to reach support outside of standard work hours. Additionally, MOIA made significant investments in language access and technology. The Hotline launched WhatsApp communications, expanded reporting from four to ten languages, and is currently adding three new Interactive Voice Response language prompts, which are expected to be completed in Spring 2026.

Rapid Response Legal Collaborative

Finally, MOIA has made substantial use of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, or RRLC, which provides legal assistance to immigrant New Yorkers who are detained or at imminent risk of detention or deportation. To adjust for the current need, MOIA increased our investment in rapid response legal efforts by \$3 million this fiscal year.

MOIA also coordinates rapid response efforts in schools to ensure immigrant families receive timely information and support when immigration enforcement activity occurs in or near their communities. This includes connecting schools, families, and community partners with legal resources, Know Your Rights information, and direct services. Referrals are centralized through Project Open Arms, a dedicated team within New York City Public Schools that coordinates across all schools, inclusive of charter schools, District 75 and District 79, to support immigrant families and ensure access to a full range of services.

Language Access

Next, I will provide an update on MOIA’s Language Access work—an area where we have made significant strides. MOIA oversees, monitors, and provides technical assistance to more than 46 City agencies in implementing language access services. This work extends far beyond immigrant affairs; it is a critical infrastructure that touches every corner of City services, impacting approximately 1.8 million New Yorkers with limited English proficiency. As such, this is not simply a matter of checking a box or ensuring compliance, but an area where the City must take a whole-of-government approach to advance language justice.

In addition, MOIA has built an in-house Language Services team that provides translation and interpretation support to mayoral offices and City Hall. In calendar year 2025, MOIA’s Language Access team delivered translation services to 41 mayoral offices and agencies, provided on-site language support at migrant centers across the City, and played a critical role in rapidly translating evolving messaging on shelter protocols for recent arrivals.

I also want to discuss our **English Learning Programs**. Learning English continues to be a priority for immigrant communities and remains a key workforce development strategy. To increase the capacity for English language learning, MOIA operates English Learning and Support

Centers at public library branches and community centers located in immigrant-dense neighborhoods. In FY 26 so far, the program has served nearly 3,000 unique learners and seen 800 graduates. These centers use our award-winning “We Speak” curriculum to host in-person English classes. Additionally, we have developed comprehensive beginner-level materials, which have been frequently requested by communities and advocates. Our curriculum aims to improve access to both English language learning and familiarity with City services.

Community Engagement Programs

Finally, MOIA's **Community Engagement** work creates pathways for immigrants to navigate and access city services, and to know their rights during this perilous time.

Through our Immigrant Rights Workshops (IRWs), our team has made presentations that serve as additional entry points for community organizations and their clients to connect to free, high-quality immigration legal services. In Fiscal Year 2026, this program delivered nearly 300 presentations that reached nearly 6,000 people across the city, continuing our critical role to reach our diverse immigrant communities where they are.

Additionally, in calendar year 2025, our External Affairs team reached nearly 37,000 direct touchpoints through resource fairs, Know Your Rights presentations, and canvassing. Over the past four years, resources on MOIA's website were downloaded over 142,000 times by nearly 79,000 users.

In calendar year 2025, MOIA has led ten community and ethnic media roundtable to share vital information with our immigrant communities through hyper-local newspapers and TV stations in their own languages. These roundtables further strengthen city government's relationships with immigrant-focused, trusted media outlets that deliver accurate and timely news to New Yorkers.

Conclusion

Finally, I wish to thank the City's hardworking public servants who have responded to the needs of both recently arrived and long-standing immigrant New Yorkers. And thank you to Chair Encarnacion, members of the Committee on Immigration, and Finance Chair Lee for calling today's hearing. I look forward to working with the Council to fund and strengthen the programs that serve our immigrant communities who are the backbone of our city.



**New York City Council
Committee on Immigration**

**FISCAL YEAR 2027
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
March 25, 2026**

Hola, buenas tardes. Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Chair Encarnacion and members of the Immigration Committee, for convening this important hearing.

My name is Vladimir Tlali, and I am an immigrant from México. I am also the Senior Policy Strategist at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), an umbrella organization representing over 200 immigrant-serving members and partner organizations. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify regarding the New York City Preliminary Budget for fiscal year 2026.

Immigration is not an unfamiliar topic for our city: 36% of all New Yorkers are immigrants. Immigrants make up nearly half (44.3%) of New York City's workforce and contribute nearly 37% to the city's total income¹. However, as immigrant communities face unprecedented attacks from the federal government, New York City can do more. We must respond to this moment by investing in the people who keep this city running.

Immigrant legal services are increasingly important yet remain limited and underfunded. Masked agents in unmarked vehicles detain and separate our neighbors and families without due process, weakening constitutional protections for everyone. To address these threats, NYC must implement strong protections that defend our city's sanctuary policies and oversight authorities. We should move away from punitive systems and invest in community-based solutions that uphold justice, keep families together, and reinforce New York's commitment to immigrant rights.

Meanwhile, the affordability crisis severely impacts immigrant communities, which already face economic marginalization and exploitation. New and shifting eligibility requirements for workforce development programs and childcare vouchers influence job opportunities, pushing our communities into low-wage industries with few protections. It is crucial to protect immigrant workers' rights and provide the support all families need to succeed. This includes access to

¹ Kallick, David Dyssegaard, and Anthony Capote. "Immigrants in the New York City Economy: Overcoming Hurdles, Yet Still Facing Barriers." Immigration Research Initiative - Understanding Economics, Advancing Policy, Supporting Action, December 18, 2023. <https://immresearch.org/publications/immigrants-in-the-new-york-city-economy-overcoming-hresulting-decline-in-business-due-tourdles-yet-still-facing-barriers/>



quality childcare, English language education, safe working conditions, and fair banking practices.

Similarly, we observe that the federal government has launched a direct attack on the political participation and inclusion of immigrant communities. This attack comprises systematic efforts to redefine and restrict citizenship, eliminate language access, exclude people from the census, and restrict voting rights for millions of Americans. These actions suppress civic engagement, ultimately harming our communities and the city as a whole. Underparticipation in elections dilutes political power. Undercounting in the census reduces population count and political representation, leading to lower budget allocations. NYC must invest in durable civic and census infrastructure, enforce language access as a civil right, and expand pathways to political inclusion.

Health and housing services for our communities are also being systematically dismantled. The new eligibility requirements and funding rule changes caused by HR1 have led to a loss of access to lifesaving programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, and SNAP for thousands of New Yorkers. New restrictions on health, nutrition, and housing programs for mixed-status families threaten to recreate and expand cycles of poverty. Now more than ever, we must ensure access to essential services to build a resilient, inclusive New York City for all.

Finally, we believe that the city should do more to improve schools for immigrant students and protect their safety. Schools must effectively communicate how to respond to federal immigration enforcement with policies and training sessions, addressing strategies for school perimeters, arrival and dismissal times, transportation, off-campus activities, and shelter-in-place procedures in coordination with law enforcement. Additionally, current support for English Language Learners must better incorporate their cultural traditions and culturally responsive instruction. For students to thrive academically, both their safety and educational quality must be prioritized together.

For all of these reasons, the NYIC strongly urges the City Council to stand with immigrant communities and fully fund the services and programs that support our communities, enabling these communities to succeed and contribute to the collective well-being of our city.

Protect All New Yorkers from Federal Overreach - \$269 million.

- **Invest \$85M in funding for immigration legal services** to ensure continuity of services and to help defend immigrants against ongoing aggressive, anti-immigrant policies and the Trump administration's federal attacks on immigrants across the city.
- **Baseline \$3M in funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative**, and **\$40M for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI)** to meet the intensifying need of immigrant



communities as NYC's population of immigrants who have been arrested, detained, or are imminently facing deportation rapidly increases.

- **Allocate \$40M in funding for the NY Immigrant Family Unity Program (NYIFUP)** to sustain and support the representation of detained individuals.
- **Establish a \$65M Citywide Family and Loved Ones Fund** to provide travel stipends and other emergency, non-legal support for individuals and families impacted by immigrant detention.
- **Baseline funding at \$121 for the Unaccompanied Minor and Families Initiative** to ensure the continuity of critical legal services for immigrant children and asylum-seeking families.
- **Invest \$15M to create and expand restorative justice programs** in immigrant communities, ensuring immigrant New Yorkers have access to culturally competent, non-carceral solutions that prioritize healing and harm reduction.

Advance Economic Justice for Immigrant New Yorkers - \$119 million

- **Allocate \$50 million to expand ACS's Promise NYC program** to provide childcare to children otherwise ineligible.
- **Invest \$4 million in a new Childcare Immigrant Family Outreach Initiative** to ensure that immigrant families can navigate the complexities of the childcare system and obtain the services they need.
- **Invest \$50 in Adult Literacy and Workforce Development Programs**, given federal budget cuts that will reduce eligibility:
 - Allocate \$20 million to the new [Education for Integration and Equity program](#).
 - Maintain \$12 million for DYCD Adult Literacy RFP contracts, and
 - Raise total funding for adult literacy from \$14.5 million to \$18 million, consolidated under the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative.
- **Allocate \$15 million to establish a citywide Immigrant Workers Task Force** to train and certify employers through Know Your Rights programs, uphold workplace and Fourth Amendment protections, provide rapid legal response during immigration raids, and connect immigrant workers and families with essential services.

Ensure Civic and Political Inclusion of All - \$111 million.

- **Baseline \$5.8M for Language Access Services for Immigrant New Yorkers:**
 - \$3M to sustain the development and operations of the NYC Community Interpreter Bank, and
 - \$2.8M to support the growth of worker-owned language service cooperatives, ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to high-quality interpretation and translation services.



- **Baseline \$3M to fund multilingual emergency communications tools** such as Notify NYC to ensure emergency alerts are accessible across additional languages.
- **Invest \$20M to launch year-round Know Your Voting Rights workshops/programs** in trusted spaces (libraries, campuses, CBOs) with stipended civic apprenticeships, multilingual outreach, and embedded voter registration drives.
- **Baseline \$2.5M for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and Multilingual Voter Education** so that New Yorkers fully understand NYC’s voting systems and can participate meaningfully.
- **Invest \$60M to launch a “2030 Census City Counts”** outreach and engagement campaign to ensure every New Yorker is counted in the upcoming census.
- **Allocate \$20M to expand staffing and access to naturalization programs**, such as CUNY Citizenship Now!, which provide free legal assistance with citizenship applications and financial counseling to all immigrant New Yorkers.

Foster Healthy Communities for All New York Families - \$304 million.

- **Expand Access Health NYC funding to \$4.5 million** so that CBOs and community health centers can continue educating their communities about health access, coverage, and benefits for immigrants, especially newcomers and asylum seekers.
- **Strengthen NYC Care by doubling its budget to \$200 million**, so that all immigrants—particularly those expected to lose Essential Plan coverage in 2026 and ACA coverage in 2027—can access healthcare services on par with their citizen counterparts.
- **Increase funding for Community Food Connection to \$100 million** to ensure access to healthy food and strengthen the city’s emergency food system, which is facing challenges due to federal budget cuts. This is a necessary investment that will provide life-saving support for vulnerable communities.

Invest in Quality Education for Immigrant Students - \$814 million.

- **Commit \$8 million to create an English Language Learner Instructional Specialist position** to pilot the role in 50 high-need schools, where specialists would ensure access to grade-level instruction, required bilingual or ENL services, and other academic interventions.
- **Fund the Support for Arts Instruction Initiative at \$6M to support partnerships in visual arts, music, dance, and theater in 350+ schools, serving students** with heightened stress and anxiety. Arts education supports students’ emotional well-being and sense of belonging amid increased immigration enforcement.
- **Baseline \$4M in the Immigrant and Family Communications and Outreach Initiative** to strengthen communication with immigrant families through trusted CBO



partnerships, multilingual materials, access to interpretation services, and targeted outreach to

- **Target \$800 million to address urgent health and safety hazards in 400+ school buildings** to improve 400+ public school buildings to reduce absenteeism and improve learning conditions, particularly for Black, Latino, and immigrant students.

These necessary investments in our communities must also be supplemented by meaningful policy solutions, including:

- **Prohibit any transfers and communication between ICE and NYPD [Int. 395](#), and the Department of Correction, [Int. 396](#):** Unless a person is convicted of a violent or serious crime, or a federal judge signs a judicial warrant.
- **Pass the NYC Trust Act [Int. 209](#):** Hold both local agencies and law enforcement accountable and empower New Yorkers who were harmed by these violations to seek justice and not hide.
- **Strengthen sanctuary policies:** Close loopholes to explicitly bar any collaboration between city agencies and federal immigration enforcement entities, including ICE, Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO), and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), in immigration enforcement.
- **Abolish the NYPD Gang database:** Pass [Int. 798](#) to ensure that the city ends the use of this discriminatory dragnet tool, and prohibits the creation of future tools that disproportionately target Black and Latino youth in New York City.
- **Facilitate Language Access:** Establish dedicated language access budget lines within relevant agency expense budgets (including HRA, DSS, DOHMH, HPD, and DOE) to contract directly with community-based language services.
- **Invest in Universal Childcare for All:** Prioritize immigrant communities as key beneficiaries of the nation's first universal early childhood care program.
- **Advance Fair Banking Practices:** Submit a Home Rule Request to Albany to enable NYC to operate a full-scale municipal public bank
- **Expand CityFHEPS to all New Yorkers:** City Council, with support from the State, should introduce a bill to expand CityFHEPS to all households, regardless of immigration status. Expanding the program would yield long-term financial benefits for the city, increased shelter capacity, and greater stability for families.



- **Protect immigrant students:** Pass legislation requiring New York City Public Schools to issue expanded guidance and require staff training on how to interact with non-local law enforcement, including shelter-in-place, enforcement activity around school perimeters, during arrival and dismissal, on school transportation, and during off-campus school activities.

Sound investments coupled with bold and effective policy solutions are the best response to the hateful rhetoric from the federal government. NYC is at a crossroads, and we must do more to protect our neighbors and communities. Leadership in the city has a historic chance to do the right thing for all residents regardless of their immigration status.

These issues affect more than just immigrant communities; every time the federal government encroaches on and weakens the due process rights of immigrants, the rights of every person in this country diminish. Every time families are scared away from engaging with our electoral institutions or the census, our democracy weakens, and our political influence and budget diminish.

During a time when the country's economy is struggling, with prices rising far beyond wage growth, access to health, food, and education is at risk. Services and programs that support thriving communities are investments, not expenses.

We invite the Council to stand with us and create the bold, smart, and innovative solutions that only New York City can deliver. We are ready to work with you in creating an inclusive, affordable, and democratic New York City for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Vladimir Tlali
Senior Policy Strategist
New York Immigration Coalition



March 25, 2026

New York City Council

Committee on Immigration
Hon. Elsie Encarnacion, Chair

**Testimony of Jimmy Meagher, LMSW
Senior Policy Director, Safe Horizon**

On the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Jimmy Meagher, and I am Senior Policy Director at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim assistance organization. Every year, 250,000 people seek safety through our services. Our mission is to stand with those who have experienced violence, abuse, and exploitation. We offer unwavering support and advocate for systemic change. We envision a world where safety is a universal human right.

Whether we are called on to provide expert testimony at an oversight hearing or to assist a constituent in crisis and in need of emergency services, we are proud to partner with the City Council in a collective effort to make our city safer for all. We are here to help you and your staff learn how best to support survivors and connect them to the resources available in your borough and community.

Over many years, the City Council has been a key supporter of our programs helping adult, adolescent, and child victims of violence and abuse. City Council funding fills in gaps where no other financial support exists and allows us to draw down critical dollars from other sources. Moreover, this funding demonstrates the value that you and your colleagues place in helping survivors of all ages access desperately needed shelter, legal assistance, counseling, and wraparound services and supports.

The City Council has also championed the human services nonprofit sector. Our sector desperately needs your continued help to ensure that human services workers across our sector receive the compensation and support we need. To be frank – our sector continues to operate in a perpetual state of crisis. Nonprofit human services organizations are suffering as a result of delayed contracts and payments – preventable and solvable problems.

Initiative and Discretionary Funding

Every one of our programs supports immigrant New Yorkers seeking safety, healing, and support in the aftermath of violence, crime, and abuse. Citywide Initiative funding **specific** to our immigration services supports the following Safe Horizon programs:



Streetwork Project

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and so much more, in a therapeutic harm reduction community serving homeless youth ages 13 to 25. We work with homeless and street-involved young people to help them find safety and stability. Many homeless young people face a day-to-day struggle to survive, which can lead to physical and emotional harm. Homeless youth may have experienced family abuse, violence, rejection, and instability that led to their homelessness. We welcome these young people, help them navigate complex systems, connect them to community, and provide essential resources at our drop-in centers, at our overnight shelter, and through our street outreach teams. Streetwork has been doing this community-based work since 1984, and we will continue to do so for as long as our services are needed.

Over the past several years, Streetwork has experienced an increase in the number of migrant young people seeking help who have nowhere else to go.

In FY25, Streetwork Project provided services to 1,139 clients across our drop-in centers and overnight shelter, while our overnight street outreach team engaged in 15,277 contacts with homeless and at-risk young people. The City Council currently supports Streetwork through the **Supports for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade Initiative** (contracted through DYCD), **LGBTQIA+ Youth Support and Services** (contracted through DYCD), the **Viral Hepatitis Prevention Initiative** (contracted through DOHMH), and a **Speaker's Initiative** (contracted through DYCD).

The **Speaker's Initiative** enhances Streetwork's ability to address the complex immigration and social services needs of undocumented and noncitizen young people seeking our support and assistance when they have nowhere else to turn. Streetwork has experienced an increase in the number of undocumented and migrant young people seeking help. We believe that when young people are connected to legal assistance, long-term representation, and wraparound services, we help to prevent them from experiencing further exploitation, trafficking, and violence. **We are seeking a restoration of \$250,000.**

Immigration Law Project

Safe Horizon's Immigration Law Project (ILP) provides expert legal advice and representation to victims of crime, violence, abuse, trafficking, and torture. ILP staff help guide their clients through complex immigration proceedings and assist them in VAWA self-petitions, petitions for U nonimmigrant status and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), applications for asylum, adjustment of status and citizenship, as well as in removal defense. ILP receives referrals internally from Safe Horizon's other programs, as well as externally from the immigration courts, law enforcement agencies, other community-based organizations, legislators, and from former and current clients. ILP strives to provide the highest quality services to a very vulnerable population. Clients live in all five boroughs and experience a multitude of victimizations including domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. As a result of the settling of recent arrivals in New York City and the anti-immigrant policies emanating from Washington, Safe Horizon's ILP has seen an increase of survivors seeking our immediate assistance. In addition, overwhelmed government



systems have left countless in tenuous circumstances - food and housing insecure and desperate for work - making them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and in need of our support and services.

The Adams Administration prioritized assisting migrants with completing asylum applications, not comprehensive legal screenings and long-term representation and assistance. We were grateful to see that the Council invested heavily in nonprofit civil legal assistance in the FY26 budget, and we urge the Council to continue to do so this year.

In FY25, ILP provided full representation, advice, and consults to nearly 600 clients and provided over 5,100 telephonic information and referral services. The City Council supports ILP through **Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence & Gender Based Harm** (contracted through DSS/HRA), the **Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative** (contracted through DYCD), the **Protect NYC Families Initiative** (contracted through DSS/HRA), and the **Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)** (contracted through DSS/HRA).

City Council Initiative funding increases ILP's capacity to assist noncitizen survivors across NYC who have experienced violence here and abroad, including survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, with a wide range of immigration relief. We are seeking **a restoration of \$200,000 in Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence & Gender Based Harm funding, a restoration of \$175,000 in Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative funding, a restoration and enhancement to \$50,000 in Protect NYC Families Initiative funding, and a restoration of \$20,000 in Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding.**

Late Contracting Issues

We are grateful to the City Council for understanding the systemic late contracting issues that impact the nonprofit human services sector. Late contracts have a detrimental effect on community-based organizations and the communities we all serve. Great progress has been made because of the Council's movement on these issues through legislation to provide advances on contracts (LL156 of 2025, LL11 of 2026). However, much more needs to be done to address the millions still owed to providers across the city.

Frequent government contract payment delays put providers at risk of eviction and worsen deficits by forcing organizations to borrow to pay rent and salaries. Safe Horizon has, on many occasions, been forced to borrow money to sustain service provision to survivors while waiting months or even years for a contract to be registered so that we could receive payment.

The City's delays cost providers real money and jeopardize quality of services by diverting funds away from programs to pay interest on lines of credit, for which we are not reimbursed. In addition, when nonprofits are owed money, we cannot respond to emergencies effectively because of limited cash flow to meet urgent needs. For example, during the pandemic, we needed to purchase supplies, like masks and cleaning equipment, and were forced to utilize our credit line for that purpose because of the city's payment delays.



As of January 31, 2026, Safe Horizon is owed \$5.1M across 15 contracts through DYCD and DOHMH. Many but not all of these contracts are related to the City Council funding detailed above. As the Council knows, these contracts are frequently registered long after the start date for services.

Int. 0452

Additionally, we urge the Council to support wage equity legislation that will bolster the nonprofit human services sector.

We are grateful for the multi-year COLA investment, which was a major victory for the nonprofit human services sector. There are still challenges, in that the COLA funding is implemented by agencies in ways that are overly restrictive. That investment ends next year so now is the time to push for true wage equity, where nonprofit workers are not paid up to 30% less than their government counterparts. We enthusiastically support Intro 452, which would be a huge step forward.

Government is not just the predominant funder of human services but also the main driver of human services salaries. Government either directly sets salary rates on contracts or does so indirectly by establishing costs for a unit of service along with required staffing on a contract.

New York City has relied heavily on the nonprofit human services sector to house, shelter, safety plan, and provide other critical services for survivors of violence. However, our government partners too often ask our community of nonprofits and community-based organizations to do more with less and to accept the bare minimum. This means that many - too many - nonprofit human services workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color, are barely surviving on the wages paid by underfunded contracts. Because many survivors come into victim services work to help other survivors, government funding for the nonprofit victim services sector is an economic justice issue for survivors. To live up to our shared values of equity, equality, and supporting communities, New York must commit to funding contracts at appropriate levels to allow nonprofits and community-based organizations to offer competitive living wage salaries. Pay equity is a racial justice issue, a gender justice issue, and an economic justice issue.

The human services nonprofit sector is dealing with a sustainability crisis. Organizations across the sector continue to lose staff because wages are not comparable to wages in the government and private sectors. Hiring and staff retention continue to be major issues across the field. Vacancies and staff turnover directly impact our clients – survivors of domestic violence, runaway and homeless youth, and victims and survivors of violence and abuse across New York City. When staff leave for a better paying job in the private, for-profit sector, our programs must reassign cases, which is disruptive to the survivors coming to us seeking safety and healing.

Intro 452 is a significant step towards ensuring that human services workers receive equitable pay comparable to their City counterparts. By establishing a clear wage requirement system, this legislation promotes transparency in compensation, ensuring that every worker is paid solely based on their qualifications and experience.



Conclusion

As the City Council and the Administration sets the budget for the next fiscal year, it's imperative that our city expand, perfect, create, and invest in programming that provides healing and support to people who have experienced harm, violence, and trauma. When we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of individual New Yorkers, we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of New York City as a whole.

And it is essential that the City invest in the nonprofit human services workforce that we collectively rely on to support our safety net. We urge you and your colleagues to listen to providers, our dedicated workforce, and survivors. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony



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Testimony of Lucia Cuenca, Immigration Staff Attorney at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration on March 25, 2026, regarding the New York City FY27 Budget

My name is Lucia Cuenca and I am the Immigration Staff Attorney in the Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you Chair Encarnacion and members of the Council for the opportunity to testify today.

After more than one year in power, the federal administration continues to create unprecedented threats to the rule of law and to New Yorkers' freedoms, civil rights, access to public services, and access to a healthy environment. New York City legislators must continue to leverage the substantial power of local government to uphold and protect our laws and rights, and to make the major investments needed to protect and strengthen infrastructure, public institutions, and the renewable energy economy.

New York City's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget

In recent years, the City Council has played a critical role in defending vital city services, investments, and infrastructure from budget cuts and flatlining. We appreciate the Mamdani administration's transparency about the major fiscal challenges facing New York City. In recent years, the City Council has played a critical role in defending vital city services, investments, and infrastructure from budget cuts and flatlining.

We offer the following comments on the FY27 Preliminary Budget for the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), which plays a critical role in securing New York City's energy supply, generating affordable renewable energy, and advancing environmental justice and protecting public health.

Immigrant Health Initiative

We ask the Council to continue and enhance support for the Immigrant Health Initiative, which continues to save lives and improve health across our city. This program supports more than 20 nonprofits, including NYLPI programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers and their families through direct legal representation, litigation, community education, strategic partnerships with public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy. Through vigorous client and community advocacy and wraparound services, NYLPI improves health outcomes, increases access to healthcare, and provides critical and timely education for communities, healthcare providers, and legal service advocates.

Such access to essential healthcare often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net health care system when people are able to resume work and lead productive lives.

As increasing numbers of New Yorkers are detained in immigration jails, we remain one of few organizations focused on medical advocacy and the acute health hazards of immigration detention. In addition, in the face of continued attacks on the asylum process, we have offered culturally competent legal representation, including to those who identify as transgender, gender-expansive, or live with HIV.

Improving Access to Healthcare for New Yorkers

Immigrant New Yorkers make up nearly 40% of the population of our city, speaking a range of languages other than English. Recent changes in the law and rhetoric promulgated by the federal government have instilled deep fear in many immigrants across the country, causing them to forego necessary healthcare and treatments they may be eligible for. In 2025, the number of immigrants avoiding, ceasing, skipping, or postponing care rose from previous years, due to increased fears of immigration enforcement.¹ This includes mixed status families where family members with status or citizenship may similarly be going without care due to fears of enforcement or scrutiny of immigrant relatives. The consequences of this climate of fear are clear: immigrant New Yorkers suffer worse health outcomes and consequences when they do not seek routine or preventative care due to immigration fears.

Recently, a NYLPI client undergoing dialysis while managing multiple comorbidities shared that she is afraid to speak up for herself, including when medical providers are causing her harm, for fear of immigration enforcement and retaliation. Our client is insured through both NYC Cares and Emergency Medicaid. Still, she fears that insurance alone is not sufficient to protect her in this climate of fear. Our client has shared the extensive steps she takes to manage her symptoms and conditions while she is receiving treatment, including fasting, strict routines, and use of devices, so that she doesn't cause more work for medical staff at her dialysis center for fear that individual providers will retaliate against her by calling immigration officials to detain her or initiate her removal from the United States. Her life depends on the treatments she receives in the United States. A relative in her home country has similar conditions and has shared how expensive and inaccessible the care they need is. Her greatest fear is being returned to a country where she is almost assured a painful death.

These fears resonate with many of our clients as well as many immigrants across New York City, with mental health consequences. Immigrants fearing consequences and enforcement are at a heightened risk of a range of mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, alcohol misuse, suicidal ideation, and increased vulnerability to sexual violence.² This fear not only prevents immigrants from seeking medical care, but also prevents them from seeking protection and safety from law enforcement where immigrant New Yorkers fear collusion or information sharing with federal agencies tasked with their removal.

¹ Drishti Pillai, Samantha Artiga, Akash Pillai, Alisha Rao, Liz Hamel, Shannon Schumacher, and Ashley Kirzinger “KFF/New York Times 2025 Survey of Immigrants: Health and Health Care Experiences During the Second Trump Administration,” available at <https://www.kff.org/immigrant-health/kff-new-york-times-2025-survey-of-immigrants-health-and-health-care-experiences-during-the-second-trump-administration/>

² Myriam Vidal Valero, “U.S. immigration policy: Mental health impacts of increased detentions and deportations,” available at <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2025/09/mental-health-immigration-enforcement>

With your support, we have continued to provide health care advocacy and access to New York's most vulnerable immigrants. In 2025, we advocated on behalf of 52 New Yorkers and provided 44 detained New Yorkers with care in immigration detention. We also participated in various education campaigns, including Know Your Rights trainings, community education material distribution, pro bono provider recruitment and education, and targeted community partner referrals, aimed at educating both immigrants about their rights and eligibility in health care as well as providers' rights and responsibilities to their patients, including immigrants.

NYLPI's Medical-Legal Community Partnership

Your funding has allowed us to expand our Medical Provider Network's reach, partnering dedicated medical providers with vulnerable immigrants who need their advocacy and support in their legal cases. Providers in our network have volunteered numerous times over the last year to provide vital evaluations for our immigrant clients in their immigration proceedings. These evaluations include psychological evaluations necessary to ensure that competency is addressed and restored through proper legal safeguards, as well as physical and psychological evaluations used as evidence of persecution in asylum cases. These evaluations are often key evidence in removal proceedings as they help show the true impact of harm our clients faced in their countries of origin and continue to face in the United States.

Our Medical Provider Network has also been instrumental in assuring better health and legal outcomes for detained New Yorkers. Our providers provide evaluations and medical records review and advocacy on behalf of New Yorkers in immigration detention across the country. This has proven vital not only in their legal proceedings, but also in their healthcare while detained. In one case, our client was detained in immigration custody for over nine months. Over the course of those nine months, he was denied his daily medication necessary to manage his chronic condition, forced to undergo surgery with little information or instruction, and ignored when he repeatedly and desperately pleaded for medical assistance when he began to bleed uncontrollably and suffered excruciating pain. Our volunteer medical provider twice reviewed our client's medical records and confirmed what we all feared: our client was dying in immigration detention due to medical neglect. Following submission of this report to the federal court, our client let us know that medical staff came to find him and provided him with medication and pain relief that significantly relieved his pain and symptoms. He told us he didn't know this relief even existed. We confirmed through medical records that it was our volunteer doctor's assessment and serious concerns that prompted the medical providers at the detention center to act. Days later, a federal judge cited his concerns about the sufficiency of our client's medical treatment in detention and went on to order immediate release, allowing our client to return home to his health providers and re-establish care for his chronic conditions as well as conditions developed in detention.

We partner closely with NYIFUP providers and offer our Medical Provider Network services to legal service providers and attorneys across the city because we are sure that there is no health in detention and expert medical advocacy can be the key to securing the release of New Yorkers detained in immigration jails. Our report, "Denied Care, Denied Dignity: Systemic Medical Failures in Immigration Detention at Orange County Jail," provides examples of the significant

abuse, neglect, and discrimination at just one immigration detention center, Orange County Jail.³ Our report found recurrent deficiencies in care including neglect of follow-up care, lack of care for chronic conditions, lack of medication access comprised of erroneous prescriptions, and lack of nutrition and language access in managing chronic conditions, among many other failures of healthcare in detention. These issues are endemic across detention centers nationwide, where we've seen issues of over-crowding, lack of access to nutrition, lack of hygiene, and multiple outbreaks of extremely contagious but preventable diseases such as measles.

Immigration Representation is Health Care

In today's landscape, the best opportunity immigrants have to maintain their health and safety is seeking immigration representation. Detention risks have sky-rocketed for all immigrants, independent of their personal circumstances like their community connections, health conditions, or criminal histories. We have witnessed how our immigration representation increases the chances of better legal outcomes for our clients. Represented immigrants are less likely to be detained when interacting with federal agencies such as ERO and EOIR. Further, represented clients are able to be connected with representation in federal Habeas Corpus proceedings when they have counsel who can either represent them in those proceedings or quickly provide referral to competent litigators.

Recently, immigration representation has caused a huge draw on our resources. In 2025, this administration deployed various strategies to keep immigrants from pursuing their claims in immigration court and protecting their own rights. In early 2025, we saw a bait and switch operation deploy in immigration courts across the country, where DHS dismissed proceedings against immigrants with no notice or explanation, only to detain those same immigrants as undocumented persons immediately upon exiting their hearing. Around the same time, the government overturned long-standing principles and practices, declaring almost all immigrants who crossed the border subject to mandatory detention not eligible for bond. Attorneys quickly responded by filing habeas corpus petitions and appeals, successfully obtaining release of many clients wrongly detained across the country.

We also saw two different "prepermission" campaigns deploy in 2025, where DHS asked the judges to prepermit asylum applications, essentially throwing clients' applications for life-saving asylum out and denying them their day in court. With the passage of H.R. 1 over the summer, immigration fees increased exponentially, with the average appeal costing over \$1,000, a fee prohibitive for many. When represented, clients were able to successfully argue against prepermission in some cases. In one case, our client received a motion for prepermission over email without ever appearing before the judge. We were able to prove that our client's life was in danger in the country of proposed removal, and the immigration judge denied prepermission, allowing our client to continue seeking asylum in the United States without the lengthy and expensive process of appeals through the immigration system.

³ "Denied Care, Denied Dignity: Systemic Medical Failures in Immigration Detention at Orange County Jail," available at https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/English-OCJ-Health-in-Detention-Report_FINAL.pdf

Countless other strategies have made it impossible for immigrant families to look after themselves. Increasing fees, strict scrutiny of applications, and an overburdened immigration bar have made it extremely hard for vulnerable immigrants to seek the representation they desperately need. Pro se assistance campaigns are important, but the complexity of new strategies to detain and remove immigrants has made it increasingly difficult for clients to successfully represent themselves, even when equipped with application support and instruction. The immigration legal landscape is ever-changing and increasingly violent. Representation and legal support is vital to ensure flexible and responsive strategies in immigration court and when interacting with immigration agencies.

Your support in 2025 allowed our small team of experts to serve over 300 New Yorkers. We represented over 60 people in legal proceedings since the beginning of 2025, while providing advice and counsel, healthcare advocacy, and healthcare navigation to nearly 100 New Yorkers. Still, we receive calls weekly from persons seeking legal representation while navigating these quick and confusing changes in the law and their proceedings. Your continued and increased support would allow us to meet this need.

Nonprofit Rapid Response Network

The federal administration has focused tremendous power on mass deportations, revocation of racial justice initiatives, claw backs of climate and environmental justice funding, and retribution against those standing up to it. The human cost to New York's disadvantaged communities has already been staggering. Nonprofits and CBOs serving or employing immigrants and other marginalized groups continue to form a critical shield but are also becoming direct targets of federal agencies attempting to conduct raids, chill advocacy, and cut services to people in need.

With continued support from the Speaker and the Protect NYC Families Initiative, our Nonprofit Rapid Response Network will strengthen and protect New York City's nonprofit sector by providing legal resources, relationship-building, practical training, and legal advice and representation to nonprofits and CBOs. It will foster collaboration, build capacity, and distribute essential resources and legal advice to help nonprofits survive attacks by the federal administration.

Nonprofit Contracting Reform

Legal services providers continue to face significant challenges related to timely payments for our contracts with the City. When non-profit legal services organizations take on such contracts, we commit to providing high-quality services, supporting marginalized individuals and communities. We urge the Council to invest adequate resources towards fixing the city's flawed contracting and procurement systems to ensure providers are paid on time. This entails filling long-empty agency vacancies for contracting positions and reforming the payment process, so providers are no longer completing the critical services they are contracted for and then waiting years to receive already allocated funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

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For 50 years, NYLPI has fought to protect civil rights and achieve lived equality for communities in need. Led by community priorities, we pursue health, immigrant, disability, and environmental justice. NYLPI combines the power of law, organizing, and the private bar to make lasting change where it's needed most.

For more information visit: www.nylpi.org

^[1] In 2025, NYLPI published guidance for nonprofits responding to the threat of immigration enforcement. See: <https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Guidance-to-Nonprofits-Regarding-Immigration-Enforcement.pdf>

**Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) before the NYC Council
Committee on Immigration Jointly with the Committee on Finance regarding:**

Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 25, 2026

Chair Encarnacion, Council Members, and staff, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Immigration Committee and the Finance Committee regarding the City's Budget for fiscal year 2027. My name is Jodi Ziesemer, and I am the Director for Emergency Immigration Policy Response at 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, financial counseling, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the home-bound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence survivors, 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 Immigration Committee and Finance Committee regarding the City Budget for the 2027 Fiscal Year.

Our City has repeatedly noted its commitment to our immigrant communities. Legal services funding is essential to preserve the rights of immigrants and keep families from the harms of detainment, deportation, and loss of documented status. In this terrifying moment, when our neighbors fear being torn from our City, their families, their homes, and their lives, we call on the City to doubled-down on the longstanding investment our City has shown to support communities through increased funding. As attacks increase, funding and services must as well, through

additional dollars to be allocated in the City budget supports innovative and flexible legal service programming to respond to the ongoing and emerging needs of our communities will give immigrant New Yorkers the chance to live, work, and thrive in our city.

The need for immigration legal services is enormous and critical as the federal government ramps up its resources and power on arresting, detaining, and deporting millions of immigrants while simultaneously revoking and limiting access to status and documentation for millions more. Our immigrant neighbors, including many lawfully working and present, are targeted and vulnerable, forced to navigate multiple government systems on their own, including the behemoth that is the United States' deportation system. The current allocation of resources and funding, while demonstrating strong support for immigrant New Yorkers, is now woefully inadequate to address the legal needs of immigrant communities that have developed over the past year. Thousands of vulnerable families have been left without assistance in meeting asylum filing deadlines, navigating the confusing immigration court system, and defending themselves against detention and deportation. Far too many are left unable to access critical legal services which would help them maintain their status and defend against arrest and deportation.

With many pathways to relief—temporary protected status, parole, DACA—cut off and many other pathways, such as asylum, severely curtailed, many immigrants served through various City programming will not be eligible to file for status. Additionally, with executive orders, directives, and legislation (Laken Reily Act), filing immigration forms, engaging in any process to obtain or renew status, or attending appointments carries a greatly increased risk of detention and deportation for many. It is critical that immigrants receive competent, robust, and up-to-date information and legal guidance to navigate the challenges that they face. The need for

representation and assistance in removal proceedings and to defend against deportation is enormous.

New Programming and Additional Funding

1. Need to restore stability through increased, multi-year, flexible funding for legal programming

New York Legal Service providers are under enormous pressure to fulfill our current commitments to clients and contracts in this harsh enforcement environment. Our practice has changed rapidly over the past ten months with the ending of previously straightforward pathways to immigration status and relief such as Temporary Protected Status, parole, and DACA, and the increasingly fraught enforcement landscape which puts at risk for detention and deportation clients applying for any type of immigration application. In the past two decades, New York City has devised and funded stable, multi-year programming to respond to changes in the federal immigration landscape.

Legal Service Providers call for additional funding and new programming to support comprehensive legal services to cover the full breadth of work involved with representing immigrants in this new environment. Because filing what a few years ago were straightforward affirmative cases now often require removal and detention defense, we call for funding for full representation allowing us to pivot services to meet the needs of individual cases. We also ask for increased funding for existing programming designed to address evolving legal needs such as the Pro Se Plus Project through Asylum Seekers Legal Advocacy Network (ASLAN) which has evolved from asylum application assistance to in-court advocacy for families facing the harshest aspects of enforcement and the weaponization of our immigration court system. Rapid Response Legal Collaborative was created during the first Trump Administration and continues to be a critical source of expertise and capacity for detention and deportation defense as well as preserving rights through federal litigation. We also ask for a continuance of the 1-year Legal Support Center Contract funding that covered existing programming

excluded from shifts in programming. Specifically, this funding enabled NYLAG to continue and expand community-based legal service programs, partnering with culturally specific community organizations and hospitals to provide flexibility services, education, outreach, and legal services. Services have been crucial to fill needs in New York City's immigrant communities and demand has continued to grow.

The City fundamentally lacks multi-year, flexible programming which would allow legal service organizations to grow their capacity and expertise to properly respond to this moment. For the past four years, contracts from the City—including, in particular, funding for legal and case management response to the influx of asylum seekers in 2022-2024—have been doled out on yearly basis, through contracts that were often negotiated after the start of the fiscal year. This instability and the short-term nature of these contracts has stunted our ability to create supervision infrastructures, hire and train and promote permanent staff, and invest in systems that allow us to maximize our reach and provide secure legal support to meet the current needs.

Immigration cases require a commitment of years and deep expertise. There are no more straightforward cases as even family-based petitions or applications for naturalization must navigate the gauntlet of stricter interpretations of the statutes, restrictive regulations, harsher adjudications or senseless denials, and are increasingly risking being routed into removal proceedings, detention, and deportation.

Providers need a stable source of funding that allows us to build the infrastructure and expertise that will respond to this moment and the flexibility in contractual deliverables to provide legal support that evolves to meet the current need. For example, many of our contracts require us to provide a high-volume of application assistance. This was responsive to the needs even just last year as many clients were eligible for Temporary Protected Status, asylum, parole and contingent work authorizations based on those statuses; however, there has already been a swift reconfiguring of our immigration system to

end many of these pathways to status and to put substantial barriers to extant forms of relief such as asylum. Currently, friend of court appearances, representation in removal proceedings, appeals, detained representation and federal litigation are at the forefront of the need and we are scrambling to shift capacity to address this change. However, given the rapid pace of new policies and practices, even this current need may be eclipsed by other, more pressing needs in the near future.

2. Need for innovative and flexible programming to increase capacity to respond to harsh enforcement environment

In addition to flexibility in existing programming, there needs to be support for innovative, novel programming to respond to the increase in enforcement. NYLAG has demonstrated unique and innovative responses to various immigration crisis over the past decade, creating partnerships to provide expert legal intervention for immigrants at imminent risk of deportation through the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, programming to respond to Ukrainians and Afghans fleeing war and political unrest, and establishing the Pro Se Plus Project to leverage community-based organizations and legal expertise to serve recently arrived asylum seekers. Immigration representation has rapidly shifted to detention work, bond, challenging removal orders, appeals, and federal habeas petitions. NYLAG has the staffing and expertise as well as a history of effect service provision to adequately incorporate this new work into our existing practice and anticipate and innovate for what is on the horizon.

NYC Immigration Legal Service Providers have demonstrated their ability to create innovative, responsive programming to respond to rapidly evolving community needs and shifts in local and national immigration policy. This was evident in formation of the ICARE programming in response to the increase in unaccompanied minors immigrating to the U.S. and to the NYC area in 2014 and creation of the “rocket docket” processing of juvenile cases; creation of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative during the first Trump Administration when immigrants with existing removal orders were targeted for detention and deportation; the creation of the Pro Se Plus Project to provide

emergency services to the large number of immigrants arrived in New York City seeking protection and humanitarian relief.

The City should earmark funding for creative bids for programming to increase capacity for people at imminent risk of detention, as well as detained, habeas, and federal court practice in New York City. This moment calls for multiple creative approaches to respond to the onslaught of national policy changes. A competitive bidding process to fund various pilot projects designed by legal services providers would generate innovative responses by the experts in the field at relatively low-investment costs to the City.

3. Additional programming for appeals and federal litigation

Unfortunately, while the specific policies are rapidly changing and evolving, the larger trends which will inform the practice of immigration law in the next few years indicate that the majority of cases for relief or defense to deportation will be challenged and will require advocacy at the agency level in the form of administrative appeals, evidentiary responses, and requests for reconsideration and in the removal context, will require federal litigation and appeals to the Circuit Courts. We will need dedicated programming and funding to hire experienced staff to engage in this work and to develop this practice. Much like in the criminal context, appellate work is its own niche and should be supported through the City's budget.

4. Dedicated Naturalization Programming

For decades, NYC funded dedicated programming for legal support and English language learning to encourage the City's 800,000 Lawful Permanent Residents to become naturalized U.S. citizens.^[1] Since 2019, there has been a considerable constriction of funding and support for dedicated naturalization services and there is only one remaining funding stream that focuses exclusively on naturalization. While other legal service programming can and does assist with naturalization, it cannot replace the dual support in language and civics preparation as well as legal representation through the naturalization process. With immigration protection being eroded for all immigrants and the

naturalization process becoming more fraught,^[2] it is critical that the City provide support to assist as many lawful permanent residents as possible conclude their immigration journey by achieving U.S. citizenship.

II. Continue Support and Increase Funding for Essential Programming

1. Asylum Seeker Legal Advocacy Network (ASLAN) and Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP)

Legal Service providers, NYLAG among them, have come together to develop innovative programming to maximize the limited legal resources and personnel and to ensure that the linguist and cultural needs are incorporated in service delivery. This broad initiative entitled Asylum Seeker Legal Advocacy Network (ASLAN) includes Lutheran Social Services, CUNY Citizenship Now!, Catholic Charities, and the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP), led the City's response to an influx of immigrant families and supported their journey to obtaining security. When ASLAN was first founded, the focus was on submitting asylum, temporary protected status, and work authorization applications for indigent immigrant New Yorkers working and/or living in the City. Today, ASLAN partners are working on oppositions to prepermission, *pro se* appeals, and emergency planning. ASLAN providers continue to collaborate despite the City dissolving coordination and support and have become nimble in adapting in a harsh and evolving immigration enforcement landscape. **ASLAN calls for sustained and increase funding in the amount of \$5,682,000**

The PSPP program within ASLAN is comprised of NYLAG, UnLocal, Catholic Migration Services, Central American Legal Assistance, African Communities Together, and MASA and has been jointly funded through private and public partnership for the past four years. Its flexibility and the collaborative nature of programming between legal services providers and community organizers has allowed programming to deftly pivot from assistance with asylum and TPS applications to pro se assistance with motions in immigration court and advocacy to prevent ICE

detentions and assist families of those impacted by immigration enforcement. In Fiscal Year 2025, funding for PSPP was summarily cut and only restored through extraordinary measures by New York City Council. **We call for PSPP funding to be returned to MOIA's oversight and budget and for the overall PSPP budget to be increase by \$1,225,000.**

2. Rapid Response Legal Collaborative

In 2019, NYLAG, Make the Road New York, and UnLocal collectively launched the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC) to provide a safety net to those detained immigrants who cannot be served through the City universal representation program NY Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP). The RRLC is funded through both the State and the City, however, in the past two years, the City funding has shifted from MOIA to City Council and critical City funding has been reduced at a time of immense need. Funding should be restored through MOIA and baselined. Meanwhile, it has become clear that additional resources are needed to keep up with demand. RRLC is receiving an overwhelming number of referrals for New Yorkers detained by ICE. Rapid response cases are exceedingly complex and time-consuming, requiring very experienced attorneys, engagement with novel arguments and theories, and federal litigation at District and Circuit Courts. The Rapid Response Legal Collaborative is requesting **at least \$3 million to expand services for New Yorkers faced with ICE detention and/or imminent deportation.** This request will allow RRLC to bring in additional partner agencies, train local and national partners on this complex work, and increase local capacity to engage with the most urgent and necessary defense of our immigrant communities.

3. Key To the City (KTTC)

Key to the City (KTTC) is City Council funding program of long-standing, which brings together the New York Immigration Coalition and NYLAG to provide open, information sessions and screenings at public spaces throughout the five boroughs on a rotating schedule. Over the past five years, NYLAG and NYIC have been able to expand our screening clinics for immigrants in New York

City and have increased the number of events to address some of the current need. We now conduct more than 14 in-person Key to the City events over the year and additional monthly phone consultations, serving more than 400 immigrants each year. We provide legal orientations, information about city services, and individual legal screenings. We also provide simple brief services such as change of address and change of venues and refer eligible migrants to our other programming. It is critical that this programming be sustained as it serves as one of the only open arenas for walk-in legal services in the city. KTTC funding has remained static for almost a decade and we request **a modest increase of \$150,000 to fully support the administrative costs, quality in-person interpretation, and to ensure that we can continue to maintain this vital program in these challenging times.**

4. ACTION NYC

In 2014, the City launched the Action NYC program to provide funding for legal services in partnership with community-based organizations to address the need arising from the creation of the DACA program and the anticipation of other forms of relief for previously-undocumented New Yorkers. This program was a huge success and increased capacity and expertise as well as collaboration amongst city organizations. Unfortunately, this program has been re-envisioned to de-centralize legal support and to fund low-impact, high volume services, in a time when robust legal representation is critical. Concerningly, the new iteration of Action NYC—now titled Legal Support Centers—eliminated extensive services at Hospitals, Libraries, and Schools and reduced the budget for this program by more than \$3 million. The reconfiguration of this programming will make legal services more challenging to access and legal representation necessary to mitigate against detention and deportation is absent from this new model. We urge the City to reinstate the Action NYC model in Hospitals and Schools (and Libraries) to reach otherwise isolated immigrant populations and provided needed legal services at trusted institutions and **restore the \$3 million that was cut from this program.** We echo the demand from the New York Immigration Coalition to baseline this funding to restore and add additional dollars to expand Action NYC under the previous service model.

5. Immigration Health Initiative Continued and Increased Funding

NYLAG's LegalHealth unit is a proud recipient of Immigrant Health Initiative funding that provides free, comprehensive immigration legal services and Medicaid advocacy for immigrants receiving healthcare at NYC H+H. Our medical legal partnership model brings legal services to immigrants with serious and chronic, often life-threatening illness where they receive their treatment – in ambulatory medical clinics, bedside for patients hospitalized, and via tele-legal appointments for patients too sick or afraid to leave their homes.

Our immigration and Medicaid advocacy services can be the crucial link for H+H patients to receive lifesaving care such as organ transplants available only at private institutions or to enable discharge from hospitals to home or nursing homes. With the loss of 1,440 appointments for immigrant patients resulting from the winddown of the ActionNYC Hospital/Institutional program, we anticipate dire health outcomes for immigrants unable to access care because of health insurance barriers and immigrants are too afraid to seek medical care. We urge the Council to continue and expand its support for Immigrant Health Initiative to meet the needs of immigrants with health issues.

NYLAG wants to once again take the opportunity to thank Chair Encarnacion 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Jodi Ziesemer

New York Legal Assistance Group

^[1] <https://cmsny.org/publications/data-briefing-on-new-york-city-immigrants/>

^[2] <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/17/us/politics/trump-immigration-citizenship-denaturalization.html>

^[1] Mackler, Camille, Carmen Maria Rey, Vilma Ilic, Jessica Olive, and Alejandra Collado. “No Safe Harbor: The Landscape of Immigration Legal Services in New York.” The New York Immigration Coalition. February 2020. https://pronto-core-cdn.prantomarketing.com/537/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/NoSafeHarbor_Final2020.pdf

^[1] <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/eoir-immigration-court-listing#NY>

^[1] Brad Lander, “Economic Benefits of Immigration Legal Services,” March 18, 2024. [Economic Benefits of Immigration Legal Services - Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander](#)

^[2] Id.

^[3] Id.

^[4] *Facts, Not Fear: How Welcoming Immigrants Benefits New York City*, New York City Comptroller (Jan. 2024), <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/>.

**NORTHERN MANHATTAN
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION
(NMIC)**

TESTIMONY

Regarding

Adult Literacy Forward

SUBMITTED TO:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Immigration

March 25, 2026

NMIC is a community-based settlement house founded in 1979 which has grown into a leading multi-service agency with a staff of over 120 employees, serving all of New York City. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our community on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. We serve about 14,000 clients each year with a variety of programs to address Housing, Immigration, Education/Career, Finance/Benefits, Health, and Holistic needs. Our Adult Education programs provide over 500 members of the community with preparation for the High School Equivalency exam, English language skills, and the associated wrap around services necessary to establish secure and prosperous futures.

The clients we serve are nearly 100% low income, 70% are foreign born, and 58% speak Spanish as their primary language. Our core catchment area is Upper Manhattan (Community Districts 9-12) and adjacent Bronx neighborhoods (Community Districts 1-7). Our communities specifically represent some of the highest socioeconomic need in New York City and include 9 of the top 10 (out of 59 total) community districts with the highest percentage of residents living below the federal poverty level.

NMIC does not charge any fees for services and is one of only a handful of settlement houses to provide a wide array of services onsite. As such we are uniquely positioned to provide clients with both literacy and educational programming, as well as the advocacy and case management support required for their success.

In 2025, NMIC provided education services to over 500 New Yorkers, of who were enrolled in our adult education programs. Of the 103 students enrolled in our Adult Basic Education program, 80% saw improvement on pre-post exams and nine successfully completed their GED. Of the 259 students enrolled in our English for Speakers of other languages classes, nearly half realized a gain of at least one NRS level on pre and post tests.

As participants in these programs, NMIC clients not only received instruction towards their GED or English proficiency, but they also received regular case management and wrap around services. Over the course of the year, clients were connected to childcare, employment services, housing support, public benefits, financial literacy, and much more by NMIC case managers.

There are over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access adult basic education (ABE), GED, or ESOL classes in any given year. Further, this funding typically does not cover case management services and other supports necessary for programs and their clients to thrive.

The report *Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders* points to student supportive services that respond to the complexity of adult students' lives and adequate committed full-time staff as key building blocks of quality adult literacy programs. NMIC has two active adult literacy contracts with DYCD, which provides for a total of two full-time staff to support all program intake, case management, data entry and reporting across both contracts.

That is simply insufficient to address the over 1500 program applications we receive annually or provide any meaningful case management to our enrolled clients.

The Adult Literacy Forward Initiative will support nearly 400 additional hours of primarily English language instruction across NMIC's Adult Education Programs, but it is also an essential supplement to NMIC's DYCD contracted literacy programs. This funding allows NMIC to hire a part time intake specialist to guide clients through the enrollment process and supports two full time case managers dedicated to Adult Education clients. In FY 26, NMIC case managers have helped clients access childcare, food pantries, immigration services, employment and training, and mental health services. As our community faces cuts in services and attacks from the federal government, the work of our case managers is more essential than ever.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, the need in our community remains high. To support our ongoing work NMIC requests a renewal in FY27 of our \$240,000 Adult Literacy Forward allocation. We also ask that the City Council consider increasing total Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward. An increase of \$3.5 million would enable the 63 programs that currently receive funding to serve thousands more adults in need.

Thank you again for your time and support. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the City Council to ensure our communities have access to the resources and support necessary to meet their academic, personal, and economic goals.

**NORTHERN MANHATTAN
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION
(NMIC)**

Written Testimony

Regarding:

Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget

**SUBMITTED TO:
THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION**

**Presented by:
Jesenia Ponce, Esq.**

March 25, 2026

NMIC was founded in 1979 to protect low-income and immigrant families in Upper Manhattan. Since then, we have expanded into adjacent Bronx neighborhoods and support 14,000 New Yorkers with a wide array of programs to address Housing, Immigration, Finance & Benefits, Education & Career, Health, and Holistic needs.

Our Legal, Organizing, & Advocacy Services (LOA), provide a range of benefits to community members including immigration services and domestic violence services. We advise and represent our clients on matters including family-based petitions, citizenship application assistance, U-visas, and other culturally and linguistically competent immigration services. Nearly half a million residents in our core service area are immigrants (86% of whom are from Latin America) including about 230,000 noncitizens. Additionally, our dedicated Domestic Violence Unit offers direct services to survivors of intimate partner violence, bilingual and free of charge, including individual/group counseling, crisis intervention, trauma-focused therapy, shelter placement, relocation assistance, and case management.

MOIA since 2016 has funded NMIC and dozens of other non-profits providing vital immigrant legal services. Originally called ActionNYC, MOIA's new Legal Support Centers (LSC) continue to provide vital funding that enables nonprofits to help tens of thousands of immigrant New Yorkers per year. In addition to the current 3-year MOIA LSC contracts

running from 2025-2028, MOIA also issued several separate 1-year contracts to NMIC and other nonprofits, set to expire July 1, 2026.

The 1-year contracts were instrumental in enhancing and expanding services for immigrant New Yorkers. NMIC hired a new team of one attorney and three paralegals, who provide daily legal consultations, straightforward and complex USCIS applications, and legal and social service referrals for immigrants regardless of status. We are deeply grateful to MOIA for the 1-year contract. However, MOIA has not announced a renewal of the contracts set to expire in July, and we are deeply concerned about the consequences our communities and our talented legal staff will face. To allow this successful 1-year program to expire would do a great disservice to the city at the worst possible time. Without timely action, organizations will be forced to make difficult staffing and service decisions that could disrupt critical legal support for immigrant New Yorkers in need.

Immigrant New Yorkers face a truly unprecedented crisis due to hostile and chaotic policy from the federal administration. I will not speak at length regarding the well-known increases in detainment, deportations and innumerable instances of cruelty and disregard for due process. I want to emphasize though, that this issue is not even limited to those without status or recent arrivals. We are witnessing a full-scale attempt to dismantle the country's entire immigration legal system, and this affects those with status; it affects green card holders; it affects United States Citizens who have already naturalized; it affects the U.S. Citizen children of those seeking status.

NMIC primarily represents clients on USCIS applications, and we have seen a disturbing trend in applications being wrongfully or arbitrarily denied. We have seen a total lack of discretion on humanitarian cases, where the smallest infraction is used to deny a benefit that the community member has worked hard for years or decades to achieve. Those who have waited abroad dutifully for their family member's petitions to be approved have been "paused," under the bigoted justification that any person from the banned 75 countries will be an unacceptable burden on society. And all applications denied within the U.S. are being turned over to ICE for rapid efforts at removal, regardless of criminal history, regardless of time present in the country, regardless of family members who would suffer.

NMIC's MOIA-funded attorneys and paralegals have reacted to these attacks on our community and legal system- filing a much higher volume of appeals and motions. We have even taken on some removal cases where clients have ICE check-ins. We are committed to going above and beyond to protect our communities, even with limited organizational capacity.

This is why MOIA must offer across-the-board renewals of all current 1-year Legal Support Center contracts. The need for trustworthy advice, thoughtful representation, and other legal support has never been greater.

Sadly, we now see our community, in desperation, increasingly turn to either incompetent or fraudulent “notarios¹” whose filings have led directly to applicants being summoned for deportation. For example, just last month, NMIC received a referral to our MOIA LSC for Dulce², who had lived and worked in the Bronx for two decades. Last year she paid a notaria a few hundred dollars to file for a green card, with her U.S. citizen mom as the petitioner. Under the plain rules of the law, this was doomed to fail. Surely enough, it was denied and ICE swiftly served Dulce, who had no criminal history, a notice to appear for removal proceedings. NMIC’s Bronx attorney, funded through the 1-year MOIA contract, advised the client thoroughly and immediately sent a direct referral through MOIA’s network for court representation the same day.

Should this vital contract end in July, we will see more lives destroyed by ICE and we will be less able to assist victims of immigrant services fraud like Dulce.

For these reasons, we urgently and respectfully request this Committee to ensure renewal or extension of all current MOIA 1-year contracts. Thank you for the opportunity to have our voices heard on this matter.

¹ Non-experts operating out of storefronts advertising tax, immigration and other services without legal counsel.

² Name changed for client privacy.



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Immigration
Council Member Elsie Encarnación, Chair**

**Submitted by Paula Inhargue, Policy Analyst
March 25, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Encarnación and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration for convening today's Executive Budget hearing. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 800,000 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.

The federal administration is rapidly targeting immigrants across the country to follow through on President Trump's commitment to mass deportation. New York City's immigrant communities are increasingly vulnerable to intensified enforcement. Settlement houses play a crucial role in providing these communities with the support and protection they need. The FY27 budget must acknowledge the struggles of immigrant families by ensuring they have access to supportive services. Our testimony will focus on sustaining and expanding funding for Adult Literacy in New York City and ensuring that children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidies can access the child care they need.

Invest \$18 million in City Council funds for Adult Literacy services that sustains programs not eligible for funding under DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

In New York City, an estimated 2 million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma. No-cost community-based adult literacy programs such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), and high school equivalency (HSE) preparation programs enable New Yorkers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families, support their children's education, and advocate for themselves and their

families. Adult literacy programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations reach over 9,000 people each year and often serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being.

In 2024, the Department of Youth and Community Development's Adult Literacy RFP introduced new requirements tying program eligibility to specific Neighborhood Tabulation Areas (NTAs), which significantly limited which organizations could apply for funding. As a result, many long-standing providers were excluded from securing multi-year contracts and lost the funding needed to sustain their adult literacy programs, despite a large student base and successful program outcomes.

To address the gaps created by the 2024 DYCD RFP, the City Council made a historic investment of \$16.5 million in adult literacy funding in FY25 and FY26. This discretionary funding is sustaining more than 60 programs. For four UNH settlement house adult literacy program providers (CAMBA, Center for Family Life, Queens Community House and Sunnyside Community Services), City Council discretionary funding is the sole funding source sustaining these programs, and they have served or expect to serve more than 3,100 students collectively. Without renewed funding, organizations excluded from the current DYCD literacy portfolio will not be able to offer adult literacy classes after June 30th of this year.

It is necessary for adult learners to have stable programs and support, as continued City Council funding supports staffing and essential program infrastructure and thousands of adult learners depend on these programs for essential skills. Ideally, these programs would be supported by a robust, baselined program managed by DYCD that offered students and providers stability with year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revisits its unnecessarily restrictive stance on geographic priority for programming, **it is crucial that the City Council increases its investment to \$18 million to make sure that more adult learners can have access to quality classes.**

Restore and baseline Promise NYC with a \$50 million annual investment

Despite there being many types of child care programming in New York City, immigrant children do not always qualify for extended day/year child care programming because of their status. Promise NYC was created to fill in this gap, and to ensure that children who were not eligible for child care programming via ACS's traditional assistance program could still receive care. Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). Since the program launched in FY23, providers have been reporting full enrollment and long waitlists, which demonstrates the need and desire from families to have this support.

Promise NYC was funded at \$25 million in the City's FY 2025 budget, and this investment helped clear waitlists across the program and expand access to child care for undocumented and mixed-status families who are otherwise excluded from most public child care programs. However, this funding was not baselined, and programs are now anticipating that child care services will end on June 30th, leaving families abruptly without care arrangements.

This year, we urge the City to both **baseline and increase funding for Promise NYC to \$50 million in the FY 2027 budget.** The success of the program has driven significant demand, and waitlists are growing as providers struggle to keep up with the number of eligible families seeking care. Additional investment would allow the program to serve more families and bring more providers into a model that has proven effective at connecting immigrant families to stable, affordable child care.

We celebrate that child care is receiving the attention and investment it deserves, and we strongly support efforts to expand access so that every child in New York City can benefit from early care and education, regardless of immigration status. However, experience shows that immigrant families are often the first to fall through the cracks when new systems are implemented or existing programs are expanded. Promise NYC has been successful precisely because it was designed to reach families who are otherwise excluded and to work closely with trusted community-based providers.

As the City works toward building a more inclusive and equitable child care system, it is critical to sustain and strengthen Promise NYC so immigrant families do not lose access to essential services during this transition. Maintaining and expanding this program ensures that families can continue accessing the child care they rely on today, while the City builds long-term systems that guarantee equitable access for all families.

Lastly, the City Council must **renew its investment in immigration legal services** so that immigrants navigating complex legal systems can access the support they need. Without free or low-cost legal assistance, many immigrants, especially low-income families, face significant barriers that can lead to family separation, economic hardship, and reluctance to engage with essential services. By sustaining these investments, the City Council helps ensure that community-based organizations can continue to show up for their communities and that all New Yorkers have a fair opportunity to live, work, and contribute to the communities they call home.

Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please reach me at pinhargue@unhny.org

CAMBA/ CAMBA Legal Services

City Fiscal Year 2027

City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing Committee on Immigration

March 25, 2026

Introduction

Thank you, Chair Encarnación, Committee on Immigration and to the New York City Council at large for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Janet Miller and I am an Executive Vice President at CAMBA. I am here to request your support of two critical programs: the New York City – Immigration Resettlement Initiative and Legal Services for the Working Poor.

CAMBA Inc. is proud to serve nearly 80,000 individuals and families across New York City each year—offering over 180 programs at more than 100 locations throughout the five boroughs, delivering comprehensive, client-centered services to help New Yorkers achieve stability and self-sufficiency. These two initiatives are critical components of our holistic approach to serving New Yorkers, a majority of whom are immigrants.

New York City- Immigration Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI)

This year, CAMBA respectfully requests a **\$1 million investment in our Resettlement work through the New York City- Immigration Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI)**, a coordinated, citywide effort led by five local, trusted, immigrant-serving and refugee resettlement organizations. CAMBA is a member along with Catholic Charities

Community Services, Church World Service, Commonpoint, and the International Rescue Committee. Collectively, our organizations have responded to nearly every major migration and displacement movement impacting New York City over the past 5 decades. This critical support will serve approximately 4,000 vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers citywide overall, strengthening community stability across all five boroughs through coordinated, evidence-based service delivery. 800 of these clients will be served by CAMBA.

CAMBA was founded 49 years ago to serve Central Brooklyn's immigrant population. For nearly five decades we have been working to support Refugees, Asylees and other immigrants from around the world, migrating here as a result of forced displacement, to rebuild their lives as New York City's newest New Yorkers.

This is a pivotal moment for New York City, our clients, our communities and our programs. Thousands of immigrants urgently need access to vital social, workforce and educational services. Immigration enforcement, rapidly shifting federal policies, changing eligibility rules, and significant funding losses have intensified this need. At this critical moment, experienced, trusted providers are essential to ensure that vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers are not left without support. We know we are stronger together and we are coming together as we have done in past times of crisis, now as the NYC-IRI, a formal, coordinated initiative inclusive of all five New York City local resettlement organizations.

As an affiliate of the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) and with support from NYS Bureau of Refugee Services, our team provides resettlement services to more than 1,000 individuals annually. In 2025, CAMBA Resettlement Services assisted approximately 1,500 individuals to rebuild their lives after fleeing conflict and persecution. Our clients represent a highly diverse community of more than 20 nationalities, arriving from countries such as Haiti, Ukraine, China, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, and Guinea.

The individuals we serve arrive with resilience, skills, and a strong desire to work, but often face barriers such as limited English proficiency, unfamiliar job markets, and the need to rebuild their careers while meeting basic needs. Through job readiness training,

English language instruction, resume and interview preparation, along with holistic case management, our programs help clients move from instability to long-term independence. Approximately 85% of our resettlement participants secure employment within their first year in NYC, with strong retention and measurable wage growth.

NYC-IRI is uniquely positioned to deliver a holistic, resettlement-informed case management model for our newest New Yorkers. Services address both immediate stabilization needs and long-term pathways to integration and self-sufficiency for individuals and families navigating profound uncertainty related to immigration status, housing instability, economic insecurity, and trauma. Without this critical investment, these highly vulnerable people will be left to fend for themselves in an increasingly hostile and precarious environment. The consequences will be devastating – eviction, food insecurity, physical and mental health ailments, homelessness, limited social support, lack of familiarity with resources, lack of knowledge about legal rights and responsibilities, unemployment and underemployment, childcare and school enrollment challenges, and myriad other vulnerabilities. An investment in NYC-IRI will help to hold our newest New Yorkers harmless during this time of great peril.

Let us follow just one client story as an example. Mr. V, a doctor specializing in pediatric and trauma care from Ukraine, arrived in the United States with Humanitarian Parole. When he came to CAMBA, he was living in a shelter and struggling to find work. Despite his qualifications, he faced significant barriers navigating his new surroundings and entering the U.S. workforce. Through our programs, he received emergency needs support- English language training, career counseling, credential evaluation, and funding for EMT training, enabling him to move into his own apartment within months, complete his EMT certification, and re-enter the healthcare field.

This is not a unique story. Across our agencies, CAMBA and the rest of the NYC-IRI agencies support individuals requiring a wide range of short term supports in order to stabilize, orient, educate, navigate, and participate in their new community and economy. As one former client shared, “I came to the U.S. completely alone, with no family or friends

in the country, determined to start over from scratch... CAMBA's support helped me stabilize my life and focus on building a future." Together, these supports quickly enable clients to enter the workforce and build meaningful, sustainable livelihoods.

We ask for City Council's support to sustain these vital services, protect our immigrant neighbors, and continue helping individuals transition from instability to employment and self-sufficiency. Immigrants and refugees are essential to our communities. With the right support, they become productive workers, business owners, taxpayers, and contributors to our economy in every regard. We urge you to invest in NYC-IRI to continue making that possible.

Legal Services for the Working Poor (LSWP)

CAMBA is a founding member of the Legal Services for the Working Poor (LSWP) Coalition that also includes Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC), Mobilization for Justice, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and TakeRoot Justice. The Coalition was created with support from the City Council over 20 years ago to address the civil legal needs of working poor and other low-income New Yorkers whose income is slightly higher than the poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering them ineligible for free civil legal services. LSWP's services are critical to ensure working New Yorkers maintain financial independence and help them preserve economic stability in communities across New York City.

In Fiscal Year 2026, the LSWP initiative was funded in the City Council budget under Legal Services for Low-Income and Working-Class New Yorkers, totaling \$9,255,000, with each of the five Coalition members receiving \$455,000. **In Fiscal Year 2027, CAMBA and the other members of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition are requesting a \$600,000 allocation** from the City Council, which includes a full restoration of the \$455,000 allocated in Fiscal Year 2026. A \$600,000 allocation to each of the 5 Coalition partners would support critical legal services and allow providers to deepen their impact in the practice areas of immigration, consumer, workers rights and benefits law. The impact of cuts, actions and policy changes on the Federal level threaten the social safety net and

put working poor New Yorkers at risk for immigration abuses, illegal debt collection, the wrongful termination of benefits and other threats to their wellbeing. We call on the City Council to make critical investments into legal services in Fiscal Year 2027, including the Legal Services for the Working Poor initiative. Added resources are vital to safeguard against Federal policy that attacks working poor New Yorkers.

We continue to see that working poor New Yorkers, who can barely make ends meet, face catastrophic consequences as a result of a civil legal problem. Common problems include not being paid for their work or not being paid overtime; identity theft; the freezing of a bank account that resulted from a collection lawsuit they did not even know about; or being denied public benefits to which they are entitled. The consequences of these problems can lead to other problems, including increased risk of eviction or foreclosure. These working New Yorkers can end up spiraling downward to join the ranks of the poor if they do not have access to lawyers to assist them. Our legal services organizations represent New Yorkers across all five boroughs in immigration, employment, consumer, foreclosure, benefits, and housing matters in addressing these matters.

Conclusion

At CAMBA Inc., our mission is to connect people with opportunities to enhance their quality of life. These two initiatives are core to that mission.

This Council's funding for Legal Services for the Working Poor is the only funding that specifically targets the civil legal needs of working people to ensure continued self-sufficiency for families struggling to survive in New York City. It is *vital*ly important that the City Council not only continue to support this flexible funding stream but increase its funding so that the legal service organizations are able to meet the needs of their clients by providing a diverse array of civil legal services to working poor New Yorkers. We urge the Council to fully invest in civil legal service initiatives overall and for the Legal Services for the Working Poor allocation in particular. In Fiscal Year 2027, the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition is respectfully asking the City Council to enhance the allocation of each of the 5 Coalition partners from \$455,000 to \$600,000.

City Council funding for NYC-IRI is critical to providing support to thousands of immigrants in urgent need of vital social, workforce and educational services. Increased immigration enforcement, rapidly shifting federal policies, changing eligibility rules, and significant funding losses have intensified this need. At this critical moment, experienced, trusted providers are essential to ensure that vulnerable immigrants are not left without support. By extending proven resettlement supports to those who need them most, the NYC-IRI strengthens the social fabric of New York City and advances equity across immigrant communities. Thank you.

If you have any further questions, please contact Janet Miller, Executive Vice President at Janet.Miller@camba.org.



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**Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice
Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
Mar 25, 2026**

Namaste. Thank you to the Committee on Immigration for this opportunity. My name is Riksang Gurung, and I am a case coordinator at Adhikaar. Adhikaar, meaning “rights” in Nepali, is the only women-led worker and community center for the Nepali-speaking community. We organize for workers’ rights, immigrants’ rights, access to healthcare, language justice, and youth development. We are our community’s 911 and 311– the first place our members go to find help, get on-the-job training, and learn English. Our members live in Jackson Heights, Woodside, East Elmhurst, Elmhurst, Corona, Maspeth, Sunnyside, Ridgewood, Jamaica and Flatbush. We are also one of the newer and most rapidly-growing immigrant communities in New York City.

We are nail salon workers and nannies, gas station attendants and small business owners. We are students and home health aides. We are the people who make delicious momos and butter tea. We like to dance and sing and take part in this great City. We are your neighbors.

We are asking you, the Committee on Immigration, New York City’s steward and advocate for immigrant communities, to invest in the safety and protection of the people who make this City run.

Many of Adhikaar members came to New York after the political crisis in Nepal in the early 2000s, others came with their families in the months after the 8.0 earthquake in 2015 that killed nearly 10,000 people and displaced thousands more. Some of us were granted Temporary Protected Status, as we worked, studied, and contributed to this economy, while also supporting our families.

We are seeking what all New Yorkers seek: safety, protection, and opportunity.

The recent termination of TPS designation for Nepal, and increased collusion between immigration enforcement and the police, are making our members scared and confused. Our healthcare and jobs are being lost. Almost overnight, TPS holders have been at risk of detention and deportation. This decision comes despite the threat of returning to Nepal, at a time of political and economical instability back home.

Individuals who relied on their TPS status are now forced to navigate a terrorizing immigration system. The fear of ICE extends to everything we do: to get state ids, find jobs, or claim unemployment.



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Adhikaar is holding legal clinics, offering translation and interpretation and showing up in court with our members, who are being hit with daily assaults on the immigration status and working class jobs.

With the support of the City Council, Adhikaar has expanded our immigration services through **Rapid Response** work, which has involved hosting **Know Your Rights** and **Safety planning** workshops. We have also developed relationships with legal organizations and community lawyers and built a **referral network**. This has resulted in 100+ plus referrals with Adjustment of status and Change of Status questions. Adhikaar has been hosting monthly “**Ask Me Anything**” **legal info sessions reaching 60-100+ members everymonth**, where members can ask immigration questions from a immigration lawyer and **monthly immigration clinic** where community members can have an in depth consultation with a lawyer. We are grateful to live in a city that has strong **sanctuary protections**, which need to be strengthened and funded at its maximum level.

Many members risk losing their health insurance, because once they lose a valid immigration status, they risk losing healthcare and access to life-saving medication. We are noticing a higher demand for health navigation services, particularly among individuals with limited English proficiency and health literacy. In response, we have expanded our focus on healthcare access, integrated culturally and linguistically appropriate health education into our existing programs, and dedicated more staff time to screening and enrollment support. In 2025 alone, we were able to register more than 1100+ members through NYC care, and NY marketplace to ensure our members have access to health care.

In addition to this, we are continuing to provide workforce development training for our nail salon and domestic worker members. One concrete way to fund immigrant women workers is to invest in initiatives like the New York Nail Salon Worker School, a school established in 2016 and administered by the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) with partners at Mekong NYC and Adhikaar.

To date, across the entire School 1,270+ students have graduated since 2016. For domestic workers as well we provide our “We Rise” nanny training program in collaboration with Cornell ILR and the National Domestic Workers Alliance-NY where we utilize a workers-rights based curriculum in Nepali, with training led by peer worker trainers. This program is supported by NYC Domestic Worker Initiative through which we provide members with training, resources and referrals to improve their working conditions. In 2025, Adhikaar provided service to 2000+ domestic workers through this initiative.

We urge the Council to continue the funding of Adhikaar’s work through important initiatives - the AAPI Community Support (\$100,000), Adult Literacy Pilot Program (\$150,000), Domestic Worker and Employer Empowerment Initiative (\$150,000), Legal Services for Day Laborers and Domestic Workers (\$150,000) and the Immigrant Women Workers Initiative (\$100,000), Speakers Initiative (\$50,000), and Welcome NYC (\$50,000).



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We are working day and night to expand protections for our members, but we can't do it alone. We look forward to partnering with the City Council to ensure that our growing community has the opportunity to not only survive, but thrive.

We hope we can count on your support.



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Testimony of African Communities Together Before the New York City Council
Committee on Immigration FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Good morning, Chair Encarnacion and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Khadijatu Muhammad and I am here on behalf of African Communities Together (ACT), a member-led organization dedicated to improving the social, economic, and political well-being of African immigrants across New York City. We are in Harlem; however, we have offices in Washington, DC, and we are part of a broader network of organizations that provide critical programs and services to immigrants nationally.

African immigrants are one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations in New York City, contributing significantly to the cultural fabric and economic vitality of our communities. ACT works every day to ensure that our members navigate complex immigration systems, economic insecurity, and language barriers to access the services, protections, and opportunities they need to thrive.

The City has made important investments in immigrant New Yorkers through initiatives such as legal services, language access, workforce development, and community-based support. However, as demand continues to grow, it is critical that the agencies tasked with serving immigrant communities are adequately resourced to fulfill their missions effectively and equitably.

Community-based organizations like ACT have a long history of partnership with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) and other city agencies. We fill the gaps in service delivery that are created when the agency budgets do not reflect the reality of the need in the field or because of unanticipated circumstances.

We applaud the council's recent efforts to improve contract service delivery. And we urge the council to continue to make meaningful improvements to the contracting and payment process to ensure that community-based organizations are paid in a timely manner for services already delivered. Delays in contracting and reimbursement place unnecessary financial strain on providers, particularly small and mid-sized nonprofits, creating

precarious conditions that ultimately hinder their ability to sustain programs and serve communities effectively.

We urge the Council to prioritize a budget that fully funds the agencies serving immigrant communities, ensuring they have the staffing, infrastructure, and programmatic resources necessary to meet the scale of need.

An appropriately funded ecosystem of City agencies and community partners is essential not only for meeting immediate needs, but for advancing long-term integration, economic mobility, and civic participation among immigrant New Yorkers.

We also emphasize that underinvestment in these systems ultimately leads to greater costs both human and financial down the line. When immigrants cannot access legal services, workforce support, or basic protections, it can result in instability that has an impact on families and communities.

African Communities Together stands ready to continue partnering with the city to ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of where they come from, can succeed. And to do so, we urge the city to maintain its commitment to immigrant communities.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the FY27 budget fully equips our city's agencies to meet this critical moment.



The Arab American
Association of
New York

Testimony of the Arab American Association of New York

New York City Hall
Committee on Immigration Hearing
March 25, 2026

My name is Maryam Shuaib, and I am the Coalition Organizer at the Arab American Association of New York. As we navigate an unpredictable string of policies against non-citizens, it is organizations like ours that stand by and advocate for our immigrant communities. We're here today as representatives of our community to call for increased investment in community-based immigration programs and other critical support services.

Since 2001, we have provided direct services for low-income and immigrant New Yorkers as they've adjusted to a city that welcomes them with surveillance, criminalization, and prejudice. Today, we continue this necessary work as we confront complex immigration systems that seek to break the people who make up the fabric of New York City. Our immigration program is one of the only ones in all of New York City providing free immigration legal services to Arabic-speaking New Yorkers. Now more than ever, our clients need culturally-aware, in-language immigration assistance to help them navigate an increasingly hostile immigration legal system and find safety and security in their new home. Our program has helped countless immigrants as they seek to make New York City their home. Recently, a client who has been a green card holder since 2016 applied for citizenship more than five times. After nearly ten years of citizenship applications and delays, he finally became a U.S. citizen and is now petitioning his daughter for citizenship.

Funding is essential for us to continue navigating and maintaining a team of reliable Immigrant Navigators as they assist clients whose applications take months, or even years, to be processed. The people we serve include recent arrivals, undocumented individuals, survivors of violence, and families navigating the immigration process with limited resources. During one-on-one consultations with clients, common challenges include lack of proper legal support, fear of enforcement, lack of access to reliable information, and the high cost of the neutralization process. When our Immigrant Navigators are not directly working with clients, they empower the community through know your rights safety programming that centers around how *we* keep *us* safe.

Heightened immigration enforcement and provocative anti-immigrant policies are creating a climate of fear that discourages individuals from seeking help to the point where seeking everyday necessities is a luxury. Many community members have expressed reluctance to attend legal clinics or even inquire about services due to concerns about exposure, surveillance, or potential consequences for themselves or their families. This fear often results in people delaying or foregoing critical assistance, even when facing urgent deadlines or risks to their status. These experiences highlight how external pressures, beyond our control, are limiting access to services and deepening existing vulnerabilities within the communities we serve.



**The Arab American
Association of
New York**

Our work is critical and serves as a lifeline for community members who may not otherwise be able to access the life-saving services and resources they need. Every New Yorker, regardless of citizenship status, deserves a reliable resource that will meet them where they are at. We hope that you will continue to support NYC immigrant communities by investing in community-based organizations & immigration services that are essential to our communities.



Asian American Federation

Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 25, 2026

Written Testimony

Thank you, Chair Elsie Encarnacion and the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and for giving us the opportunity to testify. My name is Ahyoung Kim, and I serve as the Director of Programs at the Asian American Federation, where we work with 70 member/partner nonprofit organizations to raise the influence and well-being of 1.5 million Pan-Asian New Yorkers.

We firmly believe that as a sanctuary city, we should welcome all immigrants with the dignity and fairness they deserve. Our pan-Asian community continues to face the struggles of xenophobia, a rise in anti-Asian violence, ever-changing and regressive immigration policies from the current federal administration. And more recently, ICE's indiscriminate tactics have shattered families, instilled fear, and prevented New Yorkers from accessing essential services, reflecting an increased need for additional resources that span from culturally appropriate mental health services to linguistically accurate immigration services. The most recent development of immigration enforcement policies where we are seeing ICE presence in our airports is increasing the touchpoints of immigration officers for our community members, raising more concerns and anxiety.

One in six New Yorkers is Asian, and the Asian American community is the fastest-growing demographic in New York City, making up 17.3% of the total population (or 1.5 million people). From 2010 to 2020, the Asian American population grew by 34.5% – the highest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic group in the City. This growth was also the fastest in all five of the City's boroughs. In 33 of the city's 51 council districts, Asian Americans represent 10% or more of the population.

As the number of Asian New Yorkers continues to grow, so have the needs of our communities:

- One in three Asians in New York City lives in low-income households, with Asian seniors experiencing the second-highest poverty rate in the city.

- Asian Americans have the highest rates of limited English proficiency in New York City, at 44%, more than any other major racial or ethnic group.
- Nearly one in four Asian Americans did not complete high school, the second-highest percentage of adults without a high school diploma among all major racial or ethnic groups in the city in 2021.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) continue to serve as the front line of support for immigrant communities, providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services that government systems often fail to deliver. However, their capacity has not kept pace with the scale and urgency of need. Without sustained and increased investment, these organizations cannot continue to meet demand. The City must prioritize funding for immigrant communities and the CBOs that have consistently filled critical gaps, ensuring they have the resources necessary to stabilize and strengthen the communities they serve.

Increase Immigration Services for Pan-Asian New Yorkers

Due to chronic underinvestment, access to critical immigration legal services for Asian New Yorkers remains severely limited. This gap is particularly concerning in the current political climate, where shifting federal policies and increased enforcement actions are driving higher demand for timely legal support. This disproportionately impacts individuals with limited English proficiency, low incomes, and uncertain immigration status, leaving many at risk of prolonged instability. Between 2017 and 2019, AAF established a rapid response network of nearly 20 Asian-led, Asian-serving nonprofits to expand access to these services. More recently, a survey of our member organizations found that only 5.6% had the capacity to take on additional immigration cases, with the vast majority already operating beyond their limits. Referral pathways are equally constrained—mainstream legal providers are overwhelmed, with long waitlists or closed intake due to capacity challenges.

In FY27, AAF’s Rapid Immigrant Support and Empowerment (RISE) network will build on our track record to implement a coordinated, multi-pronged response to expand Asian immigrants’ access to critical immigration services while strengthening the nonprofit infrastructure that supports them. This includes establishing an immigration referral network that increases the capacity of our member organizations to deliver immigration-related services, strengthens connections to legal providers and subject-matter experts, and supports targeted community education and outreach. The network will improve case management support for limited-English-proficient community members and families navigating complex systems. RISE will also deliver Know Your Rights and compliance trainings for Asian-serving organizations, ensuring they are equipped to respond to rapidly evolving policies. Together, these efforts will

create a more coordinated, responsive, and resilient support system for Asian immigrants and the organizations that serve them.

To sustain this work, we are requesting \$3.5 million in funding for the Legal Services for AAPI Communities initiative to support the continued development of RISE. This investment will strengthen coordination across providers, maintain and deepen access to critical immigration legal services, and equip trusted community-based organizations with the capacity and tools to respond in real time to rapidly evolving needs.

Language Access and Language Justice

AAF is a proud member of the Language Justice Collaborative (LJC), alongside African Communities Together, MASA, the New York Immigration Coalition, and, more recently, Haitian Americans United for Progress and I-ARC. Together, we work to enforce existing language access laws and directly address gaps in interpretation services through community-based solutions like interpreter training pipelines and worker cooperatives. AAF is developing a language interpreter worker cooperative for Pan-Asian languages, in parallel with the Collaborative's cooperatives serving African, Haitian, and Indigenous Latin American communities. We appreciate the City Council's investment to date and urge continued funding in the FY27 budget to ensure the stability and long-term sustainability of these programs already underway.

In FY25 and FY26, AAF worked with our nonprofit partners to recruit community members to participate in the Asian language worker cooperative. To date, we have received over 200 applications and, through a rigorous screening process, selected a cohort of 16 multilingual immigrants fluent in high-demand languages in New York City. In March 2026, we launched United in Speech Co-op NY, which is now providing no-cost interpreter services in Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Korean to community-based organizations. We are also training Nepali interpreters in FY26 and will expand services to include Nepali by the end of the fiscal year.

Continued City Council investment will allow us to sustain this pipeline and support trainees as they transition into service delivery in FY27. We appreciate the Council's support to date and urge continued funding to ensure continuity for programs that are already in progress. We are requesting \$5.8 million in funding for the interpreter worker cooperative initiative.

Citywide funding requests to support our work across our Asian Community

In addition to the funding requested for language access work, below are our other Citywide funding requests to support our work across our Asian community.

Please support AAF's work and priorities by:

- **\$500,000 - Speaker's Initiative**
- **\$150,000 - Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund** - Provide leadership development and organizational capacity building to help Asian-led, Asian-serving organizations thrive
- **\$300,000 - CUNY Citizenship NOW! Program** - Increase Asian American participation in the civic life of our city through voter education, and outreach
- **\$100,000 - Hate Crimes Prevention** - Support programs that aim to prevent hate crimes through community-based safety solutions
- **\$100,000 - Immigrant Health Initiative** - Support programming to reduce mental health stigma in pan-Asian communities
- **\$150,000 - Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations** - Support the development of culturally relevant mental health and related services for pan-Asian communities
- **\$700,000 - Legal Services for AAPI Communities** - Operate year two of the Rapid Immigration Support and Empowerment (RISE) initiative to strengthen the infrastructure for a rapid response network that swiftly connects Asian immigrants with critical immigration legal support. Empower Asian-serving nonprofits with the knowledge and training needed to navigate and respond to fast-changing immigration policies, ensuring greater protection for New York's most vulnerable communities.
- **\$700,000 - Language Services Worker Cooperatives** - Support the public launch and first year of operations for the nation's first worker cooperative of Asian language interpreters to train and accredit community members as legal and medical interpreters and translators. This investment will create much-needed interpretation and translation capacity for a broader range of languages
- **\$400,000 - AAPI Community Support** - Support research to identify the urgent service and policy needs of Asian immigrants and to ensure findings are widely disseminated to elected and community leaders, media (including ethnic media), academic institutions, and other key stakeholders.
- **\$20,000 - Neighborhood Development Grant Initiative** - Support immigrant small business owners and commercial corridors through in-language training, digital literacy workshops, and referrals to legal and financial resources that help businesses comply with regulations and reach customers through mapping and delivery platforms.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. If you have any questions, I can be reached at ahyoung.kim@aaafederation.org.



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TESTIMONY OF:

The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) Providers

Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, and The Legal Aid Society

Presented before

**The New York City Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget Hearing –
Immigration**

March 25, 2026

Introduction

My name is Catherine Gonzalez, and I am Associate General Counsel at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS is a multidisciplinary 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 nearly 30 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. Our staff consists of specialized attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals, and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields.

In July 2025, BDS expanded its mission into Queens after assuming responsibility for the contracts to provide criminal representation in Queens County. Combined, our staff now represents approximately 40,000 people annually across Brooklyn and Queens who are accused of a crime, facing loss of liberty, their home, their children, or deportation. I thank Chair Encarnacion and the members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to testify about our critical budget needs to serve New York City's immigrant communities, and for the council's consideration of our funding requests.

For over a decade, the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) has been the national model for universal representation for immigrants facing deportation. Since its

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inception, the NYIFUP providers—The Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Legal Aid Society—have provided robust and comprehensive legal representation and wraparound support services for people in detained deportation proceedings. During this time, our offices have represented thousands of New Yorkers, providing expertise in the complex legal issues that arise in these cases.

However, we are at a breaking point. Zealous immigration defense is needed now more than ever. While NYIFUP has remained steadfast during numerous surges in enforcement over the past decade, the current increase in federal enforcement and mass detention has created a need to build capacity that has never been greater.

For Fiscal Year 2027, the NYIFUP providers are collectively requesting \$13,299,000 per organization to meet the crisis of mass detention. Additionally, BDS is requesting \$200,000 through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) to sustain our Immigrant Community Action Project (ICAP).

Funding Request: The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)

For Fiscal Year 2027, the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) providers are collectively requesting \$13,299,000 per organization to meet the crisis of mass detention. NYIFUP is the nation's first-ever publicly funded universal representation program for detained immigrants facing deportation. Requested funding will enable each organization to continue representing immigrant New Yorkers detained and facing deportation charges in New York and New Jersey, and to provide remote representation to the increasing number of New Yorkers who are physically transferred to other parts of the country. We are currently representing New Yorkers detained in at least fifteen states because they were moved. For the people we serve, detention is existential: loss of liberty, separation from family, and the very real risk of deportation to life threatening conditions or to countries where they have no support.

This increased funding would also allow our organizations to file more federal litigation on behalf of our clients—a now essential tool for protecting the due process rights of detained immigrants, preventing illegal renditions, and keeping families together.

Our offices provide legal representation that would otherwise be unavailable to people facing deportation as there is no right to assigned counsel in these proceedings. We specialize in representing individuals detained while they await their deportation hearings and we maintain continuous and interdisciplinary representation throughout the life of the immigration case—

even after release from detention—including applications for employment authorization, social work support, public benefits advocacy, and other services to clients and their families. NYIFUP representation is provided by interdisciplinary teams of attorneys, social workers, and legal advocates who collaborate with clients to provide excellent legal representation and other forms of support.

Our staff provide enhanced legal representation beyond the immigration case, most notably on federal habeas petitions which can get someone out of detention before their case is heard in immigration court. Through that work, we have developed extensive expertise in litigating immigrant rights in federal court, including through petitions for review before the federal circuit courts. Through our full representation model and wide array of litigation tools, NYIFUP has protected immigrant New Yorkers from wrongful deportation and effectively responded to changes in immigration policy and enforcement since the birth of the program in 2013.

The last year has presented our greatest challenge yet. In 2025 we witnessed a dramatic increase in ICE arrests in New York City, including never-before-seen enforcement practices and ruthless efforts at mass deportation. We also saw an increase in the number of detained New York City residents rapidly transferred outside of the NY/NJ area to locations far from their families where they have no access to legal services. Data from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University paints a grim picture of the national and local landscape:

- **The Representation Gap:** As of February 2026, only 33.3% of immigrants nationwide had attorney representation when removal orders were issued¹. While this is a modest improvement from 26.7% in December 2025, it means two-thirds of immigrants are still forced to face the system alone.
- **Staggering Deportation Rates:** In February 2026 alone, immigration judges issued 46,786 removal orders. When factoring in voluntary departures, the combined deportation rate stands at 81.9%².
- **The Burden on New York City:** New York City remains at the epicenter of this crisis. Residents of Queens County currently have the 3rd highest number of pending

¹ Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), Syracuse University, *Immigration Court Operations: February 2026 Update* (released March 24, 2026).

² *Ibid.* Judges completed 67,908 deportation cases in February 2026, issuing 46,786 removal orders and 8,843 voluntary departure orders.

deportation cases in the country (103,791), and residents of Kings County follow closely with 81,611 pending cases³.

- **Bond Denial:** For those able to get a bond hearing, the national bond grant rate remains low at 27.8%⁴. The passage of the Laken Riley Act and recent policy changes by ICE reclassifying nearly all noncitizens as “applicants for admission” have stripped Immigration Judges of jurisdiction, replacing individualized custody reviews with categorical, unreviewable incarceration. Consequently, most clients can now only challenge their detention through a federal habeas corpus petition. Further, over the past year, we have seen ICE shift to a systematic practice of appealing bond grants and simultaneously requesting an automatic stay, forcing our clients to remain in detention for weeks or months longer while the appeal is pending⁵.

We are grateful to the City Council for answering our call for increased support last year which enabled us to represent more individuals in both immigration and federal court. Despite this expansion, the need has outpaced our capacity. Our offices require greater resources to meet the demands of the moment, which include:

- Raising our overall client numbers in response to expanded ICE enforcement.
- Learning new court and jail systems as we increasingly represent New Yorkers detained around the country.
- Filing federal court habeas petitions on behalf of almost every detained client and filing emergency habeas petitions for previously released clients now at risk of re-detention.
- Bringing more federal circuit court appeals to defend against politically-motivated and unlawful immigration court decisions.
- Providing representation on previously closed cases that have now been reopened pursuant to new policies.

Increased resources are also needed because detained deportation cases are moving faster than ever, often going to trial within weeks, leaving very little time for attorney preparation. Without sufficient staffing, our attorneys and legal support staff cannot keep up with this pace and cannot provide effective representation to our clients. The increasing pace of deportation cases is compounded by the federal government’s continuing efforts to deprive noncitizens of their rights

³ *Ibid.* queens County (103,791) and Kings County (81,611) represent the 3rd and 5th highest county caseloads in the nation, respectively.

⁴ *Ibid.* Immigration judges conducted 28,951 bond hearings through February 2026, granting bond in 8,050 cases.

to pursue relief in these proceedings, requiring our staff to adapt rapidly with novel litigation strategies. Finally, ICE prosecutors in immigration court are no longer permitted to utilize their discretion to settle or dismiss cases and are appealing an increased number of immigrant-favorable rulings. This means more resources must be devoted to litigating cases all the way through trial and to defend against ICE appeals.

What Increased Funding Will Provide

To meet these challenges, we must expand our capacity. We are currently grossly understaffed to perform this complex legal work at the volume and speed it is arriving, with cases often moving to trial within weeks. Increased funding in FY27 will enable us to:

- **Adapt to Shifting Tactics:** We must hire and onboard additional staff to meet the increased need in immigration court and respond to ICE enforcement throughout New York City. The current volatility requires an extraordinary level of procedural agility; our teams are now increasingly responding in real time, conducting urgent interviews late at night or early in the morning, and filing last-minute motions to preserve life-saving claims that would otherwise be lost without a hearing.
- **Expand Federal Litigation:** We will hire and train staff to litigate Federal Habeas writs and petitions for review in federal courts. Habeas petitions are often the only way to secure a client's release from prolonged detention before their case is even heard in immigration court. The government has created a due process crisis where we must scramble to prevent clients from being "outsourced" to countries they have never even visited, often with less than 24 hours of notice. The expansion of "third-country removals" places clients at extreme risk by threatening their deportation to unfamiliar nations where they lack legal status, support networks, and protection from further persecution. Further, this policy endangers clients whose cases were previously closed or who were granted protection from their home countries.
- **Maintain Geographic Continuity:** We will follow our clients' cases when they are transferred to far-away facilities, ensuring their right to counsel stays with them regardless of where the federal government moves them. By providing stable funding for remote litigation technology, out-of-state travel, and coordination with local counsel in distant jurisdictions, we can ensure that a New Yorker's constitutional protections do not end at the state line.

- **Support Disappeared Neighbors:** We will help family members navigate legal systems to locate loved ones who have disappeared into the federal detention network and seek their release. This work involves aggressive advocacy to access "shadow" detention infrastructure—such as warehouses and temporary holding centers—that often lack the transparency and oversight of established jails. Our teams will act as a lifeline for families who have been kept in the dark regarding the whereabouts or physical well-being of detained relatives.
- **Public Education and Outreach:** We will continue to provide specialized legal technical assistance to community-based organizations and public education for New Yorkers. Examples of our public education initiatives include:
 - BDS’ [We Have Rights](#) series of animated films in eight languages to help immigrants know what to do when confronted by ICE in the most common situations. The full list of languages includes English, Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, Haitian Creole, Urdu, and French. In the coming months, this website ([WeHaveRights.us](#)) and written materials will be shared out with local immigrant community-based organizations in New York City.
 - LAS’ [Know Your Rights hub](#), providing up-to-date information and resources about ICE encounters, detention, and other critical resources for New Yorkers.
 - The recently launched [OurCityOurRights.org](#) website, designed in collaboration with the Our City, Our Rights Alliance (OCORA), is a comprehensive online know-your-rights resource for immigrant New Yorkers and individuals engaged in protest activity who may be at risk of encountering federal immigration agents and law enforcement.

Funding Request: Immigrant Community Action Project (ICAP) - funded through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)

While NYIFUP focuses on the detained population, BDS’ Immigrant Community Action Project (ICAP), funded through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI), provides essential services to non-detained individuals and families across all five boroughs. This includes current and former clients of BDS’ public defense services and their families.

BDS is requesting \$200,000 in IOI funding to bolster our ability to provide direct immigration legal services and know-your-rights training. This funding will allow BDS to



provide essential legal services to immigrant clients and families facing unprecedented challenges as they navigate a complex and increasingly hostile immigration system, both through direct immigration remedies and by overcoming legal barriers that need to be resolved before immigration relief is possible.

Our ICAP attorneys, BIA-accredited representatives, social workers, and support staff represent people in non-detained removal proceedings and applications for immigration benefits, including family-based applications for lawful permanent status, fear-based applications, U & T visas, Special Juvenile Immigrant Status (SIJS), DACA renewal, deferred action for labor-based claims, employment authorization applications, and other immigration remedies. Our staff provides representation for affirmative applications such as green card renewals, petitions for other family members, citizenship, orders of supervision, and employment authorization applications.

ICAP staff specialize in complex immigration legal matters and meet immigrant clients' unique needs through interdisciplinary representation, social work services and community education. Responding to recent trends in immigration enforcement and shifting policies, we are providing more rapid response consultations and screenings as well as individualized risk assessments to clients and families justifiably concerned about any contact with current immigration systems. Drawing upon the expertise of BDS' criminal, family, and civil legal practice areas, ICAP staff are uniquely qualified to represent immigrants that find themselves at the intersection of immigration, criminal, family court, and other legal systems.

In addition to supporting clients in need of direct immigration remedies, ICAP social workers and advocates help clients navigate complicated systems to access essential benefits and services. Many of our clients are living with mental illness and struggle to find access to free or affordable mental health care. Immigrant New Yorkers are more likely to face employment discrimination and may lack requisite documentation to work, obtain public assistance benefits, or access shelter and stable affordable housing.

Conclusion

The City Council has played a critical role in safeguarding New York City's immigrant communities and established itself as a national leader through the creation of NYIFUP. Today, the federal government is testing our resolve. With a national deportation rate exceeding 80% for those without counsel, the choice for the Council is clear.

Brooklyn Defenders

By fully funding NYIFUP and the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, the Council is not just funding legal services—it is defending the families, the economy, and the soul of our city. We urge the Council to provide the increased support—**\$13,299,000 per NYIFUP organization** and **\$200,000 for BDS’ IOI program**—necessary to ensure that the vision of universal representation remains a reality.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Gonzalez

Associate General Counsel
Brooklyn Defender Services

For more information, please contact: Lisa Schreibersdorf at lschreib@bds.org, Adriene Holder at aholder@legal-aid.org, and Juval Scott at jscott@bronxdefenders.org.

THE BRONX DEFENDERS

**New York City Council
Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027
Committee on Immigration
March 25, 2026
Testimony of The Bronx Defenders
By Karla Ostolaza, Managing Director, Immigration**

Good afternoon. My name is Karla Marie Ostolaza, and I am the Managing Director of the Immigration Practice at The Bronx Defenders (BxD). I would like to thank the New York City Council for its continued support of immigrant New Yorkers and the legal providers that serve them. We are grateful for the Council's increase in NYIFUP funding from \$5,533,333 to \$8,299,000 per organization. While this investment has made a meaningful difference, additional funding is necessary to meet the growing need. For FY27, we are requesting \$39,897,000 across the three NYIFUP providers, or \$13,299,000 per organization, to ensure detained New Yorkers continue to have access to universal representation.

I. The Bronx Defenders Immigration Practice

Twenty-three years ago, BxD adopted the holistic representation model by integrating immigration legal services into a public defender office. Today, our robust immigration practice includes more than fifty attorneys, social workers, advocates, and administrative professionals. We provide deportation defense in both detained and non-detained courts. Additionally, we offer integrated, holistic representation aimed at mitigating or avoiding negative immigration consequences for clients targeted by the criminal and family regulation systems.

Our advocates provide these services within three related but distinct programs: (1) representation of currently and formerly detained people through NYIFUP, (2) our Padilla team that provides wrap-around immigration advice and services to people with pending criminal and family court proceedings, and (3) our open-door community intake program that serves Bronx residents at risk of detention and deportation.

II. BxD's NYIFUP Program

In this testimony, I will explain why NYIFUP work continues to serve a critical role in protecting immigrant communities from ICE's mass detention and deportation campaign,

and why a significant investment in our program is of critical importance to protect our mission of providing universal representation to detained New Yorkers.

A. NYIFUP is Essential in Fighting Against ICE's Mass Deportation Campaign

Since our last testimony before the Council in 2025, immigration enforcement has continued to escalate. Arrests have rapidly increased, and new detention facilities have opened across the Northeast and throughout the country. ICE is now transferring New Yorkers within hours of arrest—often out of state and sometimes thousands of miles away. As a result, we are currently representing New Yorkers detained in at least fifteen states simply because they were moved. For the people we serve, detention is existential. It means loss of liberty, separation from family, and the very real risk of deportation to life-threatening conditions or to countries where they have no support. These enforcement strategies are designed to sever community ties and undermine due process.

Since its launch in 2013, NYIFUP has been a crucial lifeline for detained New Yorkers and their families. In a 2017 study, NYIFUP was found to increase a detained person's likelihood of success by 1,100%. When this study was conducted, detained and unrepresented New Yorkers had only a 4% chance of success. This low success rate was recorded before the myriad attacks on due process in these proceedings, such as the erosion of the independence of the immigration courts and coercive ICE tactics, including frequent transfers to distant locations that create insurmountable barriers to detainees' success. Today, more than ever, NYIFUP is a crucial tool in the fight against community and family separation.

B. NYIFUP's FY26 Programmatic Expansion and Success

The Council's generous funding increase during FY26 has allowed us to grow, adapt, and meet community needs in ways that were simply not possible before. When the Trump administration began, our teams were carrying more than a thousand pending cases for clients we had fought to free from detention—people now at risk of being detained again. Thanks to the Council's increased funding, we expanded our capacity to take on an extraordinary influx of new clients while still providing excellent, client-centered representation to prevent re-detention.

Your investment also enabled us to adapt to a rapidly changing detention landscape. One of the most significant shifts has been transforming NYIFUP from a purely court-based model into a hybrid system that includes both Varick Street intake and community-based referrals. Since launching our public referral form in August 2025, we have received more than a thousand direct referrals from families, teachers, hospital social workers, and community organizations.

Because ICE now transfers New Yorkers all over the country, our work must follow them. At any moment, we are representing people held in facilities across roughly fifteen states. Your support ensures that our clients are not abandoned simply because they were moved far from home.

We have also expanded our impact through partnerships. Our habeas pro bono project has trained attorneys from eight major law firms, resulting in more than twenty petitions filed so far—every adjudicated case has been successful. We’ve also provided technical assistance to advocates across the city who are engaging in detained work for the first time.

The FY26 infusion has allowed us not only to respond to crisis, but to build a stronger, more resilient system for immigrant New Yorkers. While NYIFUP has made significant strides in defending detained New Yorkers, the rapid increase in detentions and changes in ICE’s tactics necessitate an additional increase in resources to maintain our effectiveness. Looking into FY27, we are eager to continue expanding our reach—so that no New Yorker ever has to face deportation alone.

C. NYIFUP Needs Adequate Resources to Continue Serving All Detained New Yorkers Facing Deportation Proceedings

The mission of NYIFUP is to represent every detained New Yorker in deportation proceedings who cannot afford an attorney. We are determined to continue carrying out this important role. The requested increased funding for FY27 to \$13,299,000 per organization, will allow us to expand our federal practice to address the need for additional habeas petitions right at the moment of detention, as well as increasing our capacity for federal court appeals of deportation orders. This additional funding will also allow us to expand our reach and cover all New Yorkers regardless of where they are transferred after detention.

III. BxD’s Community Intake Program (Funding Request: \$200,000)

Through our open-door practice, the Bronx Immigration Community Intake Project provides early intervention, legal representation, and assistance navigating the immigration legal system to Bronx residents. While in New York City clients are entitled to an attorney when in criminal court, facing abuse and neglect allegations in family court, or in detained deportation proceedings, there is no such guaranteed funding for legal representation for early advocacy crucial to prevent people from becoming ensnared in the deportation machine in the first place. Now more than ever, Bronx residents need access to skilled immigration attorneys for advice and representation. The requested funding in the amount of \$200,000 would help expand the program's capacity and allow us to engage in rapid response services for Bronx residents.

Community intake attorneys represent a full caseload of clients, which includes motions to reopen deportation orders, advocacy on behalf of lawful permanent residents subject to secondary inspection at JFK, deportation defense cases, complex affirmative cases before USCIS, and early intervention to provide community members in-depth analyses of their risks of deportation and detention. Our program is unique in that it prioritizes providing early intervention and removal defense to Bronx residents with prior contacts with the criminal legal or family regulation systems. This is a segment of the population which has a particularly challenging time accessing legal services due to the complexity of their cases and the limited resources available in the community, while also being considered a priority for ICE surveillance and detention. Because these cases have grown more complex and resource intensive than ever, we need additional funding to ensure we can continue providing robust early intervention to the vulnerable and underserve population we support.

IV. Conclusion

We are committed to defending detained New Yorkers and those at the intersection of immigration, criminal, and family law. To continue this vital work, we need robust funding to expand our capacity and meet the growing demand. We thank you for your unwavering support and for ensuring immigrant New Yorkers have the legal representation they deserve.



Testimony

New York City Council Immigration Committee

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 25, 2026

Submitted by Kelly Agnew-Barajas & Desireé Hernández Sánchez

Immigrant and Refugee Services Catholic Charities Community Services, New York

Good afternoon, Council Chair Encarnacion and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration. I am Kelly Agnew-Barajas, Co-Director of Immigrant and Refugee Services. I am joined today by my colleague, the Director of Legal Services for Immigrant and Refugee Services, Desireé Hernández Sánchez. Together, we represent Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York (CCCS). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the work of Catholic Charities with immigrants and refugees in New York City.

INTRODUCTION

Catholic Charities is proud of our long tradition of welcoming New York's immigrants and refugees. Our services have a tremendous impact on immigrant communities across New York City. The scope and diversity of our services is exceptional.

- Catholic Charities is a leading provider of high-quality immigration legal services to adults and children. Each year, Catholic Charities provides legal representation, consultations, and individualized pro se assistance to more than 7,500 documented and undocumented immigrants, most of whom are in removal proceedings in immigration court. Catholic Charities represents more than 2,500 adults, unaccompanied children, and families in immigration cases.
- Catholic Charities operates two immigration legal information hotlines, including the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline for NYC residents and the Office for New Americans (ONA) Hotline, which combined served more than 35,000 people last year.
- Catholic Charities' Day Laborer programs focus on job safety for day laborers, trainings, employment support and wage theft protection advocacy for more than 2,000 day laborers and their families each year. Our Bronx-based office is in Mott Haven (District 8).
- Catholic Charities provides English language instruction at all learning levels as well as citizenship preparation to more than 1,000 learners per year.



- Catholic Charities is one of the five official refugee resettlement providers serving New York City. Catholic Charities welcomes and integrates as many as 2,300 asylees, humanitarian migrants, trafficking survivors and refugees per year – providing intensive case management, workforce development, education and health services.

OUR WORK AND NEEDS TODAY

Immigrant communities in New York City face mounting challenges on multiple fronts. With an unprecedented increase in immigration enforcement presence and activities across New York City, which has been both unpredictable and often lawless, undocumented and documented New Yorkers are rightfully anxious about their immigration status and fearful of accessing basic public services including sending children to school, going to the emergency room, calling 911, and even going to immigration court. Some immigrants with temporary statuses such as parole and Temporary Protected Status, or provisional relief such as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, now face potential deportation from the U.S., family separation, and the loss of their livelihoods. Providers like Catholic Charities that have built robust and diverse programming to support immigrants have lost significant federal funding.

At this critical time, it is essential that New York City continue to make the investments and structural changes needed to strengthen and stabilize services that support immigrants. When the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) was established in 2002, it was the first chartered office in the United States dedicated to immigrant needs, with its initial goals focused on increasing access to programs and benefits and advising the mayor on legal service needs. MOIA's portfolio has grown well beyond those early objectives over the past 24 years, yet the current structure could be enhanced to adequately support MOIA's administrative needs. Catholic Charities recommends that the City Council evaluate the organizational capacity of MOIA, including the process by which MOIA contracts through City agencies to fund immigrant service providers.

Catholic Charities urges the City to ensure more stable, well-funded services, building greater reliability into contracts and awards. First, we recommend more multi-year contracts so that providers can plan for longer-term programming and staffing rather than revisit funding for vital programs each year. While discretionary funds have been critical for NYC immigrants and help providers expand in response to need, it is difficult to plan programs and retain staff based on year-to-year funding; for example, it is extraordinarily challenging for organizations to commit to legal representation in one-year contracts, given that most immigration cases last well over a year. Also, we urge timely notification of new and renewal awards so that awardees can strategically plan to ensure the most effective services for client communities.



Additionally, it is essential that the City process claims in a timely manner for the financial stability of the City's nonprofit partners. Finally, we urge the City to build the increased costs providers face each year into awards, so that nonprofit partners are not required to choose between supplementing City awards and asking staff to work beyond capacity.

We urge the City Council and New York City to:

- Continue funding for the extension of the former ActionNYC contracts (aka LSC), which were continued last year by MOIA to provide critical and innovative legal services with a focus on unrepresented people whose immigration court proceedings are in progress. The demand for these services, particularly consultations, pro se, and pro se plus assistance, continues to be high.
- Fund Catholic Charities to re-build its dedicated legal program in DOE schools throughout New York City, so that children and families have a safe and accessible space to receive individualized help. Our partner schools regularly request in-school services from us, which we provide when possible – but on a limited basis – through current programs.
- Provide multi-year contracting and funding increases for the Haitian Response Initiative (HRI), through which Catholic Charities provides legal services. HRI is a unique, culturally and linguistically responsive program that redresses the disparate legal treatment and lack of resources provided to Haitian immigrants. HRI has been a lifeline for the Haitian community, particularly in this time of attacks on Haitians and restrictions on their pathways to immigration status.
- Continue expanded support of Catholic Charities and other ICARE coalition members to provide legal assistance to vulnerable children and their families, especially given the loss of federal funding and new hostility toward immigrant children in the legal system. Similarly, extend funding for the complementary SIJS Initiative so that Catholic Charities and others can continue representing New York children who are at risk of aging out of immigration relief.
- Appropriately fund and provide annual increases for the multi-year, community-based Legal Support Centers, new programming started last year by MOIA. The LSCs, which started last year, offer services in trusted, accessible community spaces, such as POTS in the Bronx, where Catholic Charities serves local residents. However, they are not funded sufficiently for the services required under the contract.
- Provide for sustainable funding and yearly increases for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative's Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative, through which Catholic Charities and other providers offer services for immigrant New Yorkers in hard-to-reach communities.
- Ensure yearly increases in support of The Legal Aid Society's Immigrant Opportunity



Initiative, through which Catholic Charities provides legal representation in removal defense and other cases for particularly vulnerable and underserved communities.

- Provide multi-year funding support for the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline to provide critical legal information and referrals to New Yorkers, including rapid response services, so that we can plan effective staffing. Consider increased funding to include brief legal advice and Know Your Rights for callers who cannot find legal representation, and to support longer call volumes.
- Continue the critical support of the Catholic Charities and our fellow members of the Day Laborer Worker Initiative to provide safety training, outreach, and referral services for workers on construction sites in New York City.
- Ensure ongoing support for the Adult Literacy Initiative, the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative, increasing the total Council Discretionary funding from \$14.5 to \$18 million, consolidating all Council Discretionary under Adult Literacy Forward, and for the administration to invest in a new \$20 million city funding stream Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide expanded access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.
- Invest in the NYC-Immigrant Resettlement Initiative which will fund social and workforce services that support humanitarian migrants and preserve the infrastructure designed to help asylees, refugees and other new arrivals to integrate in our communities.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

MOIA ActionNYC Extension

March 2026

The current funding amount from MOIA is \$3,000,000. The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$3,000,000.

Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) is grateful to MOIA for extended the existing, long-term ActionNYC contracts in May 2025, to ensure that CCCS and other experienced legal service providers can offer responsive assistance to immigrants throughout their court cases. The extension recognizes the continuing need for a range of immigration legal services, particularly following the closure of the Asylum Application Help Centers and given the many tens of thousands of New Yorkers whose cases are not resolved. The focus of the CCCS extension is immigrant New Yorkers in ongoing immigration court proceedings or who have never accessed legal services.

As a provider of ActionNYC in Schools for nine years, CCCS has used this critical funding to provide innovative and responsive programming to individuals and families. Services include legal consultations and advice, pro se case assistance, immigration court support through workshops and continuing case assistance, Friend of the Court, community education, and limited representation. To ensure broad reach to New Yorkers in need of legal services, CCCS partners closely with community organizations, religious institutions, and schools.

We urge the City Council to advocate for continued funding in FY27 through the ActionNYC extension. Continued investment will allow New York immigrants to continue receiving high-quality services from CCCS as we expand the model with additional community partners.

Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- CCCS provides legal services to immigrant New Yorkers at various stages in their immigration cases, uniquely tailored to their individual circumstances.
- Services include but are not limited to initial consultations, help filing asylum applications, pro se motions for virtual hearings, Friend of the Court assistance, preparing for individual hearings, collecting country conditions, and providing written testimony.
- Consultations often result in internal referrals to one of CCCS's other legal programs for



full representation.

- CCCS offers services on-site at our offices as well as at community partners and schools, and provides a remote option for people who are fearful of traveling.
- Immigrants understand their rights and responsibilities, their legal options, and next steps for themselves and their families. They better understand how to advocate for themselves and their cases, and can access follow-up support when needed.
- As of March 2026, CCCS has provided services to nearly 700 individuals so far through the ActionNYC Extension.

Value of Program for New York City

- Individuals and families who were helped by the Asylum Application Help Centers receive continuing case support from CCCS as their cases move through the immigration court process.
- New Yorkers are prepared for their immigration court cases and to advocate for themselves, whether they are in removal proceedings or affirmatively seeking legal relief in a changing landscape of immigration law and policy.
- Services through CCCS set people up for better outcomes in their legal cases, enabling them to secure work authorization, continue contributing to New York City, and integrate into their communities.

Risk to Catholic Charities Clients

- At least 1,000 New Yorkers would not have access next year to free, high-quality services without extended funding.
- People would be referred elsewhere, with a low likelihood that they would receive the services they need given the current capacity of New York City legal services providers.
- Immigrants are less likely to succeed in immigration cases without, at a minimum, an understanding of their options and next steps, and pro se assistance.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Legal Services in Schools

March 2026

The requested discretionary funding amount for FY27 is \$1,000,000.

Since April 2016, Catholic Charities has provided high-quality immigration legal services in public schools throughout New York City, reaching school community members in more than 125 schools. These services in accessible, familiar neighborhood schools have included Know Your Rights sessions, consultations, and representation to students, families, school employees, and other community members. The CCCS team has helped thousands of young immigrants understand their rights and options, so that they can make informed decisions about their cases and futures. The program also has helped protect thousands of immigrant New Yorkers from immigration fraud.

The dedicated ActionNYC in Schools program ended in 2025. While CCCS is grateful that MOIA extended the CCCS ActionNYC contract to provide innovative services in response to emerging needs, CCCS's schools-based programming has been limited under that extension, which serves a much broader population in need. In the last year, CCCS has continued to receive and respond to regular requests from schools for dedicated services to their student communities.

CCCS proposes to stand up dedicated, robust, and regular programming to serve schoolchildren, their families, and other school community members on-site at NYC public schools. CCCS will leverage its existing relationships with more than 100 schools and conduct regular outreach to others to ensure that legal services are provided in the schools and communities where they are most needed.

Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- Immigrant students can access legal services in an environment they already know and trust, increasing the rate of attendance to legal meetings and access to quality services.
- Services are better achieved when immigrant youth have a team of providers to address various barriers. This program works to provide holistic support in collaboration with DOE support staff.
- The program provides an access point for services to more than just one student. A whole family unit may benefit from their child having access to quality services in



school, where parents also may feel more comfortable seeking services for themselves.

- When school staff and administration know the immigration landscape, they help their immigrant students and families avoid fraud and scams that take advantage of the lack of knowledge. This program includes regular contact and training for DOE staff, so vulnerable students stay protected.

Value of Program for New York City

- Addressing students' immigration needs significantly improves their education and employment prospects.
- Strong linkages between CCCS legal services and public schools ensure that children do not fall through the cracks in securing immigration legal status. DOE staff learn to pre-screen and refer students and families to help ensure that young people do not miss urgent case deadlines.
- Stronger social supports that come with immigration services contribute to the safety of immigrant youth, the school, and the neighborhood.
- Immigrant youth who will age out of SIJS eligibility in as little as two weeks are prioritized by CCCS lawyers, who are experts in age-out and complex cases.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Legal Support Centers

March 2026

The current funding amount is \$250,000 per year for three years.

In July 2025, the new Legal Support Centers (LSC) program was launched by Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), funding multiple legal service providers in neighborhoods with high immigrant populations throughout the city. The CCCS LSC, successfully launched in summer 2025, offers community-rooted services in partnership with Part of the Solution (POTS) to serve residents of the surrounding Bronx community. The CCCS legal consultations, pro se assistance, and direct representation are provided at POTS, allowing community members to receive multiple services in one location.

CCCS has already exceeded several annual benchmarks, demonstrating both the urgent need for quality immigration legal services in the Bronx and the effectiveness of the community-centered model. However, the LSC funding levels are insufficient for the contract deliverables and staffing requirements and the lack of annual increases in awards means the LSCs must continue supplementing the awards in order to successfully provide the required services.

We urge the City Council to advocate for CCCS and other LSCs, to fully fund the staffing needed – and required by the contract – for this work, and to provide annual increases to reflect rising program costs.

Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- CCCS delivers reliable, high-quality legal consultations, pro se assistance, and direct representation to Bronx immigrants facing a fraught and uncertain legal landscape.
- The CCCS LSC enables both CCCS and POTS to assist Bronx immigrant residents in a space that is local, accessible, and safe.
- CCCS will conduct 250 comprehensive legal consultations and provide full representation to over 30 immigrant New Yorkers in FY 26.
- CCCS identified a need for technological assistance for clients to obtain information on their cases, as many applications must now be submitted through online government portals. Community members now leave consultations with a clear understanding of how to access their online case information in the future.



Value of Program for New York City

- Ensures that immigrant New Yorkers have access to legal services in easily accessible, community-based spaces that are safe and familiar.
- Strong linkages between CCCS legal services and community-based organizations, particularly POTS, ensure that immigrant New Yorkers served by the LSC can access legal and non-legal services.
- CCCS has robustly responded to the changing landscape of immigration law and policy to protect the rights of immigrant New Yorkers and make sure they understand their legal options.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Haitian Response Initiative

March 2026

CCCS's current funding amount is \$785,000.

CCCS's Haitian Response Initiative (HRI) provides critical services to a historically underserved population by connecting Haitian immigrants to free, high-quality immigration legal services in their communities and their preferred language. CCCS and nine community-based organizations form the HRI coalition, which provides participants with wraparound services. CCCS offers legal representation, consultations, community-based clinics, and individualized pro se assistance. Participants have access to direct aid and resources for employment, housing, and other needs.

The City's support for HRI shows an ongoing commitment to the Haitian community. However, funding for HRI has remained flat for nearly five years, with no increases to support cost of living or other expenses, or to keep pace with the need. Current funding is insufficient both to meet community needs and cover CCCS's costs. Also, while dedicated staff work long hours, HRI currently has hundreds of people on its waitlist; funding covers two attorneys and one accredited representative to assess and accept cases for representation and other legal assistance, and three staff for support and our extensive community outreach. HRI is a yearly contract, and CCCS typically receives renewal notice just before the contract date, which restricts our ability to accept complex cases and plan staffing and programming to best serve the community.

Many federal changes have directly impacted Haitian New Yorkers, including multiple attempts to terminate Haitian Temporary Protected Status, termination of the humanitarian parole program for Cubans, Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Venezuelans (CHNV), suspension of visas for nationals of 75 countries including Haiti, and restrictions on asylum. NYC's community of more than 160,000 Haitian immigrants is understandably fearful of what these changes mean for them, and hundreds turn to CCCS for help understanding their options and to seek other legal protections. CCCS will continue to have a central role in helping these New Yorkers determine their legal options, as well as ensuring they understand the dangers of immigration fraud.

We urge the City Council to increase the funding and long-term structure of HRI contracting, so that CCCS and Coalition members can better plan critical programming and respond to the need.



Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- All program staff, many of whom are Haitian immigrants, are fluent in Haitian Creole, ensuring that services are provided in a linguistically and culturally sensitive manner.
- HRI bridges the gap in access to legal services for the Haitian immigrant population, which is historically underserved and experiences worse outcomes in immigration cases than many other populations.
- A range of legal services is available through clinics, pro se assistance, and representation.
- HRI staff stay current on the many changes in law and practice, especially in the last year, and ensure that relevant changes are communicated effectively to our Initiative partners as well as community members.
- Since 2025, HRI has offered remote services to people afraid to travel to our office out of fear of being arrested by ICE.
- HRI adjusts services quickly based on urgent needs, such as approaching case deadlines and policy changes, to help clients avoid missing deadlines and important benefits.
- Partnerships among CCCS and trusted community-based organizations ensure that clients can access a full range of services and more quickly understand their legal cases.
- Since January 2022, HRI has screened over 1,660 Haitian immigrants, filed 1,815 immigration applications, and accepted 238 cases for full representation.

Value of Program for New York City

- Widely known and trusted in the Haitian community, CCCS often is an early stop for newcomers seeking legal information, pro se assistance, and other services within days of arriving in New York.
- With legal protections for Haitians under attack, HRI continues to be the first place many in the community will turn for help.
- People served by HRI regularly return again and again for assistance understanding their rights and obligations.
- Haitian immigrants have prompt access to legal services, ensuring that applications for immigration relief and benefits such as work authorization are filed expeditiously.
- HRI Coalition members coordinate to disseminate accurate, up-to-date, and valuable legal information to the Haitian community.

Risk to Catholic Charities Clients

- The Haitian immigrant community, including CCCS clients, would lose access to a vital resource for quality legal services.
- Current clients would be referred elsewhere, with a low likelihood that their cases would be accepted given the current capacity of New York City legal services providers.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort // ICARE

March 2026

CCCS's current funding amount for the UMFI/Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort is \$3,538,256. The requested funding amount for FY 27 is \$3,725,000.

ICARE was established in 2014, with CCCS as a founding member, to ensure protections for vulnerable young immigrants in New York; it continues to provide critical legal support to thousands of unaccompanied children and families, helping them achieve permanence and stability. ICARE has been a successful model for meaningful, high-quality legal services to children, as well as to successful coordination among service providers. CCCS's ICARE program benefits from internal referrals to and from our other legal programs, including the MOIA-funded ActionNYC Extension, the new Council-funded SIJS Initiative, the MOIA Legal Support Center, and our federal unaccompanied children program. We also manage referrals externally through a new, ICARE-managed list to coordinate with the city's legal services providers.

New York City Council has been a consistent supporter of ICARE for more than a decade, with the need for continued City support particularly acute. Since April 2025, the federal funding for unaccompanied children has been deeply unreliable and available only for three-month periods, with potential future funds both inadequate and uncertain; this has required CCCS to drastically reduce the long-term services we can provide with federal funding. Our clients and staff continue to be negatively impacted by these reductions, as well as the changes in immigration law that have impacted children. Recognizing these issues, City Council responded last year by providing a much-needed funding increase.

CCCS urges the City Council to continue its increased support for ICARE, with additional funding to cover costs. This will enable providers to continue existing cases, which often last for years, and to provide new consultations and accept new cases for representation at a time when hostility toward immigrant children in the immigration system has grown. It will allow CCCS to retain experienced staff who are uniquely qualified to work with unaccompanied children.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Through high-quality legal services, immigrant children, including newcomers to the U.S., have a pathway to legal status, social integration, stability, and economic success.



- More than 90% of cases avoid imminent deportation with an ICARE attorney.
- Young immigrants and families are connected to non-legal services including school enrollment, health insurance registration, access to health care, English language learning, and vocational training and job assistance.
- With ICARE funding, CCCS has represented 922 children and families in their immigration cases.
- CCCS will provide legal services to approximately 700 children through ICARE in FY 2026.

Value of program for New York City:

- The City has been a national leader in protecting children from deportation. Investing in ICARE reflects that New York City values and is ready to protect its children and help them secure their futures here.
- CCCS's ICARE program benefits from internal referrals our other legal services programs for families and children, which often are able to take cases the ICARE team cannot.
- Since 2014, ICARE has helped more than 15,000 children and families and represented 4,000, 2,000 of whom have obtained relief and a pathway to stability and permanence.
- The stronger social supports, including work authorization and access to benefits, that come with legal services for youth and their families strengthen our neighborhoods and communities.
- In FY 27, we propose to assist at least another 600 children and families with children with increased ICARE funding. With the requested funding increase, we will be able to represent many more children in their immigration cases.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- More than 280 current legal clients would lose their Catholic Charities attorneys.
- Without this funding, more than 700 new children will not receive assistance next year.
- Catholic Charities would likely no longer to employ nine legal representatives and additional staff with unique qualifications to work with vulnerable children.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative

March 2026

The current funding amount for Catholic Charities' Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative is \$300,000. The requested funding amount for FY 27 is \$315,000

The SIJS Initiative, funded for the first time in FY 26, provides critical legal support to NYC children who are eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) but struggle to find qualified representation through the application process, which includes three separate legal systems: New York Family Court, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and, often, immigration court. The Initiative coordinates providers with specialized experience in children's cases to ensure provision of high-quality and often time-sensitive services, including for children who were assisted in part by the NYC Asylum Application Help Centers.

The SIJS Initiative complements the services under ICARE by focusing on a smaller population of children in the process of seeking SIJS. Providers offer comprehensive legal consultations, secure Family Court findings, file and monitor SIJS petitions with USCIS, provide removal defense representation, and coordinate referrals across the City to ensure youth remain supported and able to move forward safely. SIJS representation protects children who have already experienced profound harm and provides a pathway toward lawful permanent residence. The SIJS Initiative also helps young New Yorkers who are in danger of aging out of SIJS eligibility before their cases are filed.

Federal backlogs and processing delays have meant prolonged uncertainty for eligible youth. Even after SIJS approval by USCIS, continued representation is needed to secure lawful status and protection from deportation. Without sustained City investment, qualified youth risk losing access to a unique pathway to permanent legal status; with the City's ongoing support, these young New Yorker's can achieve the stability needed to thrive.

Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- Through high-quality legal services, immigrant youth who may be eligible for SIJS will receive comprehensive consultations, support by qualified legal representatives in filing their applications and petitions, and connection to a network of providers for other services as needed.
- The Initiative program provides legal services that are responsive to each young person's



unique situation, through pro se legal services, limited scope representation, and full representation.

- More than 50 immigrant youth will be represented or receive other legal services from CCCS through this initiative.

Value of program for New York City:

- Our coordinated referral system across providers provides efficiency and avoids duplication of efforts across providers, which makes it less difficult and time consuming for youth to find legal representation.
- Without counsel, immigrant children are far less likely to secure relief. With representation, they can obtain lawful status, stability, and safety. Continued City investment will ensure that NYC youth who qualify can meaningfully access that protection, remain safely and continue to build stable futures in New York.
- Many of the SIJS Initiative providers, including CCCS, are also ICARE providers, giving us access to a broader and deeper network and coalition for referrals, strategy, and best practices.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- Without the SIJS Initiative, hundreds of immigrant youth will be left to navigate a complicated process alone, preventing some from obtaining immigration relief for which they qualify.
- At least 10 current CCCS cases would be orphaned, and additional youth would not receive ongoing pro se support. In FY 27, more than 50 new children would not receive legal services.
- For SIJS, time is of the essence, as there is a statutory deadline to file a SIJS petition. Potentially eligible youth must be connected to qualified legal services to determine their eligibility and, for those who are eligible, ensure that they receive the necessary approvals from family court before turning 21.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

**Immigrant Opportunity Initiative -
Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (IOI - CILEC)
March 2026**

Catholic Charities current funding amount for IOI CILEC is \$980,038.03. The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$1,400,599.67.

Since August 2016, Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) has been funded through the city's Immigrant Opportunity Initiative as a member of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), a coalition with TakeRoot Justice, Catholic Migration Services, and Make the Road New York, to provide a range of immigration legal services to indigent New Yorkers. CILEC partners with grassroots organizations to reach underrepresented immigrant groups in New York City, accepting referrals from seven groups that serve different communities. CCCS and CILEC coalition members also accept case referrals from other city-funded programs, the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs, and the Human Resources Administration. Attorneys provide legal consultations and representation in a variety of cases.

CILEC IOI is as critical as ever given the Trump Administration's ongoing efforts to restrict due process rights and foreclose avenues of relief for immigrants, even those with lawful status. With tens of thousands of New Yorkers in proceedings and without lawful status, the need for competent attorneys to navigate available options will continue, while CILEC consortium members still operate over capacity. Yearly increases that recognize providers' true costs are urgently needed to enable CILEC providers to meet the demand for services.

The CILEC IOI consortium is awaiting a final decision from HRA on the IOI/LWW RFX, with a new contract set to start on July 1, 2026. The scope of work under the new contract will make it very difficult to for legal service providers to respond nimbly to the emerging legal and policy changes at the federal level. We urge the City Council to join the consortium's advocacy efforts to (1) restore previously available flexibility to the scope of work; and (2) include distinct budget and deliverables for community-based outreach and education, included in previous contracts.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Immigrant New Yorkers, particularly those in hard-to-reach communities that trust and turn to CILEC's base-building partners, receive wraparound services in the current program.



- CILEC services help immigrants to understand their legal options and pursue immigration relief with expert legal representation.
- The immigration legal and employment legal services that have historically been provided through CILEC, include representation by CCCS in complex immigration cases – which are more common in the last year – not available through other funding sources.
- CCCS has served 3,081 New York City residents through CILEC. Many of these individuals have been assisted with multiple cases and would have been left without legal assistance if not for the CILEC coalition.

Value of program for New York City:

- For more than nine years, CILEC has provided effective immigration legal and employment legal assistance to thousands of the city’s immigrants, including through the challenging years of the first and current Trump administrations.
- By partnering with grassroots, base-building groups, CILEC legal partners serve hard-to-reach communities through one-on-one lawyering, community clinics, and workshops.
- Free legal services provided through CILEC protect vulnerable communities from falling prey to immigration services fraud, especially important now given the sharp increase in fraud against immigrants.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- Without this funding, approximately 1,000 cases would be orphaned.
- New Yorkers seeking representation in new and ongoing cases, particularly complex removal defense cases, will be less likely to find legal representation.
- Under the new contract, without community-based organizations included in the RFP, wraparound services will be severely diminished and establishing trust with hard-to-reach communities will be more difficult.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Immigrant Opportunity Initiative - The Legal Aid Society (IOI – LAS)

March 2026

Catholic Charities Community Services' (CCCS) current funding amount for The Legal Aid Society IOI is \$678,596. The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$150,000.

Through The Legal Aid Society's IOI contract (IOI-LAS), CCCS provides legal representation to low-income immigrants, with a focus on families, underserved communities, children, and survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking. The IOI-LAS partners work together to provide community outreach, immigration legal services, and case management in furtherance of goals that include: providing legal services to low-income immigrants; strengthening immigrant families and communities; addressing poverty and inequality, including for low-wage immigrant workers; supporting immigrant workers' rights and ensuring equal workplace standards; and building and strengthening partnerships between community service providers and legal services agencies. CCCS services are provided in partnership with our Pro Bono Program to leverage the private bar in serving NYC's most vulnerable immigrants.

Robust IOI programming is critical, particularly in this time of increased attacks on immigrants that include efforts to restrict due process rights and foreclose avenues of relief. The demand for legal services continues to outpace demand, while partner organizations already operate over capacity.

Due to an increase in operating costs for the Legal Aid Society and changes to the IOI-LAS contract, CCCS's subcontractor award has been reduced by over \$500,000. This reduction will have a significant impact on our team of trained advocates and the number of immigrant New Yorkers we will serve in FY27.

Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- Provides quality legal representation to vulnerable adults and families in removal proceedings, significantly increasing the likelihood of success in immigration court.
- Represents immigrant New Yorkers in a variety of cases (e.g., asylum, U visa, VAWA, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status), putting them on a path to permanent residency, social integration, and economic success.
- Ensures that pro bono legal representation is high-quality by providing close mentorship and supervision.
- Refers people who do not qualify for IOI-LAS services to other internal CCCS programs



and to other reputable legal services providers.

- CCCS provides representation in more than 285 cases each year, through in-house services or pro bono placement that includes close supervision.
- Since 2018, CCCS has represented vulnerable New Yorkers in over 879 cases. More than 230 cases have been represented by pro bono partners from the New York City legal community.

Value of Program for New York City

- Immigrants in New York, particularly those that are most vulnerable or from underserved communities, receive high-quality legal representation in removal defense and other immigration cases.
- Clients are placed on a pathway to stability and economic success, including the ability to access benefits and other supports.
- Quality representation ensures that vulnerable immigrants are not taken advantage of by fraudulent actors in their immigration cases.
- CCCS's partnership with trusted NYC pro bono lawyers increases legal representation capacity through case placements and mentorship, with more than 100 currently active legal volunteers.
- Pro bono engagement expands our ability to place cases on tighter timelines, such as asylum seekers with impending filing deadlines and young people who are age-out risks.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- A reduction in this funding will result in a disruption of legal representation for approximately 180 cases currently funded by this grant. Fortunately, continued support through City Council initiatives will ensure continued representation for immigrant New Yorkers who will no longer be served by this grant.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline

March 2026

CCCS's current funding amount is \$881,000 through MOIA plus additional funding of approximately \$550,000 through the New York City Council's ASLAN award. Requested funding through ASLAN for FY27 is \$550,000.

Funded through the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline provides valuable information about immigration benefits, directs callers to the MOIA website for policy updates and Know Your Rights resources, and makes referrals city-funded legal service providers throughout the five boroughs. The Hotline also provides rapid response services for the growing number of people who may face arrest, detention, or deportation. Knowledgeable CCCS attorneys regularly train and update Hotline staff on legal developments to ensure they provide the most up-to-date and accurate information. The Hotline is an important resource for New York immigrants to obtain relevant information and get connected to reputable legal immigration help. Counselors are bilingual, speaking English, Spanish, French, Haitian Creole, Fulani, and can assist callers in an additional 200 languages using a live interpretation service.

Value and Purpose of Program for Immigrants

- Calls are promptly answered, with a higher than 95% answer rate in the last year and an option for all callers to receive a call back rather than wait on hold.
- The Hotline offers a confidential way to seek help and speak to someone who can help to address the difficult situation they are facing in a trauma-informed manner. Counselors are trained to identify and escalate urgent matters and support individuals in distress.
- Each caller's unique needs are addressed before referrals to appropriate city- and state-funded programs. The Hotline shares referral links via WhatsApp to callers who request this option.
- Callers with limited access to technology are supported and guided through automated systems to check their case status, search for detained loved ones, and receive information about immigration law and policy relevant to their situations.
- Connecting callers to trusted immigration legal service providers reduces the likelihood that immigrants are taken advantage of by fraudulent practitioners.



Value of Program for New York City

- Since 2016, the hotline has served over 300,000 callers, more than 90% of the incoming calls.
- In 2025, CCCS responded to over 32,000 calls through the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline.
- The Hotline takes referrals directly from New York City's 311 line.
- The Hotline also responds to calls from social service providers supporting people living in shelters and concerned friends and neighbors who reach out on behalf of people who are too nervous to contact us directly.
- The Hotline worked closely with MOIA in the last year to transition to a new referral system, including weekly provider capacity updates and identifying additional resources.
- CCCS, through partnerships with MOIA, ONA, and media, holds phone banks to increase public awareness of the hotline and understanding of emerging immigration issues. Callers to phone banks receive immediate assistance.

Risks to Catholic Charities Clients

- The complex New York City legal services landscape is difficult to navigate, especially with so many providers at capacity. The Hotline helps callers to navigate the system more efficiently, and fills a gap for those who cannot find legal representation, giving them the information they need for next steps in their cases.
- Without the Hotline, tens of thousands of New Yorkers would not have access to referrals, general information, and resources each year. They would lose the opportunity to seek trustworthy assistance in navigating challenging and complex systems, and possibly lose their options for immigration legal relief.
- There has been a marked increase in immigration provider fraud in the last year. The Hotline helps people seek legal services assistance from reputable providers, steering them toward trustworthy resources. More people would be taken advantage of by unscrupulous actors without this information from the Hotline counselors.
- In the absence of a hotline, CCCS and other legal service providers would need to divert critical resources and time to address increased walk-ins and callers to legal programs.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Day Laborers Program

March 2026

The current funding amount for the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative is \$646,668. The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$848,668.

In the Bronx, CCCS works to engage, advance, and strengthen the community of day laborers. CCCS works in coalition with five other organizations in the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative to collectively maintain and expand day labor centers in all five boroughs. These centers provide job placement, workforce development, and occupational safety training, wage theft prevention services, workers' rights training, and referral services to low-income day laborers. Workers' centers across New York City are at the front lines delivering essential services to day laborers and their families in high-need areas. Worker centers have proudly delivered food and emergency cash assistance, trained workers in Site Safety training and emergency preparedness, and have helped day laborers improve job security through job dispatching. These centers have also connected day laborers to other essential services such as housing support and rental relief, and legal services to address wage theft and immigration needs.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Provides workforce development and job assistance to vulnerable community members who are targets of wage theft and disproportionately experience dangerous and abusive working conditions.
- Provides essential training for immigrants – such as the city-mandated 40-hour Site Safety Training, OSHA trainings, workers' rights, and Disaster Preparedness trainings.
- Connects immigrants to vital resources to aid in community integration, improve job opportunities, and receive legal protection through Know Your Rights trainings, connections to immigration legal consultations, and English language instruction.
- Assists in recovery of stolen wages and other claims relating to workers' rights violations. These claims are often never pursued due to undocumented workers' fear of retribution from employers and a lack of knowledge of their rights. Workers are even more fearful now to make claims under this administration.
- Provides of a thriving center which is a safe and dignified community for immigrants to access workforce supports and services.



Value of program for New York City:

- Since 2016, the City has been a national leader in ensuring the protection of day laborers and has consistently expanded its support and resourcing for this programming over the years.
- The City's investment ensures that day laborer centers can conduct Site Safety Trainings to comply with Local Law 196. This law, created to address the rise in construction-related deaths in the city, mandates a total of 40 hours of construction safety training for all workers.
- Many workers lack technological training and have limited access to digital access at home. Catholic Charities has implemented a blended model of safe in-person and online training to reach communities and assist them to develop computer literacy skills.
- Additionally, there is an enormous need to better serve the newer populations of workers from West Africa, such as Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea, who speak French, Pulaar, Wolof, and French. Due to OSHA rules for this region, interpretation during trainings is not allowed or feasible and no French speaking OSHA instructor is available in the tri-state area. Catholic Charities has been able to serve the English speakers of this population by providing trainings in English.
- Without this assistance, these communities and workers would be unable to access linguistically and culturally aligned trainings and would be unable to secure work.
- Creating safe and dignified centers for day laborers ensures that workers do not have to utilize public spaces – which are often unsafe – to access work and can contribute to the NYC economy as they build their livelihoods. This need is even more acute now, given targeted immigration enforcement and the ejection of workers from Home Depots across the city.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- As Catholic Charities is the leading organization serving day laborers in the Bronx, a loss of funding would create a vacuum for vital services and trainings to day laborers in this borough, the borough with the highest rate of poverty in NYC.
- Without continued funding more than 2,000 workers seeking to enhance their skills would lack access.
- Wage theft cases – already under-reported – would go unaddressed.
- Funding supports employers seeking to fill positions and allows New Yorkers to be self-sustaining and live dignified lives.
- Without training on their rights and lacking a safe place to wait for work, more workers would wait for work in public spaces and would be vulnerable to being targeted by immigration enforcement, being detained, and ultimately separated from their families.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

English for Speakers of Other Languages

March 2026

The current funding amount for the Adult Literacy Initiative is \$147,000. The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$147,000.

The current funding amount for the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative is \$140,000. The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$140,000.

There are currently over 2.2 million adults in NYC who have limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that only 2-3% of these 2.2 million adults can access classes in any given year. Despite the need for adult literacy programming, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY27 includes only \$12 million to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs. We are calling on the Mamdani administration to invest \$20 million in a new adult education funding stream, *Education for Integration and Equity*, which would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.

Over the past five years, with funding from the Adult Literacy Forward Initiative and Council Discretionary funding, CCCS has successfully enhanced our ESOL classes by providing comprehensive supports that keep learners engaged with our program and offer practical guidance to achieve their immediate and long-term goals. Funding from the City Council has helped us provide ESOL programming to 102 students YTD in FY26.

CCCS greatly appreciates the support from the Council and calls for an increase of the Discretionary funding (Adult Literacy Forward and Adult Literacy Initiative) from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and for the consolidation of all Council Discretionary funding under Adult Literacy Forward.

Value of program: The NYC Adult Literacy Forward Initiative, created by the NY City Council, provides increased funding per student to increase outcomes and create stronger programs. Our program outcomes include:

- Increased access to legal and social services; 328 referrals were made in FY25.



- More thorough educational development and expanded learning options; 118 additional instructional hours were offered in FY25.
- More culturally responsive/sustaining education.

Our program site is located in downtown Manhattan, which is accessible for students from all five boroughs, drawing students from 38 Council districts as of January 2025. Students who engage are from 16 countries and cultures. This diversity in the clients we serve gives our students a chance to speak English as much as possible and interact and connect with classmates from cultures other than their own, which for many of them is a rare occurrence in their daily lives.

Without the continuation of both the discretionary and Adult Literacy Forward funding, 112 CCCS students would lose their classes, 893 instructional hours in total. We would also not be able to provide the 200 hours of individual support and more than 100 referrals to benefits and resources available to adult learners (i.e., training programs, healthcare resources, housing supports, etc.) and legal, educational and training, and social services.

**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

The New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI)

March 2026

The requested funding amount for FY27 is \$1,000,000.

Thousands of immigrants urgently need access to vital social, workforce and educational services. Increased immigration enforcement, rapidly shifting federal policies, changing eligibility rules, and significant funding losses have intensified this need. At this critical moment, experienced, trusted providers are essential to ensure that vulnerable immigrants are not left without support.

The New York City – Immigrant Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI), a coordinated, citywide effort led by five longstanding, trusted immigrant-serving and refugee resettlement organizations: Catholic Charities Community Services, Church World Service, CAMBA, Commonpoint, and the International Rescue Committee. Collectively, these organizations have responded to nearly every major migration and displacement movement impacting New York City over the past five decades. The NYC-IRI is uniquely positioned to deliver a holistic, resettlement-informed case management model for refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, other humanitarian migrants, and mixed-status families. The initiative serves individuals who often face significant barriers to accessing traditional resettlement programs and public benefits. Services address both immediate stabilization needs and long-term pathways to integration and self-sufficiency for individuals and families navigating profound uncertainty related to immigration status, housing instability, economic insecurity, and trauma.

Value and Purpose of the Program for Immigrants

- The NYC-IRI will provide comprehensive, resettlement-informed case management for populations often excluded from federally funded programs due to immigration status restrictions.
- The initiative will address urgent stabilization needs, including housing insecurity, food access, healthcare and mental health referrals, public benefits navigation, and crisis intervention.
- Services will be culturally and linguistically responsive and trauma-informed, reducing fear, misinformation, and barriers to care in a rapidly shifting and often hostile immigration policy environment.
- Close coordination with legal service providers will support clients in navigating complex immigration proceedings, work authorization processes, and evolving eligibility rules for public benefits.
- Flexible direct financial assistance will help families meet immediate needs, prevent eviction and displacement, and stabilize their circumstances while working toward longer-

term goals.

- NYC-IRI will promote long-term integration and self-sufficiency through cultural orientation, family stabilization, individualized economic mobility planning, and formal employment services for those authorized to work.
- The initiative will provide trusted, community-based support that reduces isolation and promotes dignity, safety, informed decision-making, and meaningful connection to New York City communities.

Value of the Program for New York City:

- The NYC-IRI will serve approximately 4,000 vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers citywide overall, strengthening community stability across all five boroughs through coordinated, evidence-based service delivery. 800 of these clients will be served by CCCS.
- The initiative leverages of a coalition of experienced organizations with decades of crisis response expertise, including large-scale responses to Ukrainians and asylum seekers, ensuring proven capacity and infrastructure.
- By stabilizing families early, NYC-IRI will reduce strain on emergency shelters, hospitals, and crisis-response systems, helping to prevent homelessness, health deterioration, and deeper poverty.
- The program will improve public health and economic outcomes by connecting immigrants to preventive healthcare, mental health services, benefits access, and employment pathways, accelerating workforce participation.
- NYC-IRI advances equity by extending comprehensive supports to immigrant populations excluded from shrinking federal resettlement programs, ensuring city resources reach those with the greatest unmet needs.
- The initiative will strengthen cross-sector coordination among community-based organizations, legal providers, shelters, schools, healthcare institutions, and City agencies, creating a more seamless continuum of care.
- Ultimately, NYC-IRI contributes to safer, healthier, and more resilient neighborhoods by reducing isolation, mitigating crisis conditions, stabilizing immigrant families, and promoting long-term integration and economic participation.

Risk to Catholic Charities Clients:

- Without NYC-IRI, recently arrived and status-excluded immigrants are likely to remain disconnected from essential stabilization services, increasing the risk of homelessness, hunger, untreated health conditions, and prolonged crisis.
- Families navigating complex and rapidly changing immigration systems may lose access to coordinated case management and legal referrals, heightening the risk of missed deadlines, loss of eligibility for benefits, or adverse immigration outcomes.
- Without access to flexible emergency assistance, vulnerable individuals face greater risk of eviction, displacement, unsafe living conditions, and deepening poverty.
- Reduced access to culturally responsive, trauma-informed mental health supports may exacerbate untreated trauma, anxiety, and isolation among newly arrived populations.
- Gaps in referrals and benefits navigation will make it more difficult for clients to access healthcare, food assistance, public benefits, and employment supports, prolonging reliance on crisis systems.

- Increased isolation and misinformation may expose immigrants to exploitation, unsafe labor conditions, or predatory actors in the absence of trusted, community-based guidance.

By extending proven resettlement supports to those most excluded from existing systems, the NYC-IRI strengthens the social fabric of New York City and advances equity across immigrant communities.



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RENEWING AND EXPANDING ASYLUM SEEKER
LEGAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK (ASLAN) FUNDING**

Before the New York City Council Committee on Immigration
March 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnacion and members of the City Council. My name is Raluca Oncioiu and I am the Managing Attorney of the Immigration Unit at Catholic Migration Services (CMS). I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the Asylum Legal Assistance Network (ASLAN), Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP) and pro se programming in uncertain times.

CMS empowers immigrants and low-income New Yorkers through free, comprehensive legal services and community education in the areas of immigration, housing, and employment law. CMS' Immigration Unit is comprised of four teams: Removal Defense, Affirmative Benefits, Naturalization, and the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP). We believe in the power of collaboration, and partner with other nonprofits to maximize our impact.

PSPP is a collaborative of immigration legal services providers – CMS, Central American Legal Assistance (CALA), the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), and UnLocal – and community based organizations – Masa and African Communities Together (ACT). The PSPP collaborative was first funded by the previous New York City Administration in 2023 to provide *pro se* and limited scope assistance to immigrants arriving in New York City from the southern border in the years after the pandemic. Thousands of individuals who crossed the border and settled in New York City over the last four years were facing removal proceedings. The great majority could not afford to hire attorneys to help them file for asylum and to represent them in immigration court and turned to free legal services programs provided by organizations like CMS and its PSPP partners.

For decades, the demand for free immigration legal services has outpaced non-profit capacity. Over the last two decades, I testified several times about the need for funding immigration legal services to increase capacity. The need right now, however, is unprecedented, not just because so many immigrant New Yorkers lack representation, but also because of the constantly shifting and increasingly hostile legal landscape.

The Pro Se Plus Project was conceived at the end of 2022 specifically to address this gap in services to provide thorough legal orientations, conduct screenings and provide legal advice, and train volunteers to provide assistance with applications for asylum, employment authorization, and various immigration court motions for unrepresented immigrants, under the supervision of experienced legal staff. PSPP is a scalable, flexible model that enables partner agencies to leverage their strengths, coordinate resources and expertise, and adapt quickly to emerging needs. In 2023, the City funded PSPP through the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network, which also includes Lutheran Social Services, CUNY Citizenship Now!, and Catholic Charities Community Services.

In the last year, as fewer new arrivals entered the United States, the PSPP team's focus shifted from asylum application assistance to preparing those who already applied for asylum for their hearings, drafting supporting declarations, amending insufficient asylum applications to avoid pretermission, and assembling evidence packets for immigration court and asylum interviews. In response to aggressive federal immigration enforcement policies, PSPP has continually adapted its approach to safeguard community members and uphold their due process rights. Amid the recent surge in unlawful ICE detentions during routine appointments such as ICE check-ins and master calendar hearings, PSPP has implemented a range of protective strategies, including emergency family planning sessions, accompanying community members to court and other immigration appointments, filing *pro se* motions for remote court appearances, responding to motions to pretermit, appealing asylum denials, and filing *pro se* habeas petitions. PSPP partners also provide community presentations to counter misinformation, prevent fraud, and equip community members with a better understanding of the immigration system, important legal developments, and their rights.

After the previous New York City Administration failed to fund *pro se* programming last year, the City Council stepped in and generously restored ASLAN funding. During the first eight months of the funding cycle, CMS screened 223 immigrant community members and provided 120 *pro se* services, including assistance with court motions, evidence packets, work permit applications, and occasional asylum filings. These figures do not begin to capture our extensive communications with community members seeking guidance on new policy developments, nor the urgent, time-sensitive deadlines our staff and volunteers regularly manage. Over the last three years, ASLAN and PSPP partners have built longstanding trust within the community, with individuals and families returning to us for support with a broad range of immigration legal needs.

Full legal representation remains the ideal, but the current demand for qualified immigration attorneys and accredited representatives continues to exceed available resources. Sustained and expanded investment in existing *pro se* legal assistance programs—alongside full-representation services—is essential to address this gap. *Pro se* programs enable experienced legal staff and trained volunteers to support large numbers of individuals with critical aspects of their cases, from submitting address updates to the court, to filing timely appeals, or responding to motions to pretermit asylum claims. While every person in removal proceedings should have access to competent counsel, continuing to fund *pro se* services is a practical and necessary strategy to assist as many immigrant New Yorkers as possible until full representation can be universally achieved.

We are asking that the City Council renew and expand ASLAN funding so that CMS and our partners can continue to provide vital *pro se* services to the City's unrepresented immigrants. In recognition of the increasing complexity of our work, we are seeking an expansion of funding. Specifically, CMS is asking for \$188,475 for its *pro se* programming.

CMS also relies on City Council funded programs, Legal Services for the Working Poor and the Speaker's Initiative to support the rest of our immigration practice, and we respectfully request \$100,000.00 for each initiative. **An expansion of funding for these programs will help ensure**

that our organizations have the resources needed to meet growing costs and continue delivering vital legal services to the New York City's besieged immigrant communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your consideration of our funding requests.

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Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

TESTIMONY

Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2027:

“New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative:
Worker Cooperatives to Fight Economic Inequality in NYC”

Presented to

New York City Council, Committee on Immigration
Hon. Elsie Encarnación, Chair
Wednesday, March 25th, 2026

Prepared By:

Johnny Valdivia Pastor,
Business Developer, Cooperative Development Program
Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative

Center for Family Life

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Good afternoon, Chair Elsie Encarnación, and distinguished members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration.

My name is Johnny Valdivia Pastor, and I am a Business Developer at the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, a 48-year-old social service organization dedicated to providing vital resources to low-income families in Brooklyn so they can thrive and build sustainable futures.

I am here today to respectfully urge the New York City Council to continue supporting the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative by allocating \$5.1 million in Fiscal Year 2027, including \$675,000 for the Center for Family Life to continue helping low-income families develop cooperative businesses.

Since 2014, the Center for Family Life has proudly participated in this Council-funded initiative, which enables organizations like ours to incubate and strengthen worker-owned businesses. With this support, we have successfully incubated 28 worker cooperatives in the domestic work industry, and developed two on-line marketplace software, creating transformative economic opportunities for more than 700 immigrant women to take greater control of their professional and financial futures.

With continued support from the New York City Council in Fiscal Year 2027, the Center for Family Life will incubate a new worker cooperative in administrative services, creating pathways for young professionals to enter and compete in the service economy while advancing their careers. We will also provide 275 technical assistance services to existing worker cooperatives to help them address administrative challenges and remain operational. In addition, we will offer 20 trainings in business administration, finance, marketing, and domestic industry-specific skills so 400 participants can strengthen their entrepreneurial knowledge. Through these efforts, we also aim to create at least 15 new jobs in cooperative businesses.

These services create new economic and professional opportunities each year for people who have historically been excluded from traditional labor markets. They also help ensure that members of the cooperatives we incubate earn an average of \$39 per hour.

These achievements would not be possible without the steadfast support of the New York City Council. On behalf of the Center for Family Life, thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to economic equity. We respectfully ask for your continued support in Fiscal Year 2027.

Thank you.



**CHARLES B. WANG
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**

**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
FY 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Written Testimony Presented by Maggie Wong, MPA
Charles B. Wang Community Health Center
March 25, 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Maggie Wong. I am testifying on behalf of the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center (CBWCHC). CBWCHC is a Federally Qualified Health Center with locations in Manhattan and Queens. In 2024, we served over 65,000 unique patients through nearly 300,000 patient encounters. Eighty-three percent of our patients had household incomes that were at or below 200% of the federal poverty guideline and 77% were best served in a language other than English. Sixty percent of our patients were uninsured or were covered by Medicaid. CBWCHC's core clinical services are internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, dental, mental health, and primary eye care. Support services include care management, social work, and health education. CBWCHC, along with many other organizations around the country that serve non-English speaking immigrants, is facing cuts to funding but remains open to serve the community regardless of patients' race, gender, income, legal status, or ability to pay. This is only possible in part because of support from City Council discretionary funding. I am testifying today to ask for the Immigration Committee's continued support of the Immigrant Health initiative so that we can continue to meet the needs of many immigrant New Yorkers.

With support from the Immigrant Health Initiative, CBWCHC provides culturally-responsive and linguistically-accessible health resources to immigrant populations in New York City, with a particular focus on Asian immigrants. Our services through this initiative include the provision of free health screenings, which may include blood pressure, bone density, and BMI, as well as essential vaccinations for virulent viruses like influenza and COVID-19. We have also produced in-language radio and television programs, and social media posts to provide health education and promote available health services. CBWCHC also hosts workshops to promote preventive health behaviors and provide information on how to access affordable and linguistically-/culturally-accessible health services.

For many non-English speaking Asian immigrants who face the daunting task of navigating a complex health system in an unfamiliar language, CBWCHC is a trusted and familiar name they often turn to for primary care and social services support. With continued funding and resources, CBWCHC's Immigrant Health program can continue to address the health disparities and inequities experienced by the communities we serve. Thank you for your time. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present to all of you today and am happy to answer any questions.

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**Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on Immigration
Chair, Council Member Elsie Encarnacion
March 25th, 2026**

Thank you Chair Encarnacion and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Building on our historic legacy and ongoing dedication to the Chinese American community, CPC advances the social and economic progress of immigrant and low-income communities of New York through services, resources, and advocacy. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

To that end, we are grateful to testify about the issues that greatly impact our immigrant communities.

According to the [Asian American Federation Data Center](#), Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are the fastest growing population in New York, making up 18% of the population in the city and growing and 65.7% of Asian American population are foreign born.

The largest AAPI ethnic groups in New York include: Chinese (755,983), Indian (405,833), Korean (145,335), Filipino (142,006), and Bangladeshi (86,228), but there are over 25 distinct ethnic groups and languages spoken by AAPI New Yorkers. AAPIs experience some of the highest rates of Limited English Proficiency with a rate of 43.9%.

As we face an era of heightened challenges, particularly under federal policies that are increasingly hostile to our immigrant population, it is more important than ever that we invest in our local safety net. Our city has long been a place of refuge and opportunity, and we must ensure it remains so, especially in times of adversity.

CPC's community members have already felt the effects of new federal policies. Coupled with rising costs of living and housing, they are creating significant strain. Below are just a few stories from our community:

- Almost a year ago, a senior citizen was thrown into ICE detention. Because China refuses to acknowledge his identity, he might be locked up indefinitely without legal intervention. Unfortunately, he only speaks Fujianese and is illiterate, and ICE limits legal calls to one hour, meaning it can call over \$1000 per legal call.
- A parent in one of our CPC afterschool programs is still detained despite winning the right to stay in the United States and no criminal record. 5 months ago, ICE detained him for missing a routine check in after he was hit by a car.



- Community members are fearful of being in public, especially places affiliated with the government. They are regularly asking us if it's safe for them to seek help in shelters, live in public housing, go to school, apply for SNAP, go to the hospital, and even get married at City Hall, simply because they fear potential immigration consequences or being taken in by ICE.
- At the same time, community advocates, many of whom formerly undocumented or asylum seekers themselves, have mobilized to teach their communities their rights, how to stay safe, and even how to file pro se habeases that have pushed the Southern District of New York Federal court to review emergency habeas requests to release illegally detained immigrants within days. In collaboration with our community partners, CPC has already helped dozens of individuals and their loved ones prepare and file their own cases while they search for lawyers.

We are demanding that the City prioritize the wellbeing of immigrants in our community. The Federal administration has created an environment of fear and uncertainty for many immigrants, with policies that not only threaten their safety but also their fundamental rights. In light of this, it is our duty as a City that was founded and run by immigrants to step up and protect those who call our city home. We must invest in community-based support systems that can help immigrants navigate these trying times. This includes legal aid services, mental health resources, and direct access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, and education. These resources are vital for ensuring immigrants are not left to face these challenges alone, and are provided with a pathway to stability and dignity in an increasingly hostile environment.

Funding AAPI-led and serving community-based organizations

CPC is a proud member of the 18% and Growing Campaign. Led by CACF, 18% and Growing is a critical and diverse city-wide campaign uniting over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members. We advocate as a collective in solidarity to hold New York City accountable in providing the necessary resources to serve and empower the diverse needs of all AAPI New Yorkers and other communities of color as *"we are building a community too powerful to ignore."*

AAPI communities across New York City are historically underserved and undersupported directly due to the marginalization of the community. Though AAPI New Yorkers represent almost 18% of the population, the community struggles to be seen as worthy of city resources. AAPI communities need access to health insurance, linguistic accessibility across institutions and agencies, child care, legal services, housing, educational support, domestic violence support, and so much more. The need for resources often falls on the shoulders of CBOs and nonprofits to fill the gap created by city government. This is an equity issue in the budget and consistently gets in the way of AAPI communities truly feeling supported.

We urge the Council to uplift the collective priorities of the 18% and Growing Campaign which include expanding the AAPI Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million, Communities of



Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to \$10 million, and the Access Health Initiative to \$4.5 million, to take further steps in not envisioning, but truly creating a more inclusive, safe, healthy, and sustainable society for our diverse diaspora.

Child Care Assistance Program

At CPC, we have been providing child care through the Child Care Assistance Program (formerly known as Promise NYC) and legal services to asylum seekers, as well as adult literacy classes, emergency food services, and benefits navigation. One mother enrolled in our Promise NYC program explaining that she and her children came to the US in order to escape life-threatening shortages of medications that they faced in Venezuela. Her oldest child would have died without access to medications and treatment. There simply was no time to wait given the long immigration processes and therefore is now seeking asylum. She is relying on PromiseNYC so that she can access childcare for her children, and thus access employment and income to support her family. CPC enrolled our full allocation of Promise NYC slots well ahead of the deadline, and there are hundreds of families waiting for slots. We must live up to our values as a sanctuary city and provide the resources for our newest neighbors to find permanent housing and work. We are urging the City to ensure that the adopted budget includes at least \$25 million funding for this critical program, and that it is baselined going forward to give families much needed stability.

Adult Literacy

More than ever, Adult Literacy and Education services need to be recognized and strengthened. Right now, the Federal Administration is seeking to exclude students based on immigration status through its \$24 million dollar funding of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. This would have a profoundly devastating impact on the immigrant communities of New York City. Currently, there are over 2.2 million adults in New York City who have limited language proficiency and/or do not have a high school diploma. Current funding means only 3% of these New Yorkers can access adult basic education which includes GED and ESOL classes.

In response, CPC joins our NYCCAL partners by calling on the City to invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status. This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

CPC and NYCCAL are also calling on the City Council to increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.

The importance of Adult Literacy classes to the immigrant community cannot be overstated. In our program, students come because they want to learn about their American rights, how to start a small business, become an American citizen, register to vote, and how to access



important city services. Student testimonials have credited Adult Literacy classes for teaching them to be able to “take the train, go shopping, and see a doctor”, “know what their children are saying in English”, and being able to “respond to dangerous situations”. Federal restrictions on access to Adult Literacy classes will mean student’s lives will be put on hold as people wait to achieve a high school equivalency, enter the workforce, assist in their children’s homework, or become a U.S. citizen. It will mean more people will be left behind waiting for adequate funding for these essential services.

English literacy means equipping our community to be empowered and better informed to face today’s and tomorrow’s challenges. English literacy means learning how to speak and also speak up and have our voices be heard. It means all of our communities can have a better shot at participating in this American experiment. And here at CPC’s Adult Literacy Program, we believe our communities are strongest when all our voices are heard and represented. Supporting Adult Literacy classes is critical to continuing this effort.

Legal Services

Cultural barriers and the political climate are making it both increasingly important, and increasingly difficult to access legal services. Many of CPC’s community members have a deep sense of fear around issues of immigration, housing, and employment, but struggle to find a lawyer that speaks their language or can provide culturally competent services. We consistently have community members coming to seek legal services, yet there are very few Asian American legal services available.

We urge the New York City Council to prioritize linguistically and culturally appropriate legal services for immigrant New Yorkers, and to ensure that CBOs that have trust with those communities are funded to carry out those legal services.

Arrests of immigrants from Asian countries, including China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and India, have increased significantly compared to last year. According to a new analysis by THE CITY, which examined federal records from the Deportation Data Project, there has been a 1,044% rise in arrests of Chinese immigrants and a 1,000% increase in arrests of Bangladeshi immigrants from 2024 to 2025.¹ In New York State, 24% of unauthorized immigrants are from Asia, and one in seven undocumented immigrants is Asian. These immigrants will now face a mandatory \$5,000 fee for failure to appear at court hearings. Asians are also the largest group of new green card holders in the last decade and now face high fees of \$1,500 to adjust their green card status and \$1,050 waivers of inadmissibility fees.

The demand for legal services has increased tremendously and we have seen firsthand and on the ground the confusion and fear that changes in immigration protocol and policies have had

¹ Chu, H., & Hogan, G. (2025, July 14). NYC Immigration Arrests Just Shot Through the Roof, New Data Shows. THE CITY - NYC News. https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/07/14/ice-migrant-arrests-trump-administration-deportations-data/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=SCOOP%2007142025&utm_source=ActiveCampaign



on the community. In addition, we are hearing overwhelming fears over losing essential public benefits under HR1.

At CPC, we have worked tirelessly with the goal of keeping our immigrant communities and families safe and together. Since October of 2025, we have been able to reach around 500 community members alone with our KYR training, legal clinics, and other legal resource events. We have been able to facilitate “train-the-trainer” sessions on family safety planning and as part of our legal clinic, we have assisted community members in drafting letters to USCIS, and supported families in preparing important legal documents like powers of attorney and standby guardianship. We have maintained a robust legal referral network with partners such as NYLAG, LAS, NYLPI, AABANY, and others. We collaborate with national organizations like the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) through its Client Resources Committee to help develop educational materials for immigrants across the country.

As part of the RISE Coalition, led by the Asian American Federation and comprised of nearly 20 Asian-led and serving organizations providing immigration case management and legal services, we are urging the City to continue to invest deeply in the FY27 budget in resources for immigrant communities, including legal services and wraparound support, language access, and resource navigation and specifically the organizations that have been doing this work.

The Mayor’s FY27 preliminary budget includes \$11.6 million for MOIA Legal Support Centers and \$21.2 million for immigration deportation defense and other legal services. This is a promising roadmap for immigrant justice and we hope that the Council ensures that these proposals are included in the final adopted budget.

Thank you so much for your time and if there are any questions, please reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy & Research Manager at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.

March 25, 2025

New York City Council Immigration Hearing

Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Chia-Chia Wang, and I am the New York Site Director for Church World Service (CWS). I am also a proud resident of Queens for the past 24 years.

CWS is a global humanitarian organization dedicated to transforming communities around the world through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster. Since 1946, our work has reflected our vision of a world where everyone has food, a voice, and a safe place to call home.

Church World Service New York was formally established in 2023 to meet the growing needs arising from human migration and family reunification. In our first full year, we served over 1,200 unaccompanied children, Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, and Haitian entrants through legal services and case management.

As we have both witnessed—and been directly impacted by—the drastic changes in federal funding and policies, our work serving refugees and migrants who have fled violence and poverty in pursuit of a better future for themselves and their children has been significantly affected. We ask the City Council to support our work and to better understand the refugee resettlement model.

Refugee resettlement is a proven and successful model with over 40 years of impact. It is built on advance planning, thorough assessment, and a time-bound yet extremely efficient system that ensures new arrivals have access to everything they need. The model is culturally competent, trauma-informed, and highly accountable. It identifies key stakeholders and actively encourages strong community partnerships.

Our five resettlement agencies have come together and submitted a joint proposal to the City Council—the NYC Immigrant Refugee Initiative (NYC-IRI). We do so because we are deeply proud of this model, our dedicated staff, and our resilient clients, and we look forward to the City's partnership in sustaining this work so that we may continue serving refugees and immigrants who have made New York their new home.

Chia-Chia Wang

Church World Service, New York Site Director

Tel: 347-864-4229



New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026

Executive Budget Hearings

Committee on Health and Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction

March 25th, 2026

Testimony of Miral Abbas, Health Partnerships Coordinator

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families

I am writing to urge the Council of Immigration to include **\$4.5 million for Access Health NYC in the FY 2027 budget**. With this investment, Access Health NYC can expand its network and support additional community organizations to meet the growing needs of our most vulnerable communities.

Access Health NYC is a City Council initiative that supports a network of 37 community-based organizations across all five boroughs providing culturally responsive, language-accessible health education, outreach, and navigation services. These organizations help some of New York City's most marginalized residents, including immigrant, limited-English proficient, uninsured, LGBTQ+, and disabled New Yorkers, access healthcare, public benefits, and critical health information regardless of immigration status. Access Health NYC is supported by four lead agencies that provide training, evaluation, and program guidance, including the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF). CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children and families advocacy organization, working with more than 90 member organizations, youth and parent leaders, and community allies to advance equity and opportunity for marginalized AAPI communities across New York City.

Access Health NYC awardees provide essential language access, culturally responsive programming, and healthcare enrollment assistance while connecting residents to a range of health, legal, and housing resources. The initiative also provides regular trainings for organizations on complex topics such as hospital finance, healthcare access policies, and language accessibility to strengthen their ability to serve their communities. Each year, Access Health NYC facilitates **more than 15,500 connections to care, including over 9,000 healthcare referrals and more than 6,500 public benefits enrollments in more than 30**



languages. By helping residents access preventive care and coverage earlier, these organizations reduce reliance on emergency services and strengthen the city's public health infrastructure.

This work is especially important given the barriers many immigrant New Yorkers face. Immigrants make up approximately 65 percent of New York City's population and nearly half of its healthcare workforce, yet they are significantly more likely to be uninsured and face persistent challenges navigating healthcare systems due to language barriers, misinformation, and fear related to immigration policies. These barriers create harmful "chilling effects" that discourage many people from accessing healthcare and benefits they are eligible for.

Today, many of these organizations are responding to growing threats to immigrant health access. Federal policy changes, including proposed Medicaid cuts under H.R.1 and potential reductions to language access protections, risk further limiting access to critical healthcare services. Heightened immigration enforcement and confusion surrounding policies such as Public Charge have created significant fear among immigrant communities. A [CACF study](#) conducted with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in 2019 found that more than 80 percent of organizations reported clients opting out of benefits due to these concerns.

Today and then, language barriers and a lack of clear, multilingual information continue to contribute to confusion and mistrust, leading many immigrants to avoid healthcare and public benefits they are eligible to receive.

Our AHNYP community-based organizations already report that many immigrant families are **increasingly forced to deprioritize their health** in order to focus on urgent needs such as housing, food security, and personal safety. Organizations are also seeing a surge in mental health needs, with rising levels of anxiety, trauma, and depression linked to legal stress, family instability, and fear of enforcement. At the same time, culturally and linguistically accessible mental health services remain limited.

In this environment, community-based organizations serve as the backbone of the community safety net. Through trusted relationships and multilingual outreach, they help



residents navigate complex healthcare and immigration systems, connect to coverage, and access safety-net providers. They also provide **critical real-time insight** into the barriers facing immigrant communities, information that is often missing from official data sources.

Access Health NYC organizations were also critical to the City's response during the COVID-19 pandemic, often expanding outreach and services without receiving additional funding. Many organizations reported dedicating significantly more staff and resources than their Access Health funding covered in order to meet urgent community needs.

These trusted organizations meet people where they are, through community events, educational workshops, and outreach in familiar spaces such as cultural centers, food pantries, mosques, and churches. Because they are deeply rooted in the communities they serve, they are uniquely positioned to reach individuals who often face the greatest barriers to accessing care.

Above all, community-based organizations remain trusted sources of information and support because they are embedded within and reflective of the communities they serve. This trust is essential to ensuring equitable access to healthcare resources for marginalized populations.

Increasing funding for Access Health NYC to \$4.5 million would strengthen this trusted network, expand outreach to more high-need neighborhoods, and ensure that community-based organizations can continue connecting New Yorkers to the healthcare and benefits they need while supporting the city's broader public health and economic stability.

Thank you very much for your time.

Supplemental Information:

- CACF also convenes collaborative learning spaces where organizations share strategies and address emerging challenges, including improving access to [culturally responsive mental health](#) services, strengthening partnerships between community organizations and hospitals to address [language access barriers](#), and addressing [increasing chilling](#)



[effects and misinformation.](#)

- **Our FY2024 evaluation highlights the impact of this work:**
 - In the past year, **over half of Awardee organizations** report reaching more than 2000 individuals through their health education and outreach efforts.
 - Awardees predominately serve **immigrant communities** - a crucial focus for the AAPI community, where nearly 80% of individuals are immigrants, many of whom face linguistic isolation and ongoing uncertainty..
 - **Three quarters of AHNYP awardees** provide vital health outreach, education, and referral services to asylum-seekers in NYC. Current asylum-seekers are diverse, hailing from across the globe, including Asia and the Middle East. For instance CACF recently engaged with organizations working refugees from Afghanistan/Middle East.
 - **More than three quarters of Awardees** offer benefits navigation, in community health education, and referrals to essential social services, such as SNAP and healthcare.
 - **More than 60% of Awardees (62.5%) reported an increased demand for translation services** amongst their clients, with many also seeking assistance with health insurance navigation.
 - Above all, **community-based organizations remain trusted sources** for health services because they are embedded within and composed of the very communities they serve. This deep rooted trust is essential to ensuring equitable access to healthcare resources for marginalized communities.



Asian American Pacific Islanders for a Fair Budget

**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027
Preliminary Budget Hearings
Committee on Immigration
March 25, 2026**

**The 18% and Growing Campaign:
Fight For An Equitable Budget for AAPI New Yorkers**

I am Nikita Boyce and I am the Budget Policy Coordinator at CACF, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. Thank you to the Committee on Civil and Human Rights and City Council members for your time.

Since 1986, CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children and families' advocacy organization that **leads the fight for transformative movements and policy, progressive systems change, and racial equity within government institutions to increasingly invest and equitably fund** community based organizations and city initiatives that directly impact and far reach the Asian American and Pacific Islander Diaspora, which include: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Southwest Asia, Central Asia, Pacific Island regions, and the Indo-Caribbean diaspora.

CACF leads the 18% and Growing Campaign, a critical and diverse city-wide campaign **uniting over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members**. We advocate as a collective in solidarity to hold New York City accountable in providing the necessary resources to serve and empower the diverse needs of all AAPI New Yorkers and other communities of color.

The 18% and Growing Campaign is advocating for a more equitable budget for AAPI New Yorkers and that includes expanding the AAPI Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million, the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to \$7.5 million, and the Access Health Initiative to \$4.5 million, among other key city-wide initiatives and investments.



Asian American Pacific Islanders for a Fair Budget

The AAPI Diaspora is the fastest growing ethnic diaspora in New York City, yet, it faces the highest rates of poverty, linguistic isolation, rising inequities, and widening gaps between social services. We represent about 18% of the population of NYC after rapid growth over the last decade, but despite this growth, in the past few fiscal years, we have not seen many enhancements in critical city-wide initiatives though the needs on the ground have exponentially grown. AAPI organizations only receive a 6.25% share of discretionary funding (based on initial Schedule C data). As the needs of impacted communities become more diverse and require increased capacity, providers who are willing to do the work must have the resources needed to allow them to be able to best serve New Yorkers. That means AAPI-led and AAPI-serving organizations must be prioritized for funding opportunities.

AAPI Community Based Organizations provide trusted, culturally responsive, accessible resources and support services across the city. We employ thousands and serve hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We not only deserve a more equitable fiscal investment because of the direct services provided, but because these services are provided in a manner that is culturally competent and linguistically accessible - far reaching our diverse communities when the widening gaps between social services and our most vulnerable are at its most apparent.

Equity in budgeting is essential to receive the funding that our communities so desperately need in order to fill the gaps left by city government. Currently, 1 in 5 AAPIs live in poverty. We want to build a community that provides culturally competent and linguistically accessible social services to the 78% of AAPIs who are foreign born. A community where the number of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes that are reported, underreported, and unreported decline drastically. A community that emphasizes safety as the presence of wellness in our society and empowers social safety nets and opportunities for communities of color to achieve their full potential in life.

That's why CACF urges the New York City Council to uplift the collective priorities of the 18% and Growing Campaign which include expanding the funding provided to AAPI CBOs that provide culturally competent and linguistically accessible care to AAPI and immigrant New Yorkers with expanding needs. In order to take further steps in not envisioning, but truly creating a more inclusive, safe, healthy, and sustainable society for our diverse diaspora, we need an equitable budget that leads to a more value driven, culturally representative, and human centered New York City.

Thank you.



Testimony

**New York City Council
Immigration Committee**

**New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on
The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027**

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

**Submitted by Danielle Ellman, CEO
Commonpoint NY**

This testimony is submitted in support of the New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI).

In a city where 38% percent of residents are foreign-born, hundreds of thousands of immigrants require comprehensive, culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed social, workforce, and educational services. In an increasingly challenging environment of cascading changes in federal policies, prioritization of immigration enforcement and ongoing federal funding cuts, immigrants need the support of experienced, reputable organizations like Commonpoint and its NYC-IRI partners more than ever.

Commonpoint NY is a trusted, community-based organization. Headquartered in Queens, New York—one of the most diverse places in the world—Commonpoint is deeply rooted in the communities we serve. Each year, we support over 100,000 individuals through a wide range of programs that address critical social determinants of health, such as poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and mental health challenges.



With ten flagship centers in Queens, Manhattan, and the Bronx and almost 80 co-located community sites across the city, Commonpoint provides services that span all life stages, including early childhood education, senior centers, ESOL and vocational training, college access, summer camps, and an online client-choice food pantry. Our programs are designed to foster both economic security and social-emotional resilience, empowering New Yorkers of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to overcome challenges and thrive.

Commonpoint has emerged as a steadfast leader in the resettlement and integration of refugees and other humanitarian migrants across New York City. In 2022, Commonpoint became the New York City-area resettlement affiliate of HIAS, the world's oldest refugee resettlement agency. This partnership builds on our decades-long experience providing comprehensive social, educational, and employment services to struggling New Yorkers as well as an experienced staff of case managers and employment counselors fluent in Spanish, French, Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, Russian, Arabic, Burmese, Swahili, Kinyamulenge, Kinyarwanda, and Kirundi. We leverage staff's expertise and lived immigrant experience to address the urgent needs of immigrants in a holistic and impactful way. Since 2022, Commonpoint has provided resettlement services to approximately 3,500 humanitarian migrants, including refugees, asylum seekers, and others.



At Commonpoint, we believe every individual deserves the opportunity to thrive. Guided by this principle, we address both immediate needs and crises—such as securing housing and essential resources—and long-term challenges like workforce development and legal support. Our holistic approach empowers these new New Yorkers, regardless of their race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, immigration status or gender identity, to achieve stability, self-sufficiency, and the chance for a brighter future.

The New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI)

Commonpoint is seeking **\$1M** as a member of the New York City’s Immigrant Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI) coalition, a coordinated, citywide immigrant resettlement effort, collectively seeking **\$5M** in FY27 (**\$1M** for each of the five coalition members), to respond to the urgent and evolving needs of at least 4,000 immigrant New Yorkers. Commonpoint will serve at least 800 clients under NYC-IRI.

The coalition consists of five established immigrant-serving and refugee resettlement organizations: Catholic Charities Community Services, Church World Service, CAMBA, Commonpoint, and the International Rescue Committee, and has a long history of successful collaboration. Implementing NYC-IRI as a joint, coordinated effort will allow the partners to maximize the funding and reach the maximum number of immigrant New Yorkers in need of services across all boroughs and regardless of immigration status. Designed to bring resettlement-informed case management and other services to refugees, asylum seekers, other humanitarian migrants, undocumented immigrants, and



mixed-status families, NYC-IRI includes populations that are often unable to access traditional resettlement programs and public benefits. It focuses on meeting urgent stabilization needs while also supporting integration and self-sufficiency for all clients through cultural orientation, family strengthening, individualized economic mobility planning, and formal employment services for those authorized to work.

Commonpoint and its NYC-IRI partners will provide:

- Culturally and linguistically responsive case management
- Health and medical referrals
- Benefits navigation
- Food security assistance
- Housing supports
- Emergency assistance and crisis intervention
- Mental health and wellness supports
- Family stabilization supports
- Cultural Orientation
- Longer-term self-sufficiency planning
- Employment services (for those with work authorization)
- Legal assistance referrals



NYC-IRI Impact:

- Access to comprehensive, expert, culturally and linguistically competent and trauma-informed resettlement services for all immigrant New Yorkers
- Stabilization of local New York communities and NYC at large by supporting its most vulnerable community members struggling with housing and food insecurity, healthcare and mental health needs, public benefits access, aggressive immigration enforcement, and other crises
- Reduction of strain on NYC emergency shelters, hospitals, and crisis-response systems and other resources

Extending equitable support to the whole NYC immigrant community through NYC-IRI will help overcome chronic status-based disconnection from high quality services for many New Yorkers in need of stabilization and inclusion.



March 25, 2026

New York City Council, Committee on Immigration

Testimony by Monique Francis, Executive Director

**CUNY Citizenship Now! – Citizenship Plus City Council Program and ASLAN:
Supplemental Asylum Services**

Thank you, Chairperson Encarnacion, and honorable members of the Immigration Committee. My name is Monique Francis, Executive Director of CUNY Citizenship Now! I am here on behalf of our dedicated team of 55 City Council-funded employees and more than 400 active volunteers to advocate for continued funding for our legal services programs.

In this time of escalating need, CUNY Citizenship Now! has remained steadfast in its long commitment to serving immigrant New Yorkers. Since our founding in 1997, we have expanded our services to all 51 Council districts, to community-based organizations and, more recently, to participants who cannot take part in person. In all, through the years our programs have helped more than **240,000 immigrants**, with the City Council program alone supporting **80,000 individuals**

For these New Yorkers, our free services are a lifeline — a vital link that helps them remain in the United States while building a more stable future in the city they call home.

The demand for the services we provide is greater than ever. This fiscal year alone, our organization has received more than **30,000 calls** from New Yorkers urgently seeking immigration help. In response, we have prioritized general inquiries through our contact center hotline. Since last July, we have served nearly 3,000 participants. And to keep up with demand, in January we launched a monthly virtual consultation series

To continue to provide these vital services to the thousands of New Yorkers who depend on us, we respectfully urge the Council to sustain its support for our programs in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget. Through the Citizenship Plus Council Program, we request renewal of our **\$4.6 million** allocation. For our Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network (ASLAN) – Supplemental Asylum Services Program, we request continued funding of **\$845,951**.

We are in a time when the persistent presence and actions of federal law enforcement is causing Americans to live in a constant state of fear in their own communities. Shifting federal policies, increased enforcement, and ongoing challenges faced by immigrants have created unprecedented uncertainty. Immigrants who contribute so much to this city are living daily with circumstances that are deeply destabilizing for them and their families.

We have seen this climate of fear manifesting in the reduced turnout at our monthly community-based citizenship application events. People are scared – even those who already hold green cards. And so, we have spent considerable time calming nerves and encouraging eligible immigrants to apply for citizenship, document renewals, and work authorization, despite their apprehensions. We have allocated more resources to revamp our marketing and outreach strategies to address hesitation and worries. And we have pivoted to respond quickly to the many changes in federal immigration policies over the last year.

CUNY Citizenship Now! is making a measurable difference while empowering thousands of immigrant New Yorkers to understand that despite the challenging times, citizenship is a right they should not delay in pursuing.

On May 16, we will hold our annual Spring Citizenship Drive at John Jay College, where we aim to help 300 permanent residents complete and submit their citizenship applications. Invitations will be sent to your offices. We ask that you please show your support by attending the event and by promoting it in your newsletters and through your constituent communication channels.

Last month –with the number of asylum seekers continuing to grow and many becoming easy targets when they show up for scheduled USCIS check-ins and Immigration Review court hearings– we launched the **Supplemental Asylum Services Program**. This initiative supports individuals whose previously filed asylum applications were completed on their own, or “pro se,” without sufficient evidence of the risks they would face if returned to their home country.

Our program helps strengthen and correct existing asylum applications and prepares participants for interviews and hearings. It offers critical assistance aimed at preventing detention and deportation for vulnerable individuals and explains the asylum process to participants. We are also partnering with faith-based organization and nonprofits that serve African and South American communities. This work has become an essential safeguard for those at greatest risk. This moment demands unwavering advocacy, sustained leadership, and resources to ensure that every immigrant in New York City can continue to access the free, high-quality legal support needed to navigate a rapidly changing environment. We ask you to help us meet this moment.

Thank you for your time, your commitment, and your partnership. I welcome any questions you may have and look forward to continuing our work with the Council to ensure that together, we can build a more resilient and vibrant New York City, and that every immigrant has access to the legal support and services they deserve.



Free to
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Project

Free to Be Youth Project

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NYC Council Committee on Immigration
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Public Testimony
March 25, 2026

To The New York City Council Committee on Immigration:

Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today. On behalf of the Free to Be Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center, I would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration for convening this necessary hearing. My name is Amy Leipziger, and I am the Project Director of the Free to Be Youth Project.

Free to Be Youth Project

The Free to Be Youth Project (FYP) is a direct legal service provider dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. The Project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are low-income, living on the streets, and homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system, or foster care. We regularly travel to the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) drop-in centers, including the Ali Forney Center, Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project and Covenant House and offer direct legal services and know-your-rights workshops. We also conduct legal clinics at the LGBT Center, HMI, and the Pride Center of Staten Island. We have helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal problems like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, and overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing.

In the last several years, we have seen, and responded to, an unprecedented and increased demand for legal services from recently arrived LGBTQ+ youth in New York—especially arriving from Latin America and the Caribbean. Many newly arrived LGBTQ+ youth face the possibility of deportation to countries that respond to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and lived experiences as sex workers or trafficking survivors with hostility and life-threatening persecution—one that often amounts to death sentences. FYP has been at the forefront of providing services to this uniquely vulnerable population of newly arrived New Yorkers.

Many of our clients have lived through severe trauma and face extraordinary barriers in accessing legal and social service agencies in New York City. Without access to legal immigration status and supportive services, these impacted communities are pushed to the

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fringes of the formal economy and often must participate in underground economies in order to survive. They lack access to critical healthcare including mental health services, HIV medication, and gender affirming care. They are also targeted for aggressive policing because of actual or perceived involvement in criminalized forms of survival. Although many of the individuals we serve have viable immigration remedies, they encounter language and cultural barriers to accessing the essential immigration resources that would allow them to successfully pursue and complete their legal cases. While the barriers to accessing services can be daunting, we possess a highly specialized skill set to identify, triage and creatively provide the most impactful and needed direct immigration legal service interventions in a time-sensitive manner to help open the door to safety and status in the United States for newly arrived immigrants.

It's no secret that the LGBTQ+ immigrant community has continued to suffer extraordinary challenges as a result of the current administration's zealous determination to detain, deport, and harm them. Just this week, ICE agents are fanning out at airports across the country in a coordinated effort to ramp up detentions and create unnecessary panic within the immigrant community. Here, in our city, we see ICE's presence everywhere, from Sunset Park to Canal Street, Roosevelt Avenue to Harlem and the Bronx. We see our clients, queer and trans youth, afraid to leave their homes for fear of being stopped by ICE. And yet, interactions with ICE are only the tip of the iceberg for those seeking lawful immigration status here in the city. At the Free to Be Youth Project, we, like so many other immigration providers are struggling to meet the overwhelming demand for our services. That coupled with the space of executive orders, proposed rule changes within USCIS, and the stream of negative decisions from the Board of Appeals have created unprecedented challenges in our ability to pursue relief for our clients. And yet, despite these hurdles, we continue to work tirelessly to support our clients.

Mark and Dean are a young couple that met and fell in love in Russia more than six years ago. As a queer couple in Russia, they experienced countless instances of harassment and discrimination. While waiting to enter the United States, they decided to marry in the hopes they would not be separated during detainment. Mark was briefly held and released, and Dean followed a few months later. Though Mark was granted asylum, Dean's application languished in the asylum backlog at USCIS. They came to our office seeking assistance when Dean received a notice to appear in immigration court. They were fearful of detention and deportation. With our assistance, Dean is on the way to obtaining status through his husband's case ultimately making him eligible for a green card in due course.

Lisa is a queer woman that entered the U.S. as an unaccompanied minor, fleeing abuse and violence in Guatemala. She sought our help with her immigration case, and with our assistance she has not only timely filed for asylum but has obtained a work authorization that will enable

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her to work lawfully, and create stability while she waits for her immigration case to be adjudicated.

Natalie is a 20-year-old single mother from Ecuador that came to our office seeking assistance with her immigration case. During a routine court appointment with one of our attorneys, she was detained by six large, masked men and held at 26 Federal Plaza. Our office promptly filed a habeas petition and we were able to secure her release within 72 hours. We continue to work on her immigration case, ever vigilant that she could be detained again.

These stories are not isolated, or unique. While our clients have been fortunate enough to obtain our services, there are thousands of immigrants in the city that don't have access to these essential resources. Unhoused queer youth frequently experience separation from social services and encounter discrimination or harassment from providers, making access to these services even more essential. Our capacity is limited, as are the capacities of our partner organizations, and more support is needed. We cannot be everywhere at once, and the needs of the community will soon outpace our abilities. Without increased and adequate support services, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ youth will continue to fall through the cracks in our system, struggling to access the resources they need to become successful contributors to the New York City community.

We are, therefore, here to speak today on behalf of the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, the Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. The New York City Council has in the past demonstrated its leadership and support for immigrants through funding to various immigrant services. This moment calls for drastic action, and it is our position that New York City must scale up its immigration legal needs to meet the increasing threat to our communities.

Recommendations:

- **Invest \$85M in funding for immigration legal services** to ensure continuity of services and to help defend immigrants against ongoing aggressive, anti-immigrant policies and the Trump administration's federal attacks on immigrants across the city.
- **Baseline \$3M in funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, and \$40M for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI)** to meet the intensifying need of immigrant communities as NYC's population of immigrants who have been arrested, detained, or are imminently facing deportation rapidly increases.
- **Baseline funding at \$15M for the Unaccompanied Minor and Families Initiative to provide** of critical legal services for immigrant children and asylum-seeking families.



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- **We also recommend the creation of a new LGBTQIA+ Immigrant Fund at \$15 million;** and an increase funding for community-based organizations providing legal assistance, Know Your Rights trainings, and other immigration services through the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, particularly for those led by Trans and Queer advocates;

New York City must continue to protect the rights of its immigrant residents by expanding funding for these programs, rather than scaling them back.

Thank you to the members of this Committee and to the community of advocates who have been working hard to address the needs of this community. The Free to Be Youth Project stands ready to assist the NYC Council Committees on Immigration in any way that we can.

**Pseudonyms have been used to protect clients' privacy and safety.*



**Testimony from Eman Gad, Policy & Advocacy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) before the New York City Council Committee on Immigration
March 25, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnacion and Members of the Committee. My name is Eman Gad, and I am the Policy & Advocacy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). GGE is a Black feminist, intergenerational Brooklyn-based organization, reshaping culture and policy through advocacy, youth-centered programming, and narrative shift.

As a small, Black, queer and immigrant-led nonprofit doing critical racial, gender and sexuality justice and liberation work in the context of today's hostile world, the funding we receive is imperative to the development and growth of Black girls and gender-expansive youth of color across NYC. We request continued support from City Council for our FY27 youth programming, so we can continue to address the educational needs of young people across all five boroughs during this critical period.

We are facing democratic erosion nationally and the normalization of sexual violence against girls and gender-expansive youth. The lack of accountability for perpetrators in the Epstein files paired with the continual presence of ICE in our communities is impacting the mental health of youth that attend our programs. Young people feel powerless, which our staff has to respond to in real-time by shifting program curricula, increasing 1:1's, updating safety protocols, and developing a whole new organizing arm and campaign to tend to current, real-world needs and re-empower our young people.

Furthermore, attacks against "DEI" and racial justice work have led foundations to steer away from funding our work. This year, GGE is facing decreased funding from

across the sector, with funders reducing investment away from gender and racial justice organizations. In response to these challenges, GGE has restructured by reducing staff and scaling back certain programs. This current FY, we are projecting a budget deficit of approximately \$1M, which underscores the urgency of securing multi-year, flexible funding and a stronger partnership with City Council to stabilize operations and sustain impact not just for GGE, but for **ALL** small organizations doing this critical work.

This is why we have formally launched the Alliance on Gender Equity, or AGE, and are requesting \$300,000 in the form of a new City Council initiative to sustain this work. AGE is a youth-led space for political education, civic engagement, leadership development and community-building for Black girls, queer and gender-expansive youth of color. The coalition consists of our GGE youth participants, adult co-conspirators and non-profit allies. We convene with partner organizations on a monthly basis to see how we can support and uplift each other with our unique and shared priorities as we face growing attacks against our work and our communities.

To help build the youth alliance, we held a Town Hall In November 2025 centering young BIPOC girls, gender-expansive and LGBTQIA+ youth from all five boroughs. We heard from them in six priority areas, with many issues coming up that are of direct interest to this Committee, specifically a demand for Know Your Rights trainings in schools, increasing language accessibility services, and compensating students who have taken on translation services for new students to fill in the gaps.

AGE turned these grievances and recommendations into a List of Demands for New York City and State, which is now the School G*rls Demand campaign, launched this month. We will share our demands and list of city-specific requests in the written submission, to keep this brief.

GGE is continuing to do the work and expanding our reach, despite financial constraints. With \$300k in support from City Council through the AGE initiative, we hope to continue equipping young Black girls, queer and gender-expansive youth to fight for a NYC that is resilient against harmful national forces working against them.

1. \$350,000 towards our Young Women's Advisory Council program funded by Young Women's Leadership Development Initiative (YWLD) for political education and empowerment,
2. \$200,000 towards our Sisters in Strength survivor program funded by the Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative (DoVE) initiative to support young survivors,
3. \$100,000 towards the Sports Training and Role Models for Success (STARS) Initiative to promote the physical, mental, social and emotional well-being of youth ages 12-24, and
4. \$250,000 in ATI funding to continue our youth organizing work surrounding racial disparities in disciplinary actions and school policies, and promotion of restorative and healing justice measures and Alternatives to Incarceration.

We hope you consider supporting us in these endeavors. Thank you.



Testimony: Timothy Fallon, Esq., Managing Attorney of Immigration Practice Group
Hearing: New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Date: March 25, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the City's FY27 Preliminary Budget. I am Timothy Fallon, Managing Attorney of the Immigration Practice at Her Justice, a nonprofit organization that has advocated with and for women and gender minorities living in poverty in New York City for more than 30 years. In Fiscal Year 2025, Her Justice provided a range of legal help to more than 4,000 women and their children in our practice areas of family, matrimonial, and immigration law. Her Justice clients come from communities across all five boroughs of New York City. 31% of clients were from Brooklyn, 30% from Queens, 23% from the Bronx, 14% from Manhattan, and 2% from Staten Island. Among the clients served, 92% are women of color and 85% are survivors of domestic violence. Three-fourths of our clients were born outside the U.S., coming from 103 countries across the world.

Her Justice provides direct representation and skilled advocacy in an arena that often fails to adequately serve the legal needs of the marginalized. In this moment of volatile change, as in ordinary times, legal services are essential services. Every day, our staff attorneys provide women with information about the legal remedies available to them and work with clients to weigh their options, develop strategies, and decide on the course that is right for them and their children. We are grateful for this committee's commitment to recognizing civil legal services are essential in New York. We hope this testimony underscores the **critical importance of civil legal services for immigrant women living in poverty in New York and for all New Yorkers** and highlights the partnership we seek with the City to ensure immigrants have access to them.

Her Justice is grateful for the New York City Council's longstanding partnership in expanding access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence. Council support through Citywide Domestic Violence Empowerment (DoVE), Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE), and the Speaker's Initiative has allowed Her Justice to provide critical legal services to low-income survivors of domestic violence and immigrant women in New York City. We hope the City Council will reaffirm and enhance resources to survivors and recognize legal services as essential to ensuring their economic well-being and safety. Her Justice respectfully seeks support through the following City Council initiatives:

- 1) \$300,000 Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE);
- 2) \$150,000 Citywide Domestic Violence Empowerment (DoVE);
- 3) \$100,000 Speaker's Initiative;
- 4) \$100,000 Immigrant Opportunities Initiative;
- 5) \$200,000 Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence and Gender-Based Harm Initiative;
- 6) \$250,000 Divorce Proceedings Representation for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative.

In this testimony, we present **strategies to address the unmet civil legal needs of women living in poverty in New York**, including through our unique pro bono legal services model with a significant return on investment; our innovative approach to system reform through our policy program to learn more about the impact of the courts and drive ideas for change; and our focus on culturally competent services through our own training and collaboration with community partners to enhance our delivery of legal services.



I. The Unique Her Justice Model and Impact

“Pro Bono First” Model

Her Justice recognizes that the need for legal representation in New York far outstrips the supply of help. Through our unique pro bono first model, Her Justice pairs thousands of well-trained and resourced pro bono attorneys from the City’s premier law firms with women who have urgent legal needs. This model helps fill the “civil justice gap” – the difference between the number of Americans who need civil legal assistance and the few who receive help given inability to afford legal assistance and resource constraints on the availability of free legal help. By ensuring that more women have lawyers by their side, we help make their voices heard and we begin to break down systemic barriers to access to justice.

Her Justice serves women and gender minorities living in poverty in child/spousal support, custody and visitation, and order of protection matters in Family Court; divorces in Supreme Court; and immigration matters under the Violence Against Women Act. Many of the people who contact us for help are matched with a pro bono volunteer lawyer. Volunteer lawyers are assigned an experienced Her Justice staff attorney mentor who helps strategize, answer substantive and procedural questions, review documents before they are filed and provide referrals for social and other services. Four law firm attorneys work full-time in our office as externs, providing court representation in complex or emergency matters.

Non-attorney volunteers translate or interpret for non-English-speaking clients. Volunteer law students and paralegals work in-house in our main office, supervised by staff attorneys. Volunteer forensic accountants and investigators support litigation by compiling and analyzing the documentation necessary to obtain fair divisions of marital assets, maintenance awards, and child support orders for our clients.

This novel and holistic approach has enabled us to assist tens of thousands of women over the years, far more than we could have reached relying exclusively on direct service. It also allows Her Justice to offer representation for many of the cases other legal services organizations do not have the bandwidth to take on – for example, child and spousal support matters, and litigated divorces. Her Justice’s 13 staff attorneys actively trained and mentored 1,642 pro bono attorneys and non-attorneys (summer associates or paralegals) who worked on both open and closed cases with Her Justice clients.

For those seeking assistance, our staff responds with a broad array of legal information and advice, know-your-rights materials easily accessible on our website, and information about other resources. In addition to training and mentoring pro bono attorneys, Her Justice in-house attorneys provide representation to some clients whose legal issues are particularly urgent or complex. This both meets critical needs and allows staff attorneys to remain fully expert on the legal issues on which we train and provide support.

Return on Investment and Impact

In addition to achieving successful outcomes in individual representations, Her Justice is committed to providing legal services that help women living in poverty achieve stability in other areas of life. To measure the impact of our legal services, our team conducted a preliminary return on investment analysis based on our Fiscal Year 25 data. For these calculations, we used Her Justice client data across our various legal service areas, along with publicly available datasets used by other legal organizations to calculate the value of their services. During this period, Her Justice received \$7.8



million in funding from state and local government, donations, and private foundations. These core funding sources are critical to Her Justice’s ability to provide essential legal services, and we are grateful to the Council for ensuring their protection in the City budget. From the full range of investments in Her Justice, we calculated the following benefits:

- Pro bono attorneys representing Her Justice clients were able to secure \$2.6 million in lifetime child and spousal support awards.
- For immigration clients served, increased wages will result in a benefit of \$8.6 million.
- Clients leaving abusive partners will see a one-year benefit of \$2.1 million in reduced health and mental health costs associated with an average of seven physical assaults per federal health and intimate partner violence statistics.
- Clients who had a successful case outcome during this period and their children will see a five-year improved health benefit of \$4.2 million.

Her Justice plans to update our return-on-investment analysis as new data becomes available and to utilize this analysis to support advocacy around the benefits of civil legal services and the need for greater investment in providers.

Her Justice Policy and System Reform

We believe that our client-centered services must also be paired with policy work to advance systemic reform while meeting individual needs through independent efforts and partnerships with peer organizations and coalitions. Our policy work is informed by the lived experiences of our clients, women and gender minorities living in poverty, whose livelihoods and well-being are often shaped by the civil justice system. Through this framework, we work to break down systemic barriers embedded in the civil justice system that reinforce and exacerbate economic, gender, and racial inequities. Her Justice is deeply committed to exploring the power of data to inform and support policy change. We have developed expertise in conducting original research to build civil justice data collections and leverage these to support reform.

- In November 2024, Her Justice launched our newest policy research project, [Report From Court](#), which surveys pro bono attorneys representing Her Justice clients in New York City Family Court about their experiences and case outcomes and presents survey data in real time on a website. By making visible the Family Court experience and the perspectives of pro bono attorneys, *Report From Court* aims to fill a critical gap in Family Court data and support meaningful reform.
- Her Justice has also conducted research on the legal needs of immigrants in our community to support policy reform. Our 2023 report, [Stories from Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: The Impact of Work Authorization](#), features findings from qualitative interviews with 31 undocumented immigrant survivors about the impact of employment authorization on their employment, income, housing, access to government services, interactions with the criminal justice system, and mental health. Her Justice continues to highlight this research in local and federal advocacy around rights and benefits for immigrants.
- In 2021, Her Justice released our first policy research report, [Towards Justice for Parents in Child Support Courts](#), which presented an analysis of 800 court observations in New York City child support cases and recommendations for Family Court reform. Her Justice leveraged this research to support a legislative campaign focused on reforming the New York child support courts.



II. Civil Legal Services are Critical for Immigrant Survivors of Violence

For 30 years, Her Justice has been committed to providing critical free legal services to undocumented immigrant women living in poverty. Our immigration practice provides free legal assistance to survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence as they seek to stabilize their immigration status in the United States. **Last year our attorneys provided legal information, advice, and representation on 2,058 immigration matters, securing legal status for 802 clients and their children.**

From our years of experience representing women in the civil justice system, we know that delays in securing child support or custody orders often deepen economic instability for our clients. These challenges are even more acute for undocumented immigrant survivors, who frequently wait years for the historically under-funded immigration system to review their applications for legal status and employment authorization documentation. Without work permits or stable status, survivors face prolonged barriers to employment, housing, and financial independence – undermining their ability to achieve long term safety and stability for themselves and their families.

Addressing Removal Orders and Preventing Deportation

Our work emphasizes securing legal pathways to immigration relief through affirmative applications such as VAWA self-petitions, U visas, and T visas. Through these applications we help stabilize survivors' immigration status and reduce the likelihood that they will be placed in removal proceedings. However, this affirmative work is becoming more challenging amid heightened enforcement, increased processing delays, and barriers such as the lack of timely receipt notices, all of which can leave survivors in prolonged periods of legal uncertainty.

Heightened immigration enforcement has intensified fear within immigrant communities, deterring survivors from seeking assistance from lawyers, hospitals, and law enforcement. Many are avoiding critical services out of fear of detention or removal. Additionally, immigrant survivors face increased legal risk when pursuing U, T, or VAWA relief while asylum or removal proceedings are pending, as cases may be reopened or enforcement actions taken despite their eligibility for protection. These dynamics undermine access to justice and destabilize survivors seeking lawful status and safety.

Where appropriate, Her Justice represents clients in removal proceedings with the goal of seeking termination or administrative closure of their cases, or, in limited circumstances, helping clients obtain lawful permanent residence based on a VAWA self-petition while in proceedings. We work with a large population of clients who have experienced removal proceedings with varying outcomes, and for some, reopening their case is the only pathway to safety and stability. Motions to reopen and terminate removal proceedings are highly complex, time-intensive, and increasingly difficult in the current enforcement environment, requiring significant legal expertise and sustained representation.

Access to the Courts and other City Services

Due to heightened immigration enforcement by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), many of our clients express uncertainty and fear about attending court proceedings, interacting with government offices, or accessing public services. These fears make it more difficult for survivors to safely engage with the systems designed to protect them,



including the Family Courts, law enforcement, and other city agencies. Ensuring that immigrant survivors understand their rights and feel safe accessing these institutions is essential to advancing both survivor safety and public trust.

Work Authorization as a Pathway to Safety

We pair our legal services for undocumented survivors of gender-based violence with research and policy advocacy. Through our direct services work, we know that the ability to work legally in the U.S. with an employment authorization document makes a significant difference in the quality of life, safety, and stability of our clients and their children. In 2023, we released our policy research report, [Stories from Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: the Impact of Work Authorization](#). The report is the culmination of a multi-year qualitative research project; we interviewed our immigrant clients about how delays in work authorization impacted their lives. The report presents findings about the benefits of legal work permits in terms of our clients' economic independence and freedom from abuse, housing stability, mental health and well-being. The research illustrates the strong connection between our clients having legal work authorization and their likelihood of seeking help from other systems, including the Family Courts and the civil justice system and law enforcement. The report also contains recommendations for reform, including enhancing and investing in immigration legal services. Her Justice measured the **impact of our legal services** in Fiscal Year 2025 and found that with \$6.8 million in funding from state and local government, donations, and private foundations, the immigration clients served will see increased wages resulting in a benefit of \$8.6 million— proving civil legal services matter.

III. Her Justice Is Expanding Outreach and Legal Education for Immigrant Survivors

Her Justice is actively responding to the current climate of heightened immigration enforcement and rapidly evolving federal immigration policies by expanding our outreach and education efforts to ensure that immigrant survivors understand their rights and know where they can safely seek help. Our staff regularly conduct “Know Your Rights” presentations and trainings for community-based organizations across New York City, providing survivors and frontline service providers with information about federal immigration protections, as well as the rights afforded to immigrant New Yorkers under the City’s sanctuary policies. These presentations are an important tool for countering misinformation and empowering survivors to access legal and social services without fear.

At the same time, our immigration attorneys are closely monitoring changes in federal immigration policy and enforcement practices to ensure that we can provide accurate, timely guidance to our clients and pro bono partners. Immigration law is complex and constantly evolving, particularly for humanitarian protections such as VAWA self-petitions, U visas, and T visas, which are critical pathways for survivors of abuse and trafficking. Our team tracks policy developments, consults with national immigration advocacy networks, and adapts our legal strategies to protect our clients’ safety and stability. Through this work, Her Justice seeks not only to provide direct legal assistance, but also to ensure that immigrant survivors and the organizations that support them have the information and tools necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain immigration landscape. By combining expert legal representation with proactive outreach and education, we help ensure survivors of violence can access justice and safety in New York City.

“We’re forced to dedicate more time to researching, writing, advising clients and pro bono attorneys. This makes our jobs much harder and divert critical time away from client consultations, in-house



representation, attorney trainings, mentoring pro-bono attorneys, Know Your Rights presentations, and community outreach.”

- Her Justice Immigration Attorney.

The City’s Crucial Investment in Immigration Legal Services

New York City has demonstrated strong leadership in protecting immigrant survivors of domestic violence and gender-based violence through its sanctuary policies and investments in legal services. **The Council’s Immigrant Opportunities Initiative and the Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence and Gender-Based Harm Initiative, are instrumental in ensuring that immigrant survivors can stabilize their status and rebuild their lives.** For survivors whose abusers exploit their immigration status as a means of coercion and control, access to specialized immigration legal services can be life-changing. Through this initiative, survivors can pursue immigration relief such as VAWA self-petitions, U visas, and T visas while also addressing family court and safety-related legal needs. Securing lawful status or work authorization allows survivors to obtain employment, secure housing, pursue custody and child support, and rebuild economic independence. Continued investment in this initiative strengthens both individual safety and the City’s broader sanctuary framework by ensuring that immigrant survivors can meaningfully participate in legal processes and access the protections available to them under the law.

Thank you again for the opportunity to highlight Her Justice’s longstanding commitment to ensuring that immigrant survivors of domestic violence and gender-based violence can safely access the legal protections and services they need. Through our pro bono first model, immigration legal services, and research-driven policy and advocacy efforts, we work to help survivors stabilize their status, secure safety for themselves and their families, and rebuild their lives. We thank the City Council for its continued leadership and investment in protecting immigrant communities, including through sanctuary policies and legal services for survivors. We look forward to continued collaboration and partnership with the Council and community partners to strengthen access to justice and ensure that immigrant survivors across New York City can live free from violence and fear.

Respectfully,
Timothy Fallon, Esq.
Managing Attorney of Immigration Practice Group



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee on Immigration

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Submitted by:

Sierra Kraft, Executive Director, ICARE Coalition

March 25th, 2026



Good afternoon, Chair Encarnación and members of the Committee on Immigration. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Sierra Kraft, and I am the Executive Director of the Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE). We are a coalition of legal service organizations working across New York City to ensure that unaccompanied immigrant children have access to free legal representation and the support they need to navigate one of the most complex legal systems in the country.

I want to begin by acknowledging the Council's leadership. The discretionary investments you have made, particularly through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative and the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative, have had a real and measurable impact. That investment is working, and we are deeply grateful.

Last year's investment was transformative. It enabled ICARE to bring together 13 dedicated legal service providers and lean into the true power of a coalition. We have moved beyond being a collection of individual offices; we have become a unified system. Our coalition is comprised of:

Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative:

- Catholic Charities Community Services
- The Door
- The Legal Aid Society
- Safe Passage Project
- Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
- Central American Legal Assistance (CALA)



- Human Rights First

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

- Project Rousseau
- Lutheran Social Services of New York
- Children’s Law Center
- Lawyers for Children
- Immigration Law & Justice New York
- Catholic Charities Community Services
- The Door
- Safe Passage Project

Because of your support, these 13 providers now rely on each other for specialized knowledge, shared resources, and the development of best practices. This unity allows us to act as the connective tissue across the city’s legal service ecosystem. We aren't just working alongside each other; we are working *with* each other to ensure that New York City remains a place where the most vulnerable children are protected.

At the same time, we are at a turning point. The environment surrounding immigrant children has shifted in profound and concerning ways. Legal protections are eroding at the federal level, enforcement has intensified, and more youth are facing detention. These are children—many of whom have fled abuse, trafficking, or violence—who are being asked to stand in court alone and defend themselves against a trained government attorney. There is still no guaranteed right to counsel in immigration court, even for children. The stakes of this work could not be higher: **without representation**, a child has only about a **15 percent chance of remaining safely in the United States. With an attorney**, that number rises to **over 90 percent**. In this system, legal representation is the single most important factor in whether a child is protected or removed.



But representation at this scale does not happen in isolation. It requires the coordination and infrastructure that ICARE provides. We operate a centralized referral and screening system that ensures young people are connected to the right legal services as efficiently and equitably as possible. From July through February alone, **ICARE received over 850 applications for legal support** and successfully **matched more than 300 children and youth** to the providers in our network. This collective strength allows us to place very urgent cases—those involving imminent hearings or age-out risks—by coordinating across our 13 organizations to find capacity wherever it exists.

Beyond matching, our role is to make the entire system function more effectively. We prevent duplication across provider waitlists, share critical real-time data, and provide a unified voice in advocacy. This ensures that limited legal capacity is used strategically and that children are not navigating a fragmented system on their own. This infrastructure is what makes representation possible; without it, even our most experienced providers would struggle to respond to the volume and complexity of the need we see today.

Our providers are doing heroic work, but they are doing it in an increasingly unstable landscape. For years, these services have relied on a patchwork of federal funding that was never sufficient and has now become extraordinarily unpredictable. Funding is delayed, disrupted, and at times halted altogether, making it difficult for providers to retain the specialized staff needed to manage caseloads that are becoming more complex. Cases that were once straightforward now require significantly more time and intensive advocacy, including representing detained youth and navigating rapidly shifting federal policies.



Without sustained investment from the City, this system will not hold. We are already seeing the gap widen, with providers being asked to do more with less while the number of youth in need continues to grow. If we do not maintain this support, thousands of children will remain on waitlists and eventually appear in court alone. They will be ordered deported not because they lack a legal claim to stay, but because they were never given a meaningful opportunity to present their case.

New York City has long recognized that access to counsel is a local investment in stability and due process. To sustain this work, ICARE respectfully requests that the Council fully fund **\$18.6M for the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative** and **\$2.6 million for the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative** in the FY27 budget. These are not just funding streams; they are the foundation that allows our 13 providers to stand together.

New York City has built something that works and serves as a model for the rest of the country. But it only works if it is sustained. We urge the Council to maintain these investments so that due process is not determined by luck but guaranteed in practice.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to protecting immigrant children across New York City.

In community,

Sierra Kraft
Executive Director
ICARE Coalition
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www.icarecoalition.org

Defend Their Future: Sustain Legal Services for Immigrant Children and Youth

About ICARE: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children and youth facing deportation in New York City and advocating for universal access to counsel so no child has to face the immigration system alone.

The Challenge: In FY26, City Council made a significant investment in immigrant youth legal services, enabling providers to expand capacity, reduce waitlists, and reach more young people than ever before. That investment has made a measurable difference and we're deeply grateful. The need remains urgent.

Legal protections for immigrant youth continue to erode. Cases that were once straightforward now require significantly more time, coordination, and specialized advocacy, including federal habeas work to secure release for detained youth. Federal funding remains unstable, and more youth are facing detention and emergency legal needs. Without sustained investment, this year's progress could quickly be reversed, leaving thousands of youth to face court alone, with life-threatening consequences.

Every year, thousands of immigrant children and youth in NYC face complex immigration proceedings without an attorney. Without counsel, they have only a 15% chance of winning their case. With ICARE-supported representation, that rate jumps to over 90%.

What We Do: Through the Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative, ICARE providers deliver coordinated, high-quality representation to immigrant youth and families fighting deportation in NYC, including KYRs, legal screenings, direct representation, connections to city & social services, and centralized referrals to reduce duplication and increase efficiency.

Our Impact (Since 2014)	Screened 15,000+ children and youth for relief	Represented nearly 4,000 children and youth	Obtained relief for 2,000 children and youth
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Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative

FY27 Discretionary Funding Request: \$18,559,420

Sustained City Council investment will determine whether **more than 2,000 young New Yorkers** and their families have access to counsel or must face removal proceedings alone.



No child should face the immigration process alone



Stability Is Protection: Protect SIJS Representation

About ICARE: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children and youth facing deportation in New York City and advocating for universal access to counsel so no child has to face the immigration system alone.

The Challenge: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) is a federal humanitarian protection available to children who have experienced parental abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Securing SIJS requires navigating two separate legal systems, New York Family Court and federal immigration proceedings, a dual-system process that is uniquely complex and resource-intensive.

Federal backlogs and processing delays have created prolonged uncertainty for eligible youth. Even after SIJS approval, continued representation is necessary to secure lawful status and protection from deportation. Without sustained City investment, youth who qualify for SIJS risk remaining in legal limbo, or losing access to the protection Congress intended, protections the City has supported so these young people can thrive.

What We Do: Through the SIJS Initiative, ICARE providers secure Family Court findings, file and monitor SIJS petitions with USCIS, provide removal defense when necessary, and coordinate referrals across the city to ensure youth remain supported and able to move forward safely. SIJS representation protects children who have already experienced profound harm and provides a pathway toward lawful permanent residence.

Why It Matters: Without counsel, immigrant children are far less likely to secure relief. With representation, they can obtain lawful status, stability, and safety. SIJS is a statutory protection established by Congress. Continued City investment ensures that youth who qualify can meaningfully access that protection, remain safely and continue to build stable futures in New York.

In the first two months of this initiative, 215 youth were screened and 135 youth were matched to representation, a clear signal of both unmet needs and the importance of continued City support.

SIJS Initiative FY27 Discretionary Funding Request: \$2,575,000

Sustained investment will ensure that children and youth who qualify for SIJS can secure lawful status and long-term stability — rather than remain trapped in system that is impossible to navigate alone.



**No child should face
the immigration process alone**



Wednesday, March 25: Immigration Committee, Preliminary Budget Hearing, FY27

Testimony from International Rescue Committee (IRC) in New York
On behalf the New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative (NYC-IRI)

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnación and members of the Council,

My name is Bethany Dill, and I am the Community Engagement Coordinator with the International Rescue Committee in New York, the IRC. I am grateful to be here alongside our partners in the New York City Immigrant Resettlement Initiative, the NYC-IRI. We believe our services for the refugee and immigrant community can be strongest and most effective not only by working closely together as the city's resettlement agencies but also, and importantly, by walking alongside our clients in a way that truly bears witness to their experience—grief and triumphs, past and present, and hopes for the future; and by reflecting that experience in conversations with community members and leaders.

I want to build on what you've heard today by focusing on what we are seeing daily and why case management, which we as a coalition of resettlement agencies are working to protect and strengthen, is so critical to newcomers in our city at this moment.

Across New York City, we are increasingly working with individuals and families who are eligible for services but facing many complex barriers to accessing and navigating them in a meaningful way. Rapid changes in federal policy, shifting rules for qualifying for and maintaining support, and fragmented systems mean that even highly motivated individuals are struggling to access housing, healthcare, legal support, and employment pathways in a coordinated way.

What we are seeing is not a simple lack of services; it is a breakdown in navigation: connecting to services and staying connected. Without consistent, trusted case management, small barriers compound quickly: a missed document, a misunderstood eligibility rule, a delayed referral. These gaps can lead to prolonged shelter stays, loss of work authorization opportunities, worsening health conditions, and avoidable strain on City systems. A colleague at IRC who serves as caseworker said to me just yesterday, "[Clients'] lives are inundated with fear and constraints."

This is where the NYC-IRI model is particularly important. It is not duplicating existing services—it is making them work. Case management ensures that individuals and families in the refugee and immigrant community can move through systems efficiently, access what they are already eligible for, find the stability they seek, and thrive as part of our New York City community.

From our experience responding to displacement in New York and across the country, this kind of early, coordinated, and responsive support is one of the most effective ways to reduce long-term costs and improve outcomes. When case management is strong, systems function as they are designed to. When it is absent, costs rise across the board.

The \$1 million investment proposed is a strategic way to strengthen the City's existing infrastructure, ensuring that services already funded translate into real stability and well-being for new New Yorkers and the opportunity to share skills, cultures, and dreams that shape our city.

We respectfully urge the Council to include \$1 million for the NYC Immigrant Resettlement Initiative in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your time and continued advocacy and leadership.



Japanese American Social Services, Inc.
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**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027
Preliminary Budget Hearings
Committee on General Welfare
March 25, 2026**

**Natsuko Okazaki, Director
Japanese American Social Services, Inc**

Good afternoon, my name is Natsuko Okazaki and I am the Director at Japanese American Social Services, Inc. (JASSI). Thank you very much for holding this hearing and providing the opportunity to testify.

JASSI is a proud member of the 18% and Growing Campaign. Led by CACF, 18% and Growing is a critical and diverse city-wide campaign **uniting over 90 AAPI-led and serving organizations across New York City to fight for a fair and equitable budget that protects the needs of our most vulnerable community members**. We advocate as a collective in solidarity to hold New York City accountable in providing the necessary resources to serve and empower the diverse needs of all AAPI New Yorkers and other communities of color as *"We Are Building A Community Too Powerful To Ignore."*

AAPI communities across New York City are historically underserved and under-supported directly due to the marginalization of the community. Though AAPI New Yorkers represent almost 18% of the population, the community struggles to be seen as worthy of city resources. AAPI communities need access to health insurance, linguistic accessibility across institutions and agencies, childcare, legal services, housing, educational support, domestic violence support, and so much more. The need for resources often falls on the shoulders of CBOs and nonprofits to fill the gap created by city government. This is an equity issue in the budget and consistently gets in the way of AAPI communities truly feeling supported.

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The mission of JASSI is to improve the quality of life for people living in the New York metropolitan area by providing quality social services at the local community level. JASSI provides services in both Japanese and English to people who face problems resulting from language barriers, cultural differences, and/or differences in service systems, and JASSI provides these services regardless of age, income, gender, race, ethnicity, or immigration status. All services are provided without any charge.

During fiscal year of 2025 (July 1st, 2024 through June 30, 2025), JASSI staff made a total of 3,797 contacts and assisted 511 seniors in need. The most common inquiries we received from our clients were regarding the following issues; 1) JASSI Program/Events; 2) Health Insurance (Medicare); 3) Public Benefits, Entitlements, Social Security, and MSP; 4) Financial (tax, low-income, etc.); 5) Health/Mental Health; 6) Hospital Escort/Homecare; 7) Housing issues (Eviction, etc.); 8) Assurance Call; 9) Family; and 10) End of Life Issues.

While people seek assistance from JASSI for a variety of reasons, most inquiries we receive are about health and health insurance. Due to language barriers and lack of knowledge about the U.S. health care system, many clients were concerned about health insurance issues. JASSI's Certified Application Counselors received more than 1000 emails and phone calls regarding the health care system in the last fiscal year (FY2025). They assisted hundreds of people to enroll in appropriate health insurance and many others to renew their services in FY2025. It is an overwhelming process for many people even after having enrolled in health insurance coverage, and they require Counselors' continued assistance.

During the fiscal year of 2025, approximately 44% of the total inquiries were made by senior citizens who typically have greater demands and needs. The case assistance for senior clients includes step-by-step assistance with online application for Medicare and paper application for Medicare Saving Program, advocacy to government and/or community agencies, and information/referrals. With the Access Health NYC fund we received for FY2025, we were able to increase assistance by providing more case assistance to clients.

Furthermore, JASSI places strong emphasis on addressing mental health issues as part of our mission to support our community members and help them live with a sense of safety and well-being. In today's society, more people are struggling with stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, making access to mental health support more important than ever. JASSI provided 120 individual mental health counseling sessions in Japanese, free of charge, to New York residents experiencing various challenges between July 1 and November 19, 2025.

Continued funding is vital to sustaining and enhancing the quality of services JASSI provides to the community. As demonstrated in our work, including assisting over a thousand individuals with complex health insurance inquiries, supporting seniors, offering mental health counseling, and addressing a wide range of social service needs, demand for our programs continues to grow. Ongoing support allows us not only to maintain accessibility, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and individualized care that our clients rely on, but also to expand our capacity to meet increasing and



evolving needs. Without this critical funding, it would be difficult to uphold the same level of comprehensive and high-quality support. Your continued funding ensures that we can remain a trusted resource and continue delivering meaningful and life impacting services to those who depend on us.

JASSI urges the New York City Council to uplift the collective priorities of the 18% and Growing Campaign which include expanding the AAPI Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million, Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund to \$10 million, and the Access Health Initiative to \$4.5 million, to take further steps in not envisioning, but truly creating a more inclusive, safe, healthy, and sustainable society for our diverse diaspora.

Thank you very much for your time.

**TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION**

Presented on March 25, 2026

My name is Deborah Lee, and I am the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit (ILU) at The Legal Aid Society (LAS). Throughout our nearly 150-year history, LAS has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. Over 2,300 staff members operate across all five New York City boroughs in our Civil, Criminal Defense, and Juvenile Rights Practices – guided by the fundamental principle that nobody should be denied justice because of poverty. Combining the expertise gained from representing clients across diverse areas of law with the broader public policy perspective of an advocacy group, we lift up marginalized individuals and enable them to advance themselves and their families. Part direct legal services provider, part social justice defenders, we have a unique ability to go beyond individual issues to affect change at a societal level.

Since the 1980s, LAS has maintained a citywide Immigration Law Unit (ILU) within the Civil Practice. ILU, now comprised of almost 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), before immigration judges in removal proceedings, on appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), and in federal court on habeas corpus petitions and petitions for review. Over the most recent year, ILU assisted in over 8,400 individual legal matters benefiting over 4,000 New Yorkers citywide. In addition to direct legal services, we conduct outreach presentations with community members and grass-roots organizations and provide critical immigration legal information to New Yorkers through our Know Your Rights hub on our website,¹ which has garnered over 200,000 views since January 2025, and our dedicated legal helpline telephone bank. We also provide regular trainings 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 nearly 70 participating law firms enable the ILU to maximize resources to meet the increasing demand for

¹ <https://legalaidnyc.org/news/critical-resources-immigrant-communities/>.

representation.

The Legal Aid Society submits this testimony to highlight the unprecedented escalation of immigration enforcement, detention, and due process erosion under the current federal administration, and its devastating impacts on noncitizen New Yorkers and their families. These federal actions have dramatically increased the demand, complexity, and urgency of immigration legal services in New York City, particularly for detained individuals, immigrant youth, and mixed-status families. **To meet this moment, LAS respectfully requests the City Council to: (1) increase funding for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) to \$13,299,000 per provider; (2) enhance LAS funding for the Unaccompanied Minor Children and Families Initiative (UMFI) to \$4,500,000 in FY27; and (3) maintain flexible implementation of LAS' Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding so providers can respond to rapidly changing community needs.**

LAS' testimony here presents our challenges under the current Trump administration as well as our funding-related requests for our New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), Youth, and federal litigation, and Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)-related work.

Immigrants built our great City, and we are proud to honor our own histories, our loved ones, friends, and neighbors. LAS is committed to fighting for immigrants' rights on all these fronts and respectfully calls upon this Committee to take bold action in these turbulent times, and to lead this City in protecting the rights of noncitizen New Yorkers.

A. The Current Immigration Landscape

The immigration landscape today is more volatile and demanding than at any point in recent memory. Since January 2025, ICE detention has increasingly become the primary tool used to terrorize noncitizens, with over 3,000 New York City residents detained by ICE between January through mid-October of 2025, the majority of whom were later deported.² This federal administration has also used novel means, such as invoking the Alien Enemies Act to forcibly remove noncitizens to El Salvador for

² See Haidee Chu, *NYC Deportations Ramped Up While Immigration Arrests Slowed, Latest Data Shows*, The City (Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/12/05/ice-deportations-arrests-immigration-data/>.

potentially indefinite detention,³ implementing the near elimination of being released on bond from ICE detention,⁴ and using third-country removals,⁵ and asylum cooperative agreements to prohibit asylum seekers from seeking humanitarian protection in the United States.⁶

Additionally, the over 600 immigration policy actions⁷ and over 50 new precedent decisions⁸ since January 2025 have fundamentally reshaped the practice of immigration law, removing temporary protections for noncitizens,⁹ making it more difficult for them to obtain longer term lawful status,¹⁰ eliminating pathways for work permits,¹¹ and expanding information-sharing systems that expose noncitizens to heightened enforcement risks.¹²

Inside the courts, instability is escalating. Immigration Judges are being reassigned at

³ See Ali Bianco et al., *Supreme Court Blocks Trump from Conducting More Deportations Under Alien Enemies Act*, POLITICO (Apr. 19, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/18/trump-deportations-alien-enemies-act-00299474>; see also Deborah Lee, *How the 2025 Invocation of Alien Enemies Act Erodes Immigrants' Rights*, 53 Fordham Urb. L.J. 1 (2025).

⁴ See Camilo Montoya-Galvez, *ICE Says Many in Immigration Detention No Longer Qualify for Bond Hearings*, CBS News (July 15, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ice-immigration-detention-bond-hearings/>; see also Paul Moses, 'Is Bond Now Being Granted?': Conflicting Orders Leave Detainees, Attorneys in Limbo, Documented N.Y. (Jan. 22, 2026), <https://documentedny.com/2026/01/22/bond-hearings-immigration-detention-eoir-bautista-hurtado/>.

⁵ See Michael Kunzelman, *Trump administration's 'third country' deportation policy is unlawful, judge rules*, AP News (Feb. 25, 2026), <https://apnews.com/article/south-sudan-deportation-supreme-court-judge-murphy-148cee2906dc7286b074116d3ecec6fd4>; see also Am. Immigr. Council, *What Are Third-Country Removals? Understanding Their Use in U.S. Immigration Policy* (Dec. 5, 2025), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/what-are-third-country-removals-factsheet/>.

⁶ See Ctr. for Gender & Refugee Stud., *Asylum Cooperative Agreements: Denial of Due Process and Risks of Return to Danger* (Mar. 11, 2026), <https://cgrs.uclawsf.edu/en/our-work/publications/asylum-cooperative-agreements-denial-due-process-and-risks-return-danger>.

⁷ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/?after=2025-01-20>; see also <https://www.nycbar.org/reports/the-trump-administrations-early-2025-changes-to-immigration-law/?back=1>.

⁸ See <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/ag-bia-decisions#menu1>.

⁹ See Catholic Legal Immigr. Network, Inc. (CLINIC), *TPS: Quick Summary Chart of Currently Designated Countries* (Mar. 17, 2026), <https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/humanitarian-relief/temporary-protected-status-and-deferred-enforced-departure/tps-quick>; see also U.S. Citizenship & Immigr. Servs., *DHS Ends the Abuse of the Humanitarian Parole Process and Terminates Family Reunification Parole Programs* (Dec. 12, 2025), <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/dhs-ends-the-abuse-of-the-humanitarian-parole-process-and-terminates-family-reunification-parole>.

¹⁰ See Billal Rahman, *From Travel Bans to Green Cards: How U.S. Immigration Could Change in 2026*, Newsweek (Dec. 21, 2025), <https://www.newsweek.com/from-travel-bans-to-green-cards-how-us-immigration-could-change-in-2026-11236880>.

¹¹ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/23/2026-03595/employment-authorization-reform-for-asylum-applicants>; see also Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project, *5 Things to Know About A New Proposed Work Permit Rule* (Feb. 23, 2026), <https://asaptogether.org/en/proposed-work-permit-rule/>.

¹² See Adriel Orozco, *District Court Greenlights ICE-IRS Agreement, Blurring Lines Between Civil Immigration Enforcement and Criminal Investigations*, American Immigration Council (May 22, 2025), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-irs-data-sharing-agreement-court/>.

unprecedented rates, leading to inconsistent and hostile adjudication.¹³ Hearings are cancelled with little notice, and our clients face the constant risk of ICE detention during routine immigration interactions, such as at court and ICE check-ins.¹⁴ Under the current administration, these courts have become increasingly weaponized to advance enforcement goals. The Department of Justice’s recruitment of “deportation judges,”¹⁵ encouraging applicants to “become a deportation judge,” reflects a system designed to accelerate removals rather than ensure neutral adjudication.

Layered on top of this instability is the near total collapse of meaningful appellate review within the Immigration Court system. The BIA’s Interim Final Rule¹⁶ has dramatically shortened filing deadlines and permits appeals to be summarily dismissed in as few as ten days, effectively eliminating the neutral, deliberative review process that once served as a backstop against erroneous or unjust Immigration Judge decisions. Even with on-going litigation that has partial stays in place,¹⁷ it is clear that noncitizens can no longer rely on the immigration court system or the Board of Immigration Appeals for meaningful review.

This deterioration has forced a dramatic realignment of immigration practice into the federal courts. The rise in unlawful detentions requires routine filing of habeas corpus petitions in federal district courts to secure clients’ release. Emergency litigation, constitutional challenges, and circuit court appeals—once exceptional—are now core components of representation. Comprehensive advocacy increasingly requires continuity across administrative hearings, district court litigation, and federal appellate practice.

¹³ See Anusha Mathur and Ximena Bustillo, *U.S. has a quarter fewer immigration judges than it did a year ago. Here's why*, NPR (Feb. 23, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/23/g-s1-110911/trump-immigration-judges-dismissals-numbers>; see also E. Tammy Kim, *Inside Donald Trump’s Attack on Immigration Courts*, The New Yorker (Oct. 23, 2025), <https://www.newyorker.com/inside-donald-trumps-attack-on-immigration-court>.

¹⁴ See Sergio Martínez-Beltrán, *DOJ admits ICE courthouse arrests relied on erroneous information*, NPR (Mar. 26, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/26/nx-s1-5762691/doj-admits-ice-courthouse-arrests-relied-on-erroneous-information>; see also Gwynne Hogan, *ICE Turns Required Check-Ins Into Arrest Dagnet in Lower Manhattan*, The City (Jun. 3, 2025), <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/06/03/ice-arrest-drag-net-manhattan/>.

¹⁵ See <https://join.justice.gov/>.

¹⁶ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/06/2026-02326/appellate-procedures-for-the-board-of-immigration-appeals>.

¹⁷ See American Immigration Lawyers Association, *Federal Court Blocks Key Portions of IFR Changing BIA Appellate Procedures* (Mar. 8, 2026), <https://www.aila.org/library/federal-court-blocks-key-portions-of-ifr-changing-bia-appellate-procedures>.

Tragically, the narrative underlying this all is that asylum seekers, and noncitizens more broadly, are inherently dangerous or unlawful. This rhetoric dehumanizes individuals fleeing persecution and is used to justify harsh enforcement measures and erode due process, conditioning the public to accept policies that would once have been unthinkable.

With the Trump 2.0 administration's promise of mass deportations underway nationwide,¹⁸ our noncitizen family members, neighbors, and loved ones are being told repeatedly that ICE will detain and quickly deport them. Noncitizens in New York City, whether recent arrivals or long term residents, no longer feel safe accompanying their children to school, seeking medical care, attending a religious service, or even going to their own Immigration Court hearing because they fear that ICE will summarily detain and deport them.¹⁹

LAS calls upon City Council to meet this historical moment by doing whatever it can to protect noncitizens in New York City, including most urgent to increase funding support organizations fighting on behalf of noncitizens and giving us the flexibility to respond to the ever-changing legal landscape.

B. New York City Council Funding Requests – Immigration

We are grateful for the Council's support for legal services for low-income immigrant New Yorkers, who are among the City's most vulnerable populations. The Council's commitment to ensuring parity of justice and access to comprehensive legal services for our immigrant communities is central to our work and establishes New York City's approach as among the most progressive in the nation. Thanks to support from the New York City Council and the Human Resources Administration, LAS currently conducts the following immigration-related programs:

- 1) The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)**, a collaboration between The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders, has represented over 4,300 detained immigrants facing deportation since 2014, helping to

¹⁸ See Allison McCann et. al, *High Immigration Arrest Figures Under Trump Come With Few Details*, *The New York Times* (Feb. 1, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/02/01/us/politics/ice-arrests-trump-immigration.html>.

¹⁹ See Arya Sundaram, *Fearful NY migrants are skipping doctors' visits and food help, advocates say*, *Gothamist* (Sep. 16, 2025), <https://gothamist.com/news/fearful-ny-migrants-are-skipping-doctors-visits-and-food-help-advocates-say>.

ensure New York families are not separated simply because they cannot afford an attorney. The nation's first universal legal representation program for detained immigrants, NYIFUP provides high quality, holistic representation to New Yorkers detained and facing deportation who cannot afford an attorney. Our NYIFUP team manages a full caseload of deportation defense cases, and provide services including representation at master calendar, bond, and individual merits hearings before the Immigration Court, appeals in front of the Board of Immigration Appeals and federal circuit courts, and comprehensive social work services. Many of our NYIFUP clients are long-term permanent residents or other noncitizens with strong family ties and long work histories in this country.

As of February 7, 2026, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security detained over 68,289 noncitizens nationwide and is monitoring via Alternatives to Detention (ATD's) over 179, 991 families and individuals.²⁰ As has been the trend over the last few years, ICE has increasingly arrested New Yorkers in New York City and then detained them in facilities hundreds of miles away, including in Western Pennsylvania, at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, Miami Correctional Facility in Indiana, La Salle Detention Facility in Jena, Louisiana, The Federal Correctional Institution in Berlin, New Hampshire, and El Paso Camp East Montana in El Paso, Texas, and other detention facilities across the United States. This practice of detaining NYC residents all over the country has made it more difficult for us to identify and provide representation to these NYC residents.

Since its inception and increasingly over the past several years, NYIFUP, this City Council, and other immigration advocates have held ICE accountable for egregious illegal detention trends of our neighbors, families, and friends. Most recently, we have called attention to needless and egregious suffering our clients endure at detention centers such as withheld medical care, racist behavior, abusive and transphobic treatment, violations of attorney client privileged mail and communications, and

²⁰ Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/quickfacts/> and https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/detentionstats/pop_agen_table.html.

persistent access to counsel issues. The need for advocacy and legal representation on behalf of our fellow New Yorkers is more critical than ever as ICE continues to collaborate with local Department of Corrections officers to forcibly incarcerate New Yorkers and abduct them from our communities.

NYIFUP providers are the City's and statewide experts in defending these New Yorkers who are at imminent risk of being removed from the United States, and likely forever separated from their families here. We are best positioned to meet the challenge needed to help these vulnerable New Yorkers now.

To meet the need, LAS respectfully requests increased support from the City Council for NYIFUP, in the amount of \$13,299,000 for each provider.

- 2) The Unaccompanied Minor Children and Families (UMFI) Initiative** has been providing legal assistance to Unaccompanied Children and Adults with Children fleeing endemic gang violence and domestic abuse since 2014, with the support of the New York City Council. Over the past 4 years, an average number of 140,000 unaccompanied children (UCs) enter the United States yearly,²¹ with some of these children finding themselves trapped into exploitative child labor situations, as the New York Times has repeatedly documented.²² Others are released to supportive sponsors, including many in New York City. This traumatized and vulnerable population is especially in need of highly competent legal representation to advance their claims for asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and other forms of immigration relief.

Over the past decade, but with a dramatic increase since spring 2022, the City has also seen an extraordinary influx of Adults with Children (AWC) families. Such cases

²¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Stats and Summaries (Nationwide Encounters), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>.

²² Hannah Dreier, "Labor Department Denounces Surge in Exploited Minor Children," New York Times (July 27, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/27/us/migrant-child-labor.html>; Hannah Dreier, "Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.," New York Times (Feb. 25, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>.

involve multiple complex immigration legal matters, including expert evaluations, multiple relief applications that need to be submitted by different members of the same family unit, labor-intensive trials to prepare for, and particularly thorny ethical issues when clients' interests sometimes diverge. The demand for legal screenings and full representation of these AWC family units are ever increasing and LAS' work is desperately needed, as it is one of the few organizations with significant expertise in handling complex asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile status, U and T nonimmigrant status, and deportation defense in Immigration Court removal proceedings.

The Legal Aid Society is respectfully requesting an enhancement to \$4,500,000 for UMFI in Fiscal Year 2027. The requested budget increase will allow us to fully cover the cost of the staff dedicated to this project.

- 3) The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)** serves noncitizens who are seeking citizenship, permanent residence, or another immigration status or are seeking employment legal services after having been exploited by their employers. Legal services are provided through our Immigration Law Unit and Employment Law Unit, with the support of 13 current subcontracting agencies, including legal services providers and community-based organizations with deep ties to marginalized communities.

We are deeply grateful for the recent award notification for the IOI RFX solicitation, and remain hopeful that there will be a fair and thoughtful consideration for the need for ongoing flexibility in providing legal services during this volatile federal administration.

C. Our Work with New Yorkers Detained by ICE - New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)

Against this backdrop of escalating enforcement and instability in the immigration courts, programs that ensure continuity of representation for detained New Yorkers have become not only lifesaving, but indispensable to preserving due process and family unity. However, providing immigration legal services to those who are detained by ICE is incredibly challenging for a variety of reasons, including that Immigration Court hearings are conducted at an extremely rapid pace, their cases often involve more

complex legal analyses than those who are not detained by ICE, and their incarceration in and of itself is traumatizing and devastating for their families. Three developments have made this work even more challenging:

- the detention of New Yorkers outside of the New York/New Jersey region which exacerbates communication and representation challenges;
- the increased detention of noncitizens under the current Trump administration; and
- the Department of Homeland Security's position, despite a federal district court's ruling otherwise, that most noncitizens in the United States are ineligible for bond, so that they can be released back to their families and communities here in the United States while their Immigration Court proceedings proceed.

For the most part, New Yorkers are no longer locally detained by ICE. ICE's New York City Field Office routinely arrests noncitizen New Yorkers in New York City, holding them for a temporary time at 26 Federal Plaza or other "holding" facilities throughout New York, and then often transfers them to facilities hundreds of miles away. While there are some more local facilities, including the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn, New York or Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey detained New Yorkers, many of the NYIFUP clients we serve are transferred to Western Pennsylvania, at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, Miami Correctional Facility in Indiana, La Salle Detention Facility in Jena, Louisiana, The Federal Correctional Institution in Berlin, New Hampshire, and El Paso Camp East Montana in El Paso, Texas, and other detention facilities across the United States. This practice of detaining New Yorkers all over the country has made it more difficult for us to identify noncitizen New Yorkers and provide representation.

Challenges in Identifying and Screening Noncitizen New Yorkers for NYIFUP Immigration Legal Representation

When noncitizen New Yorkers were more routinely detained locally in the New York and New Jersey region, their Immigration Court proceedings were located locally as well, at the Varick Street Immigration Court in lower Manhattan. LAS and our other NYIFUP partners built professional working relationships with the Immigration Court and ICE prosecutors to allow NYIFUP staff to intake and screen unrepresented noncitizens during initial court hearings; this helped all stakeholders with creating more efficient and manageable dockets and helped NYIFUP identify noncitizen New Yorkers who needed

Immigration Court representation.

Unfortunately, with the detention of noncitizen New Yorkers outside of the New York and New Jersey region, NYIFUP partners do not have the existing relationships with Immigration Court and ICE prosecutors in other jurisdictions, and there is no streamlined system to allow LAS or its NYIFUP partners to intake and screen noncitizen New Yorkers in other venues. Further, despite much effort by NYIFUP providers, these government stakeholders elsewhere have shown limited interest in collaborating to allow us to identify and potentially represent noncitizens on their dockets. After considerable advocacy and coalition-building with legal service provider near the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, NYIFUP providers receive referrals of individuals who might be eligible for our services. These organizations have extremely limited staffing and capacity though and we have often received referrals too late in the Immigration Court process and noncitizen New Yorkers have often already been ordered removed by the time we are able to contact them in detention.

As LAS and our NYIFUP partners have faced resistance when trying to gain access to intake and screen noncitizen New Yorkers in other non-New York City based Immigration Courts, LAS has developed creative strategies to help identify noncitizen New Yorkers in detention. In addition to receiving referrals directly from affected New York families and loved ones, LAS tries to follow up with noncitizens whose names appear on the calendar but are transferred before they appear in Varick Immigration Court. Over this past year, NYIFUP partners also developed a dedicated referral form to track New Yorkers who get detained and transferred out of state before they get docketed in New York or New Jersey immigration court and, since August of 2025, we have received over 1,000 referrals.

Challenges in Advocating Against Unlawful Detentions of Noncitizen New Yorkers Detained In Remote Locations

LAS faces significant obstacles litigating habeas petitions to challenge the unlawful detention of those detained in remote facilities, including the reality of little to no available *pro bono* counsel options locally to litigate near these immigration detention facilities and ICE's practice of transferring individuals without notice while habeas petitions are being prepared. As most federal courts have concluded that a habeas petition may only be filed in the district where an individual is confined, it may be difficult or impossible to obtain habeas counsel who is barred in the relevant district court and, even if habeas counsel

is secured in a particular jurisdiction, there is no guarantee that such jurisdiction will be the proper venue for filing once the habeas is prepared.

LAS continues to explore and expand the ways in which we challenge ICE detention of noncitizen New Yorkers. LAS has continued to challenge the adequacy and availability of bond proceedings for noncitizen New Yorkers who are transferred outside of the New York region by filing civil complaints under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) principles. If a detained immigrant is challenging the adequacy of bond procedures in New York Immigration Court, then venue is proper in the Southern District of New York, given that most events will have transpired, and at least one government defendant is based, in that district. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(1) (permitting venue “in any judicial district in which (A) a defendant in the action resides [or] (b) a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred”).

Increased Detention of Noncitizens Under the Current Trump Administration

The second recent development that has made working in NYIFUP more challenging is the increased enforcement under the current Trump administration. Trump 2.0 campaigned with the promise of mass deportations and, since the election, has increased ICE arrests and deportations of noncitizens in this country.

To further support the priority to detain as many noncitizens as possible, ICE has increased detention capacity with the opening of the Delaney Hall facility in Newark, New Jersey, with a bed space for 1,000 detainees.²³ ICE has also increased bed space for ICE detainees at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn and there are discussions about opening new facilities in upstate New York²⁴ and New Jersey²⁵. This has led, and will lead to more ICE arrests of noncitizens in New York City region and, given NYIFUP’s limited resources, will put incredible strain on our staff to meet the increased demand for immigration legal services for these noncitizen New Yorkers.

²³ *See* Steve Janoski, *Inside New Jersey’s troubled immigration detention center: ‘It’s designed to break people’*, The Jersey Vindicator (Sep. 25, 2025), <https://jerseyvindicator.org/2025/09/25/inside-new-jerseys-troubled-immigration-detention-center-its-designed-to-break-people/>.

²⁴ *See* Gwynne Hogan, *ICE Opening Huge Lockup 50 Miles North of New York City*, The City (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://www.thecity.nyc/2026/01/14/chester-dhs-ics-detainee-lockup-jail/>.

²⁵ *See* Sophie Nieto-Munoz, *ICE buys warehouse for migrant detention, Roxbury officials say*, New Jersey Monitor (Feb. 20, 2026), <https://newjerseymonitor.com/2026/02/20/ice-warehouse-migrant-detention-roxbury/#:~:text=by%20Sophie%20Nieto%2DMunoz%2C%20New,for%20migrants%20in%20New%20Jersey.>

Persistent Challenges Representing Noncitizen New Yorkers in ICE Custody

Separate from these current trends of detaining noncitizen New Yorkers outside of the New York/New Jersey region and the increased detention of noncitizens under the current Trump administration, LAS continues to face persistent challenges in representing our NYIFUP clients generally. As we know from prior and current experience, detention jeopardizes access to counsel. As an example of this, we are constantly dealing with access to counsel issues at Orange County Correctional Facility (OCCF). The space in the OCCF that is set aside for in-person visits, sometimes referred to as the “glass house,” is a room divided by a glass wall with a phone for communication. There is usually at least one correctional officer within earshot and frequently there are also other detained people meeting with their advocates. This makes it extremely difficult to have confidential conversations about past trauma, fear of gangs, or to dive into the personal details that an attorney must know to properly advise their clients and prepare them for trial. Some of the people we represent understandably refuse to meet with us in person given the confidentiality concerns. Although NYIFUP providers have repeatedly requested consistent access to confidential meeting spaces with our clients at the facility, OCCF leadership and ICE have refused to allow for this.

Additionally, in-person visits at OCCF present language access issues when attorneys and clients do not speak a common language. The “glass house” telephones—the only mechanism by which an attorney and detained person may effectively communicate—make it nearly impossible for attorneys to communicate with their clients when they do not speak the same language. The only way to do so is to bring an interpreter in-person with the attorney; however, attorneys have often been restricted in bringing interpreters or other individuals with them on legal visits.

Our ability to adequately represent clients is significantly hampered by their detention. For years we have had issues communicating with clients behind bars, but these challenges have only been exacerbated by the recent increase in detention which has led to other serious disease outbreaks, such as the recent tuberculosis outbreak at OCCF which has resulted in quarantining an entire unit. Video conference services repeatedly fail, often with technical malfunctions where one party cannot hear the other, or the call fails to connect altogether. Efforts to correct these issues are sometimes resolved by individual officers, but often are not. Sometimes attorneys must wait days to be able to speak with their

clients, even with pending trials looming on the horizon. Further, NYIFUP attorneys have at times had to prepare clients for their trial testimony using video technology where the audio portion was non-functional. Attorneys resorted to using dry-erase boards, or pieces of paper, to communicate messages to their clients visually and to prepare them for their final hearings which would determine whether they would be deported or permitted to remain in this country with loved ones.

Calls have varied, ranging from issues with OCCF's video technology to a lack of staff available to facilitate the call. Officials at OCCF have consistently failed to respond to requests for assistance in restoring a reliable system of communication. ICE has at times allowed for 15-20 minute "legal phone calls," which are appropriate to convey a brief message or a rescheduled court date at most, and woefully insufficient for people preparing testimony for their multi-hour trials, where a judge will determine whether or not they can remain in this country and ultimately their freedom. Developing the necessary attorney-client communication and trust is impossible by 15-20 minute calls.

Video calls are also extremely difficult to schedule. On any given day, there are only 14 timeslots longer than 25 minutes available for an entire housing unit which can house more than 40 people, and three of those time slots are after 7:00PM. Once a time slot is filled, it is no longer available for anyone in the unit to use. When considering the number of NYIFUP advocates, private attorneys, and other representatives attempting to schedule a call to clients at OCCF, this is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of the demand of representation.

As a result of the limitations on access to counsel, we often must communicate through calls made with new video tablets provided by OCCF. Tablets are often left uncharged or are taken away in retaliation for a perceived infraction or for speaking out against conditions of confinement. Sometimes clients are not informed that communicating with counsel through tablets is an option. Relying on tablets often jeopardizes confidentiality as the people we represent are forced to communicate with us in open spaces where other people are nearby, once again rendering our conversations non-confidential and hindering the free flow of often sensitive information that is necessary for us to provide effective legal representation.

OCCF, and other ICE detention facilities in New York State, have limited detained people's access to representation, making it less likely that they will be prepared for their trials, and thus more

likely that they will be deported. Detention alone, particularly during the past few years, has become an access to counsel and due process issue by impeding detained people's ability to adequately prepare and gather evidence for their defense. NYIFUP is undermined by this.

D. Our Youth-Related Work

The same enforcement-first federal policies destabilizing adult New Yorkers have had especially devastating consequences for immigrant children and youth, whose legal eligibility is time-sensitive and whose futures are permanently shaped by delays and denials of due process.

Since 2003, LAS's Youth Project has assisted undocumented noncitizen youth in New York City and surrounding counties who are in foster care, adoption, or guardianship, to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), allowing them to obtain green cards and other immigration benefits. The project also defends unaccompanied youth in removal proceedings.

LAS's Youth Project remains a leader amongst our fellow undocumented youth legal service providers. LAS leads the New York SIJS advocates' group, a bimonthly forum for immigrant youth legal service providers statewide to troubleshoot Family Court issues, discuss USCIS challenges, and brainstorm solutions to other developing legal issues. Approximately 40-50 advocates regularly attend the SIJS meetings, including officials from ACS.

The Youth Project also manages the SIJS-NY listserv, which includes hundreds of statewide legal service providers who can better represent their immigrant youth by maintaining contact with other experienced service providers. Members of the Youth Project speak regularly at continuing legal education (CLE) events, and several have spoken at national conferences, including the American Immigration Lawyers Association's Immigrant Defense Conference, National Association of Counsel for Children's annual conference, and the American Bar Association's Unaccompanied Child Conference. Youth Project staff are frequently asked to consult on matters having national impact, including strategizing about, and conducting impact litigation, drafting amicus briefs, and commenting on proposed changes to regulations.²⁶

²⁶ LAS also sits on the steering committee of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition (www.sijsbacklog.com), a group of directly-

Below, we highlight current trends and the most immediate challenges facing LAS' Youth Project and its work on behalf of immigrant youth.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Representation and Meeting the Immense Needs of New Yorkers

With New York City's existing immigrant population and those who have more recently arrived, there is a tremendous need immigration legal representation for immigrant youth eligible for SIJS and are approaching their 21st birthday when they will age-out of eligibility. Within LAS' Youth Project alone, we have taken on for representation of emergency SIJS cases every month, rushing to prepare clients, filings, and constantly pushing for Family Court hearing dates before our clients age-out. This is in addition to our work with existing clients and other new clients who are not in absolute last-minute crisis.

To additionally respond to this community need for SIJS assistance, in 2024, LAS launched a pilot project through the Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE) coalition²⁷ that has helped streamline the SIJS application process in New York City Family Courts. Through this project, the Youth Project has assisted over two dozen youth with filing pro se guardianship applications in Queens Family Court, a necessary step towards obtaining SIJS. In December 2025, the pilot project was expanded to include Brooklyn Family Court and LAS is currently working to expand this pilot to Staten Island. Since December 2025, ICARE has filed close to 50 petitions through the pilot project. The project helps alleviate the burden on immigration legal providers at a time where the system is overwhelmed with applications for SIJS while ensuring that youth have counsel each step of the process.

In February 2025, the Youth Project integrated its work through the SIJS pilot project with ILU's weekly legal clinics, utilizing volunteer attorneys and law school students to help build capacity to help with preparing the family court petitions for SIJS cases.

impacted youth and over 150 allied advocate organizations across the country, working to educate Congress, relevant administrative agencies and the public about the harmful impacts of visa caps on vulnerable immigrant children, and to advocate for an end to the SIJS backlog. In 2023, the Coalition released a new report detailing the drastic increase in youth caught in the SIJS backlog over the last two years and highlights the first-hand stories of SIJS youth. The Coalition also released several Practice Advisories throughout 2023 and engaged in national policy and advocacy aimed at reducing the backlog and the impact of the backlog on SIJS youth through legislative, regulatory and policy changes.

²⁷ See <https://www.icarecoalition.org/>.

The SIJS Backlog and Deferred Action

As previously reported, in March 2022, USCIS announced a new policy that when a SIJS application is approved, the applicant will now be considered for deferred action, making SIJS- approved youth eligible for work authorization as well as hopefully protecting them from removal.²⁸ In June 2025, however, the government rescinded the deferred action policy. This termination of the policy was stayed by a Federal District court judge in November 2025.²⁹ Although stayed, USCIS has not issued any further deferred action status to youth with approved SIJS petitions. In March 2026, the visa bulletin, (the federal government system that tracks when certain individuals may apply for their green card), jumped nearly two years from March 15, 2021, to January 1, 2023. With this jump, more than 90 of our youth clients with approved SIJS petitions became eligible to apply for their green cards.

Despite the significant jump on the visa bulletin, it is uncertain how much further the visa bulletin will advance at any given time. For April, for example, there is no movement on the visa with regard to what applications are being accepted.

LAS continues to monitor immigration law developments to assess how this impacts noncitizen youth, and LAS will continue to represent our clients in their quest for safety and permanency in this country. We will also continue to provide expert technical assistance to other practitioners in New York City, statewide, and nationally regarding best practices and arguments for all types of cases relating to immigrant youth.

E. Our Federal Work

As administrative adjudication has become increasingly unreliable and protective remedies have eroded, federal courts have emerged as the only remaining forum where many immigrants can obtain meaningful review and enforce basic constitutional protections.

Our Immigration Law Unit's federal litigation team continues to be a leader in impact litigation to

²⁸ <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-to-offer-deferred-action-for-special-immigrant-juveniles>.

²⁹ See National Immigration Project et al., *Updated Guidance to Practitioners in Light of Recent Developments in A.C.R. v. Noem* (Feb. 18, 2026), https://nipnl.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/2026_ACR-Updated-Guidance.pdf.

obtain protection for broad classes of noncitizens and achieve class action victories that protect thousands of noncitizens from arbitrary and cruel immigration policies. We also undertake litigation for individuals in federal district court and in the circuit courts of appeals to address systemic injustices in our immigration system. We craft innovative legal strategies, secure wins for our individual clients, and establish favorable precedents on emerging legal issues. We also amplify our impact by facilitating partnerships and working groups, and we provide training and technical support to pro bono partners and practitioners in New York and across the country. As federal immigration policies and case law continue to shift at unprecedented speed, ILU continually reassesses emerging needs and works to provide the highest-quality services to as many clients as possible while adhering to our professional and ethical obligations.

Challenging Unlawful Detention Through Habeas Litigation and Federal Appellate Litigation

Under today's federal policies, immigrants encounter severe obstacles in immigration court, where due process safeguards have eroded, adjudications have become increasingly punitive, and the administrative appeals system rarely corrects agency error. Simply put, for many clients, there is no real justice at the administrative level. This year, ILU has continued to respond to heightened and urgent community needs through robust federal litigation.

Since 2018, LAS has filed more than 115 habeas corpus petitions challenging unconstitutional detention and prolonged detention on behalf of noncitizen New Yorkers. Over one-quarter of these cases are since the beginning of Trump's second administration in January 2025. Our habeas litigation has secured key due process protections, including requiring the government to bear the burden of proof at bond hearings, requiring judges to consider a client's ability to pay and alternatives to detention, and limiting the government's ability to detain noncitizens for unreasonably prolonged periods without judicial review.

And again, since 2018, we have filed over 65 petitions for review primarily in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit challenges the misapplication of statutory standards, systemic errors in credibility analysis, flawed adjudications under the Convention Against Torture, and unlawful expansions of deportability. One third of those petitions for review were filed during Trump 2.0. We have dramatically scaled up our federal litigation work during this federal administration because the

federal courts are often the only venue where noncitizens can obtain a fair hearing, enforce constitutional protections, and challenge unlawful government action. As a result, LAS's federal litigation practice has become more indispensable than at any time in recent history. Our attorneys approach each matter with the understanding that litigation in federal district courts and the courts of appeals is often the sole remaining check on the immigration enforcement system.

Impact Litigation and Systemic Reform

In addition to individual federal cases, LAS leads and participates in some of the most consequential immigration-related impact litigation in the country. Our cases target unlawful federal policies, abusive enforcement practices, and systemic failures that undermine due process. Since January 20, 2025, The Legal Aid Society has expanded its immigration impact litigation docket to confront the rapidly escalating harms produced by the current federal administration's immigration policies. Through amicus filings, class actions, and direct litigation, LAS has challenged unlawful federal actions, defended state and local protections for immigrant communities, and fought to ensure due process, transparency, and access to justice. Key matters include:

- In *City Council of the City of New York v. Eric Adams*,³⁰ LAS filed an amicus brief supporting the Council's challenge to the Mayor's decision to allow ICE to reestablish an office on Rikers Island. The filing detailed the dangerous history of ICE activity at the jail, the risk of irreparable harm to immigrant communities under the current federal enforcement landscape, and the ways the proposal violated New York City's sanctuary laws. Courts ultimately issued orders blocking the ICE office from moving forward, underscoring the harms identified by amici.
- In *United States of America v. State of New York*,³¹ LAS submitted an amicus brief urging dismissal of the Trump administration's lawsuit attacking New York's Protect Our Courts Act (POCA) and related Executive Orders. The brief demonstrated how POCA safeguards the constitutional rights of people using the courts, prevents ICE's courthouse arrest practices, and

³⁰ Council of the City of N.Y. v. Adams, 2025 N.Y. Slip Op. 25141 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. Cnty. June 12, 2025).

³¹ *United States v. State of New York*, No. 1:25-cv-00205 (N.D.N.Y. filed Feb. 12, 2025).

lies squarely within the state’s authority to protect public safety and judicial access. A federal judge later dismissed DOJ’s lawsuit, validating much of the reasoning advanced by amici.

- In *Maria L. v. Noem*,³² LAS joined a nationwide class action challenging DHS’s revived and aggressively expanded civil-fines program, under which immigrants have been assessed ruinous penalties of up to \$1.8 million each. The complaint explains that beginning in early 2025 ICE issued thousands of boilerplate fines without the legally required individualized findings and then adopted a June 2025 interim final rule designed to impose penalties “swiftly and at scale,” stripping away basic procedural protections and violating the Administrative Procedure Act and constitutional guarantees.
- In *CLINIC v. Rubio*,³³ LAS and national partners filed suit challenging the State Department’s sweeping January 2026 suspension of immigrant-visa processing for nationals of 75 countries. The action argues that the visa freeze constitutes an unlawful nationality-based ban grounded in an unprecedented and illegal expansion of the “public charge” definition. Plaintiffs contend that DOS exceeded its statutory authority, violated the APA, and enacted a discriminatory policy that separates families and denies lawful immigration opportunities to applicants—many of whom had already been approved.
- In *The Legal Aid Society v. USCIS*,³⁴ LAS filed a FOIA lawsuit to compel USCIS to resume publishing Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) non-precedent decisions—materials the agency abruptly stopped posting in March 2025 despite publicly representing that such decisions would continue to be published within one month of issuance. The complaint asserts that the agency’s failure to publish these decisions, and its failure to timely respond to LAS’s FOIA request seeking explanation, unlawfully undermines transparency and deprives applicants and practitioners of essential guidance needed to understand how immigration benefits are adjudicated.

³² *Maria L. v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-13471 (D. Mass. filed Nov. 20, 2025).

³³ *Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. v. Rubio*, No. 1:26-cv-00858 (S.D.N.Y. filed Feb. 2, 2026).

³⁴ *The Legal Aid Society et al v. U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services et al*, No. 1:26-cv-01140 (S.D.N.Y. filed Feb. 10, 2026).

- In *United States v. City of New York*,³⁵ LAS filed an amicus brief supporting the City’s motion to dismiss a federal lawsuit attacking New York City’s sanctuary laws. The filing emphasized that these laws are vital to protecting more than three million immigrant residents, allowing them to safely access essential services, participate in the criminal legal system, and engage with government without fear that local agencies will funnel them into federal immigration enforcement. The brief underscored that the City has constitutional authority to govern its own institutions and maintain policies that enhance public health and safety.

Working in Partnership

In addition to our work for individual federal litigation matters and impact litigation efforts, Las deeply values working in partnership with others. LAS co-facilitates the Second Circuit working group, which focuses on removal defense issues in the Second Circuit, and the New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania habeas working group, which explores creative litigation to fight immigration detention. Each of these working groups operates a lively listserv and, on a quarterly basis, convenes practitioners from dozens of organizations and law firms litigating federal immigration cases in federal district court and the courts of appeals. Through these working groups, we touch the immigration and federal court cases of thousands of noncitizens who are not LAS clients.

E. Our Immigration Opportunities Initiative-related Work

The primary aim of the City’s Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding has been to ensure that more noncitizens would have access to full legal representation, including in complex immigration matters and removal proceedings. Through our IOI work, LAS has helped thousands of noncitizen New Yorkers obtain and/or secure their immigration status, avoid deportation, and fight back against unfair labor practices and exploitation. In FY24, LAS and our subcontractors handled over 4,500 cases for individuals seeking assistance with an immigration, employment, or family law matter.

We are deeply grateful for the recent award notification related to the IOI RFX solicitation and appreciate the City Council’s continued recognition of the critical role these services play. As the federal

³⁵ *United States v. City of New York*, 1:25-cv-04084, (E.D.N.Y).

immigration landscape continues to shift rapidly, we hope the City will continue to provide the flexibility necessary to allow LAS to respond nimbly and effectively to evolving community needs. This work strengthens the social fabric of our city and benefits all New Yorkers, and LAS is committed to continuing its leadership in this area.

F. Conclusion

We thank the City Council for its generous support of immigration legal services, which allow us to serve some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers. However, the realities facing immigrant New Yorkers today are unprecedented in scope, speed, and severity. Detention, deportation, and enforcement-first policies are destabilizing families, undermining access to the courts, and eroding fundamental principles of justice. In this environment, the City's investment in immigration legal services is not merely supportive; it is essential.

We respectfully urge the City Council to meet this historic moment with the increased funding and flexibility outlined in this testimony. Together, we can ensure that New York City remains a place where due process prevails, families are protected, and no one is denied justice because of their immigration status or ability to pay.

Respectfully submitted,



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



New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Elsie Encarnación, Chair

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 25th, 2026

Testimony of Jieun Baek, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon Chair Encarnación and members of the committee. My name is Jieun Baek and I am the Program Coordinator of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, KCS is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved communities across the New York City area. Our mission is to be a nexus of services for these communities, helping them maintain their health and wellbeing. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

For over 20 years, KCS has provided adult literacy classes through city funding. Each year, the steady increase in both our student body and the number of classes offered stands as a testament to the success of our ESOL program and the ongoing need for adult literacy services in our communities. To best accommodate our students’ busy schedules, we operate in-person and virtual classes Monday through Saturday, with flexible morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. The impact of these classes cannot be overstated. Our students are driven by a desire to:

- Engage deeply with their communities and neighborhoods.

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- **Communicate effectively** with family members.
- **Advocate for their children**, particularly within the education system, ensuring they can stand up for their rights as parents.
- **Foster independence**, reducing their reliance on others for daily tasks.
- **Give back** through volunteering and civic participation.

Your continuous support has been the catalyst for these transformations, allowing our students to lead truly empowered lives.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.** This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to **increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.**

City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding is vital—not only to KCS and the communities we serve but to over 60 programs across New York City. Increasing this funding by

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\$3.5 million would allow us to close the gap for thousands more New Yorkers who are in desperate need of adult literacy services.

Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

I have seen firsthand the transformative impact of adult literacy education on our communities. It is time to show our students we have their backs—not just with words, but with a necessary increase in funding.

Thank you for your attention.

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New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Elsie Encarnación, Chair

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 25th, 2026

Testimony of Kathy Kim, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

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I have seen firsthand the transformative impact of adult literacy education on our communities. It is time to show our students we have their backs—not just with words, but with a necessary increase in funding.

Thank you for your attention.

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New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Elsie Encarnación, Chair

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 25th, 2026

Testimony of Sophia Shi, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnación and members of the committee. My name is Sophia Shi, and I am a Program Coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). As a non-profit, our organization has been providing a multitude of services to underserved communities across New York City for over 53 years. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

At KCS, we have seen firsthand the importance and positive impact of adult literacy classes in our community. Recently, I spoke with a student who had been taking our ESOL classes for a year. Her initial goal was to improve her vocabulary and grow more confident in speaking with her community members. She is now pursuing a career in translation, with hopes to travel around the country. We've continuously seen students go above and beyond their initial goals, whether it's in their careers, education, or personal aspirations. Our adult literacy services have expanded over the years to meet increasing demand. However, like others, our resources are limited.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats**

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and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers, regardless of their status. This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to **increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.**

City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding is indispensable for over 60 programs and their communities across New York City. As the demand for adult literacy rises, current funding leaves thousands of New Yorkers in need. An additional \$3.5 million in funding would help these programs bridge the gap.

Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

It is crucial to demonstrate to our community members that their interests have not been ignored by increasing funding for these essential programs.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

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**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Elsie Encarnación, Chair**

**FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 25th, 2026**

Testimony of Teresa Baik, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon Chair Encarnación and members of the committee. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, KCS is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved communities across the New York City area. Our mission is to be a nexus of services for these communities, helping them maintain their health and wellbeing. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

For over 20 years, KCS has provided adult literacy classes through city funding. Each year, the steady increase in both our student body and the number of classes offered stands as a testament to the success of our ESOL program and the ongoing need for adult literacy services in our communities. To best accommodate our students' busy schedules, we operate in-person and virtual classes Monday through Saturday, with flexible morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. The impact of these classes cannot be overstated. Our students are driven by a desire to:

- **Engage deeply with their communities and neighborhoods.**

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Written Testimony of Arlette Cepeda

Interim Executive Director

La Colmena NYC, Inc. (Formerly known as Staten Island Community Job Center, Inc.)

NYC Council Committee on Immigration

Oversight Hearing: Preliminary Budget Hearing **Immigration**

March 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnación and members of the Immigration Committee.

My name is Arlette Cepeda, and I serve as the Interim Executive Director of La Colmena, an immigrant worker center based in Staten Island. Founded in 2014, working to empower immigrant workers and their families through education, organizing, culture, and economic opportunity.

La Colmena has been a reliable partner to a number of city agencies including SBS, DYCD, ACS, DSS, MOIA, DCWP, to name a few, in making sure the most vulnerable populations can access the City services and resources they deserve, such as Fair Fairs, NYC Benefits, OSHA and SST training, legal services, Immigrant Rights Workshops and child care vouchers, among others. This work is only possible thanks to the sparker's citywide support and many council member initiatives that address the needs of Immigrant New Yorkers, which represents around 40% of New York City's population. Our center provides training programs such as ESL classes, leadership development workshops, and Know-Your-Rights training and also connects community members with resources related to wage theft, workplace injuries, health care access, legal services, and immigration assistance.

We ask the oversight committee to make sure that La Colmena continues to receive discretionary and initiative-based funding (Attachment A) to support immigrant



communities in Staten Island. La Colmena is seeking support to continue the vital and much needed work of the following initiatives:

Day Labor Worker Initiative, Domestic Workers and Employers Empowerment initiative, The Community Interpreter Bank, The Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative, The Hive Food Pantry, The Legal Services for Day Laborers and Domestic Workers, and the Culture and Digital Literacy support initiatives.

Our organization has become a trusted hub for immigrant communities on Staten Island, funding for these initiatives is of utmost importance during a time that immigrant communities are being terrorized by the current immigration enforcement tactics by the Federal Government. Every day, immigrant workers gather at La Colmena seeking guidance on employment, housing, legal issues, and navigating city services. La Colmena would face tremendous difficulty to provide these much needed services without City funding.

Staten Island is often overlooked in citywide conversations about immigration. Yet our borough has experienced the fastest growth in foreign-born residents in New York City over the last two decades. Despite this rapid growth, Staten Island has far fewer immigrant legal and social services than other boroughs. Community-based organizations like La Colmena often serve as the primary entry point for immigrant families seeking information, resources, and support.

We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council, The Office of Immigrant Affairs and other city agencies to ensure that immigrant communities in every borough—including Staten Island—are informed, supported, and protected.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



Attachment A

Application ID	Initiative name	Agency	Amount
2206405	Domestic workers & Employers Empowerment Initiative	SBS	\$150,000.00
2206296	Day Laborers Workforce Initiative	SBS	\$846,668.00
2160666	Site Safety Training - B	SBS	\$150,000.00
2213749	Food Pantry	DYCD	\$10,000.00
2207543	Community Interpreter Bank	DYCD	\$100,000.00
2241913	Culturally specific Gender Based Violence Initiative	DYCD	\$100,000.00
2243382	Legal Services for Day Laborers and Domestic Workers	DSS/HRA	\$150,000.00
2246898	Immigrant Rights Workshops	DYCD	\$50,000.00
2192628	Welcome NYC	DYCD	\$50,000.00
2247373	Rapid Response Former Legal Services for low income immigrants - Protect NYC Families	DSS/HRA	\$50,000.00
2247751	Overcoming digital borders	DYCD	\$100,000.00
2248004	Celebrating Mexican Heritage	DYCD	\$50,000.00
			\$1,806,668.00



Literacy Assistance Center

New York City Council Committee on Immigration Honorable Elsie Encarnacion, Chair

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 25, 2026

Testimony of Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center

Good afternoon Chair Encarnacion and members of the committee. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), a 43-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. The LAC is also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

Today in New York City, there are over 2.2 million adults with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access adult basic education (ABE), GED, or ESOL classes in any given year.

Currently, there is approximately \$103.5 million in federal, state, and city funding for adult literacy education in NYC. Over \$24 million of this funding comes from the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The Trump administration had called for the complete elimination of this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. In the meantime, **the Trump administration is seeking to exclude students from federally-funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status.**

Approximately 1.7 million of the 2.2 million adults in need of adult literacy services are immigrants, as are over 75% of current adult literacy students. Such restrictions could have a devastating effect on our immigrant communities.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.** This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

NYCCAL is also calling on the City Council to **increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million and to consolidate the two current Council Discretionary initiatives for adult literacy under Adult Literacy Forward.**

City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding has become vital to the 63 CBOs, CUNY colleges, and library programs that receive it. Increasing the funding by \$3.5 million would enable these programs - and potentially others - to serve thousands more adults in need.

Adult Literacy Forward is a nationally recognized, innovative model of funding. Since its inception as a City Council pilot project in FY22, it has consistently demonstrated that greater levels of investment in services, along with greater flexibility to meet community needs, yield greater outcomes and impacts for adult literacy students and their families. Consolidating all City Council adult literacy funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

Adult literacy education provides immigrants with greater opportunities, furthers gender equity, and advances educational and racial justice. Let's demonstrate our city's steadfast commitment to these principles and refuse to leave any of our communities behind.

Thank you for your attention.



Education for Integration and Equity:
Ensuring Access and Opportunity for Immigrant New Yorkers

(November 2025, Updated March 2026)

The New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) is pleased to present this proposal for a **new \$20 million city investment in adult education that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.**

Education for Integration and Equity would expand access to a continuum of educational and support services for thousands of immigrants in need. It would also mitigate the potential loss of services that would result from the Trump administration's threatened cuts and changes to the federal adult literacy funding that currently flows through the NYS Education Department to community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and libraries in NYC.

Education for Integration and Equity is modeled on the highly successful [New York City Adult Literacy Pilot Project](#) and draws on the [Migration Policy Institute's English Plus Integration](#) model, ensuring that immigrant adult students will be provided with tailored curriculum and instruction and an expansive array of wraparound services and supports, opening the doors to greater economic opportunity and facilitating fuller integration into the social and political fabric of New York City.

Background

New York City is home to 1.7 million immigrants over the age of 17 who have limited English proficiency or lack a high school diploma. These New Yorkers are overwhelmingly poor and working-class. According to an analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey, two-thirds of New Yorkers with limited English proficiency and three-quarters of New Yorkers without a high school diploma earn less than \$25,000 a year. Adult education can provide the foundation for greater economic security and autonomy, as well as the tools to successfully navigate the social, political, and economic systems and conditions that these immigrants confront.

A recent randomized evaluation of a midsize community-based adult English language training program in Massachusetts found that participation in the program **doubled voter participation, increased annual earnings** relative to the control group, and **increased tax revenue** from earnings gains, generating a 6 percent return for taxpayers. Moreover, in addition to leading to higher earnings, adult education prepares participants for post-secondary education and job training programs; and it enables immigrants with foreign degrees to develop English language proficiency and earn credentials to utilize their professional skills in the U.S. workforce.

Yet, despite these benefits, combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of New Yorkers in need can access adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (GED), or ESOL classes in any given year.

Currently, there is approximately \$103.5 million in federal, state, and city funding for adult literacy education in NYC. Approximately \$52 million of these funds are allocated to community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and the three library systems. Over \$20 million of the \$52 million in funding comes from federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) dollars that flow through the NYS Education Department. This \$20 million in federal dollars currently funds ABE, GED, and ESOL classes for approximately 14,000 students in NYC. The Trump administration had called for the complete elimination of this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. In the meantime, **the administration is seeking to exclude students from federally-funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status.**

Foundational Components

Education for Integration and Equity is designed to meet the moment and expand educational opportunities. As a complement to the Department of Youth & Community Development's (DYCD's) adult literacy contracts that support classes for both immigrants and non-immigrants, *Education for Integration and Equity* would be focused uniquely on programming for immigrants. There would be no documentation or eligibility requirements based on status. The funding would be multi-year, baseline funded and distributed through an RFP process administered by DYCD. Eligible providers would include community-based organizations, CUNY colleges, and public libraries.

In July 2021, the New York City Council launched the Adult Literacy Pilot Project, providing \$2.5 million in discretionary funding to 19 community-based adult literacy programs to significantly enhance their services and supports, and to achieve a wider range of outcomes and impacts for adult literacy students, their families, and their communities. Unlike most adult literacy funding streams that only focus on educational gains and employment outcomes, the Adult Literacy Pilot Project recognized student gains and program impacts in all the following areas:

1. Digital Literacy
2. Health Literacy
3. Family Literacy
4. Financial Literacy
5. Immigrant Rights
6. Housing Rights
7. Workers' Rights
8. Culturally Responsive/Sustaining Education
9. Student Leadership Development
10. Civic Participation
11. Community Engagement
12. Citizenship Preparation
13. Engagement in Children's Schooling
14. Work Readiness
15. Job Placement/Job Improvement
16. Legal and/or Social Services Accessed
17. Material Support Accessed (e.g., food aid, cash assistance)
18. Educational Development

After three successful years, the City Council expanded the Pilot in FY25 to 42 programs and \$7.86 million. It established an innovative funding model that provided both greater investment and greater flexibility. In FY25, the project strengthened program services and provided new classes for 5,290 students. In FY26, the Council renewed this funding and renamed it Adult Literacy Forward.

Education for Integration and Equity is modeled on the Adult Literacy Pilot Project/Adult Literacy Forward and informed by the Migration Policy Institute's English Plus Integration model. An RFP would be released in early FY27, with a projected start date of July 1, 2027 (i.e., the beginning of FY28). Programs would be funded at a rate of \$485 per Instructional Hour, creating over 41,000 hours of new instruction. (The \$485 Instructional Hour rate is based on the current Adult Literacy Forward rate of \$425 per Instructional Hour, adjusted for projected inflation.) Assuming classes that meet for six hours per week for 40 weeks, this would create over 170 new adult education classes citywide. Each program would be awarded a minimum of \$349,200, ensuring that they could provide at least three such classes over the course of the year.

With the Trump administration's targeting and terrorizing of immigrants, it is imperative that New York City remain a sanctuary where immigrants are provided with the resources they need to live freely, contribute, and thrive. Historically, community-based adult literacy programs have played a vital role in support for the newest New Yorkers. Even before the increased funding provided by the Council's Pilot Project, community-based adult literacy programs took a holistic approach to their students, providing them with the education they seek while opening the door to an array of other critical services, either directly or through established partnerships.

Education for Integration and Equity would build on this paradigm.

Conclusion

Adult education is an issue of racial, social, and economic justice. The majority of immigrants in adult education programs in NYC are from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. They are New Yorkers who live on the frontlines of struggles for workers' rights, civil rights, and human rights. English language and literacy skills give immigrants the power to understand and command information, to communicate in the language of access, to make more informed choices, to secure critical resources and opportunities, to stand up for themselves in the workplace, to fully participate in civic institutions and, ultimately, to transform their lives and the world around them.

A new \$20 million investment in *Education for Integration and Equity* will expand classes and/or mitigate losses in services and access due to potential federal funding cuts and/or eligibility constraints. **This funding will ensure that more immigrants will have the foundational skills they need to secure better jobs and higher wages, to better support their children's education, to know and speak up for their rights, to live safer and healthier lives, and to more fully participate in the cultural and civic life of New York City.** It is also a sound investment in the city's economic future.

**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Elsie Encarnacion, Chair
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 25, 2026**

**Testimony of Kaveh Sarfehjooy
Executive Director, Liz Smith Center for Adult & Family Learning
Literacy Partners**

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnacion and members of the committee. My name is Kaveh Sarfehjooy, and I am the Executive Director of the Liz Smith Center for Adult & Family Learning at Literacy Partners, a 50-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening literacy across generations.

Since 1973, Literacy Partners has supported tens of thousands of adults, parents, and caregivers in building the literacy skills they and the children in their lives need to thrive. Our model advances literacy two generations at a time, because when we invest in parents and caregivers, we also invest in the futures of their children.

We are also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, or NYCCAL, a coalition of adult literacy teachers, program leaders, students, and allies from more than 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

As you know, more than 2.2 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency or lack a high school diploma. Yet public funding for adult literacy is so limited that fewer than 3% of those New Yorkers can access adult basic education, GED, or ESOL classes in any given year.

Right now, adult literacy education in New York City depends on approximately \$103.5 million in federal, state, and city funding. More than \$24 million of that comes from the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. The Trump administration has already called for eliminating this funding in the FY26 federal budget and may do so again in FY27. At the same time, the administration is seeking to exclude students from federally funded adult literacy classes based on immigration status.

The impact of those restrictions would be devastating. About 1.7 million of the 2.2 million adults in New York City who need adult literacy services are immigrants, and immigrants make up more than 75% of current adult literacy students and 44% of the city's labor force. If those restrictions move forward, the communities with the greatest need will be the ones most shut out.

In response, NYCCAL is calling on the mayor to invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, Education for Integration and Equity, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency,

and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status. This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

Adult literacy education expands opportunities for immigrants, advances gender equity, and advances educational and racial justice. New York City must demonstrate its commitment to those values and that it will not leave immigrant communities behind.

In closing, I want to share the words of one of our students, Yessenia, who asked us to share her story in spaces where decisions are made that affect families and children who depend on free literacy classes and services. Yessenia was detained during a routine immigration status appointment. During that detention, she was separated from her husband and her child, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder, for five days.

“In the detention center, everything was in English, and everyone spoke English. I became the translator for the friends I made from other countries who were also detained, helping them communicate their basic needs because they didn’t know how to ask for things in English — even something as simple as water.”

With the little English I learned in these classes, I was able to help them get the necessities they needed. That experience gave me the confidence to speak without fear — not only to advocate for myself, but also for others who had no way to communicate.”

The English Yessenia used to advocate for herself and for others was learned, in part, through free parent-focused ESL classes. She credits that learning as instrumental in helping her navigate detention, support others while inside, and reunite with her family.

Thank you for your attention.



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(November 2025, Updated March 2026)

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A recent randomized evaluation of a midsize community-based adult English language training program in Massachusetts found that participation in the program **doubled voter participation**, **increased annual earnings** relative to the control group, and **increased tax revenue** from earnings gains, generating a 6 percent return for taxpayers. Moreover, in addition to leading to higher earnings, adult education prepares participants for post-secondary education and job training programs; and it enables immigrants with foreign degrees to develop English language proficiency and earn credentials to utilize their professional skills in the U.S. workforce.

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- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Digital Literacy | 10. Civic Participation |
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| 3. Family Literacy | 12. Citizenship Preparation |
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| 9. Student Leadership Development | 18. Educational Development |

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With the Trump administration's targeting and terrorizing of immigrants, it is imperative that New York City remain a sanctuary where immigrants are provided with the resources they need to live freely, contribute, and thrive. Historically, community-based adult literacy programs have played a vital role in support for the newest New Yorkers. Even before the increased funding provided by the Council's Pilot Project, community-based adult literacy programs took a holistic approach to their students, providing them with the education they seek while opening the door to an array of other critical services, either directly or through established partnerships.

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Conclusion

Adult education is an issue of racial, social, and economic justice. The majority of immigrants in adult education programs in NYC are from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. They are New Yorkers who live on the frontlines of struggles for workers' rights, civil rights, and human rights. English language and literacy skills give immigrants the power to understand and command information, to communicate in the language of access, to make more informed choices, to secure critical resources and opportunities, to stand up for themselves in the workplace, to fully participate in civic institutions and, ultimately, to transform their lives and the world around them.

A new \$20 million investment in *Education for Integration and Equity* will expand classes and/or mitigate losses in services and access due to potential federal funding cuts and/or eligibility constraints. **This funding will ensure that more immigrants will have the foundational skills they need to secure better jobs and higher wages, to better support their children's education, to know and speak up for their rights, to live safer and healthier lives, and to more fully participate in the cultural and civic life of New York City.** It is also a sound investment in the city's economic future.

For more information, contact: Ira Yankwitt, Executive Director, Literacy Assistance Center, iray@lacnyc.org, 212-803-3302.

**NYCCAL Proposals to Increase NYC Adult Literacy Funding from
\$26.5 million to \$50 million**

<u>Name of Funding Stream</u>	<u>FY26 Budgeted Amount</u>	<u>Current Status</u>	<u>NYCCAL Ask for FY27</u>
DYCD Literacy RFP	~\$12M	Multiyear Contracts Funding is currently included in the Mayors Preliminary Budget	NONE/ NO CHANGE
Education for Integration and Equity	NA	Proposal for a new multiyear funding stream to be contracted through DYCD Goal is to get the Council to include this ask in their response to the Preliminary Budget and to have the Mayor include it in the Executive Budget in April	\$20M

City Council Adult Literacy Initiative	~\$6.5M	Discretionary – Year to Year Will be negotiated in the final round of budget talks (May – June)	FOLD THIS \$6.5M INTO ADULT LITERACY FORWARD
City Council Adult Literacy Forward (formerly “Pilot”)	~\$8M	Discretionary – Year to Year Will be negotiated in the final round of budget talks (May – June)	ADD THE \$6.5M FROM THE INITIATIVE AND INCREASE AN ADDITIONAL \$3.5M FOR A TOTAL OF \$18M
Total	~\$26.5M		\$50M

NYCCAL City Advocacy Agenda (Spring 2026):

1. NYCCAL is calling on the Mamdani administration to **invest \$20 million in a new city adult education funding stream, *Education for Integration and Equity*, that would provide new seats and unfettered access to English language, basic education, digital literacy, high school equivalency, and civics education classes for immigrant New Yorkers regardless of their status.** This investment would be in addition to the \$12 million included in the FY27 Preliminary Budget to continue to fund DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs.

KEY TALKING POINTS:

- a. There are over 2.2 million adults in NYC who have limited English proficiency or don't have a high school diploma. 1.7 million are immigrants.
 - b. Public funding for adult literacy education is so limited that only 2%-3% of these 2.2 million adults are able to access adult literacy classes in any given year.
 - c. The Trump administration sought to eliminate all federal funding for adult literacy education in FY26 and could do so again in FY27. If this funding is eliminated, it would lead to the loss of over \$20 million to 35 community-based, CUNY, and library adult literacy programs in NYC.
 - d. While this funding was maintained in the federal FY26 budget, **the Trump administration is seeking to exclude students from federally-funded adult literacy classes based on their immigration status.**
2. NYCCAL is calling on the City Council to **increase Council Discretionary funding for adult literacy education from \$14.5 million to \$18 million *and* to consolidate all Council Discretionary funding under Adult Literacy Forward.**

KEY TALKING POINTS:

- a. City Council Discretionary adult literacy funding has become vital to the 63 CBOs, CUNY colleges, and library programs that receive it. Increasing the funding by \$3.5 million would enable these programs and potentially others to serve thousands more adults in need.
- b. Adult Literacy Forward is a nationally recognized, innovative model of funding. Since its inception as a City Council pilot project in FY22, it has consistently demonstrated that greater levels of investment in services, along with greater flexibility to meet community needs, yield greater outcomes and impacts for adult literacy students and their families.
(See reports on investments and outcomes from the first four years of this initiative [here](#).)
- c. Consolidating all City Council Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Forward funding and programs under Adult Literacy Forward would streamline the system, create uniform requirements for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs, and enable the City Council to have immediate access to all the data on services and outcomes for all City Council-funded adult literacy programs through the Council-funded NYC RISE data collection system.

(For more information, contact Ira Yankwitt, Executive Director, Literacy Assistance Center at iray@lacnyc.org)



Lutheran Social Services of New York

Administrative Offices
475 Riverside Drive,
Suite 1244
New York, NY 10115
Tel.: (212)870-1100

Lutheran Social Services of New York's Immigration Legal Program has been serving immigrant New Yorkers for decades, providing high quality, free immigration legal services. Our program strives to meet the needs of the immigrant community as they emerge and evolve over time. As the Trump Administration has abruptly changed and eliminated various forms of immigration relief, the clients we see have had increasingly complex legal needs. LSSNY's program remains flexible with evolving services to meet the evolving legal needs of our clients.

Since migrants were first bussed to New York City from Texas in 2022, LSSNY's Immigration Legal Program has been on the ground with non-profit partners to welcome and serve our immigrant neighbors in New York City. In addition to our longstanding programming, we reacted quickly to this latest migrant crisis in New York City by creating a program solely focused on newly arrived immigrants – ASLAN, or the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network.

Together, ASLAN and PSPP services have evolved as we continue to witness unprecedented threats to the immigration legal system and a corresponding increased demand for immigration legal services. Continued support for this work is essential to preserve access to justice and to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers will not be whisked away from our city without firm pushback from immigration legal service providers – people who have been doing this work for decades. This work embodies what it means to be a Sanctuary City – especially as our immigrant neighbors face a federal administration intent on denying their right to due process under the law.

LSSNY's ASLAN programming has provided pro se immigration services since the first buses arrived in the city. Beginning with know your rights and legal orientation sessions, LSSNY quickly expanded to providing holistic immigration services, including consultations with immigration attorneys, assistance with applications for asylum and temporary protective status along with Know Your Rights presentations with our community partners. Though these services are provided limited scope, or pro se, clients often return for additional assistance as their immigration cases work through a harsh and unforgiving immigration system.

Thanks to a historic investment by the City Council in Fiscal Year 2026, the ASLAN program at LSSNY's Immigration Legal Program continued to expand capacity and access to justice for our immigrant neighbors throughout New York City. Our programming is constantly evolving as we meet the changing needs of newly arrived immigrants. Just over seven months into the year, our program assisted over 1,250 newly arrived immigrants with a variety of immigration issues.

With support from City Council, LSSNY has also focused on working with youth, filing special immigrant juvenile cases before the youths turn 21 years old, and age out of relief. In coordination with the ICARE



Lutheran Social Services of New York

network, LSSNY focuses on taking urgent age-out cases when many other organizations do not have the capacity to assist. We have filed 43 age-out cases this fiscal year. These cases are often filed only weeks before the child's 21st birthday. Assisting these extreme age-out cases often requires the team to put in extra work to prioritize the filing. Our team has been flexible and creative in trying to meet this enormous need. Without this work by LSSNY, these 43 clients would likely have aged-out of eligibility for relief – making them vulnerable to deportation simply because they could not find legal assistance before turning 21.

In one example, immigrant New Yorker “TB” was referred to us on February 26th. He was from Guinea and was aging out on March 5th – meaning that we had 4 business days to complete the filing and submit to USCIS. LSSNY was able to intake TB and draft and file all of his family court paperwork the same day. As soon as TB received his family court orders, LSSNY worked with him to file the I-1360 overnight so that it arrived before his 21st birthday. This filing required the whole team to focus intensely on the client in order to meet the deadline. This simply would not have been possible without City Council funding, and TB would have been left with no status or option for relief without our intervention.

In response to the devastating number of people who have had their cases denied without a full hearing before an Immigration Judge, LSSNY provides pro se appellate relief, helping clients file Notices of Appeals with the Board of Immigration Appeals. Thanks to the City Council, LSSNY is able to assist with paying the fee associated with these appeals and with other immigration applications. The ALSAN program filed over 20 pro se Notices of Appeal in the first seven months of this fiscal year. Most of these have been filed on extremely tight deadlines with often only a few days to prepare the filing. Clients come to us uncertain of what has happened in immigration court and unaware of any deadlines. If the BIA appeal is not filed within 30 days, the removal order from the Immigration Judge becomes final and applicants are at a high risk of detention and deportation.

LSSNY has also witnessed the immigration court denying asylum applications and sending people to third countries where they have no ties and may face significant harm. Through our ASLAN program, LSSNY actively helps immigrant New Yorkers to file motions to oppose this practice. We have tried to follow up with all of these clients and assist them with filing appeals when the motions are not successful. If a program participant has a full immigration hearing, our ASLAN team works with them to prepare for their individual hearings with country conditions evidence and testimony preparation.

The sheer complexity of the current immigration rules and the increased enforcement environment make continued support from the City Council a necessity for our clients and for our immigrant neighbors. LSSNY asks the City Council to consider this urgent need and approve discretionary funding for LSSNY's Immigration Legal Program, including funding for ASLAN and PSPP partners, and for the ICARE network. The basic rights of our immigrant neighbors are under attack, and the time is now for New York City to stand up and resist these attacks.



Make the Road New York

Testimony to Committee on Immigration

March 25, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Harold Solis, Co-Legal Director at Make the Road New York (MRNY). MRNY serves 30,000 immigrant and working-class New Yorkers per year, the majority of them in New York City. Thank you Chair Encarnacion and the Council for your support of our legal, health, and educational services and programs. Based out of our community centers in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, we support New Yorkers to keep their families together, fight landlord and employer harassment, win back stolen wages, access healthcare, improve their English, access college, and more.

As this committee knows, New Yorkers are living through a relentless new chapter of immigration enforcement. Day after day, immigrant New Yorkers are arrested without warning, separated from their families, and shipped to detention facilities hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Behind every transfer is a household thrown into crisis, a child wondering when a parent will come home, and a community forced to carry fear that no one should have to live with.

But New Yorkers are not facing this alone. As a core member of the **Rapid Response Legal Collaborative**, MRNY has spent years preparing for this moment, and the past year has demanded everything we have. As the need for emergency deportation defense has surged, our staff have been on the frontlines day and night, meeting people at their most vulnerable moments and fighting to keep families together.

Last summer, MRNY and our RRLC partners were among the first to take ICE to court to win our clients' freedom from detention. That work has not slowed. Our attorneys continue working around the clock, including by filing habeas petitions to free New Yorkers who are being unlawfully detained. At the same time, we are reaching tens of thousands through Know Your Rights education, including a new guide to help families prepare if a loved one is detained.

MRNY is also building power block by block. Through Guardianes del Barrio, we are recruiting and training hundreds of community leaders to educate, mobilize, and protect their neighbors. And as federal restrictions threaten immigrants' access to health insurance, we are providing



urgent, timely updates so families can stay informed and take action. This is what it looks like to meet cruelty with courage: legal defense, community education, and organized neighborhoods standing together.

To support this work, MRNY requests the Council's discretionary support on the following:

- **First, increased support for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative**, which offers legal representation in urgent removal defense cases to get New Yorkers out of ICE detention. As ICE has changed tactics, there are more of these cases than ever. MRNY is a city and statewide leader in filing habeas petitions in federal court free those unlawfully detained, but this work is time-consuming and resource intensive. Our partners in the Collaborative are NYLAG and UnLocal.

We also request the following:

- **An increase to \$300,000 under the Speaker's Initiative** for our wraparound legal, health access, educational, TGNCIQ and Know Your Rights services.
- **\$362,750 under the Low Wage Worker Support initiative, and expanding the whole initiative to \$3 million**, for legal support, Know Your Rights, and mobilizing workers.
- **\$449,637 under Adult Literacy Forward, an increase in discretionary funding for adult literacy to \$18 million, and consolidation of all funding under Adult Literacy Forward, a nationally recognized model that has improved outcomes.**
- As federal changes kick many immigrants and other New Yorkers off their insurance, we request **an increase to \$110,000 under the Access Health Initiative, expansion of the whole initiative to \$4.5 million, and renewal of the Immigrant Health and MCCAP initiatives.**
- **\$70,000 under Coalition of Theaters of Color** to support our theater-based social justice leadership program for immigrant youth and youth of color. This includes theater-based Know Your Rights programs and street theater for social justice.

On behalf of our 30,000 members, thank you for your support of MRNY's services in this critical moment.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON

PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING – IMMIGRATION

PRESENTED BEFORE:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

PRESENTED BY:

ERNIE COLLETTE
SUPERVISING ATTORNEY
IMMIGRATION LAW PROJECT
MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.

HEARING DATE:

March 25, 2026

Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) submits this written testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration, to increase the overall legal services funding to provide additional representation to immigrant clients seeking such services in New York City.

MFJ's mission is to achieve justice for all. MFJ prioritizes the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised, or have disabilities as they struggle to overcome the effects of social injustice and systemic racism. We provide the highest-quality free, direct civil legal assistance, conduct community education, build partnerships, engage in policy advocacy, and bring impact litigation. We assist more than 14,000 New Yorkers each year, benefiting over 24,000.

MFJ's Immigration Law Project (ILP) provides free legal advice, assistance and representation to low-income immigrant New Yorkers and their families. We work directly with community-based organizations to develop clinics that meet the needs of low-income immigrant communities to provide family- and humanitarian-based immigration assistance. Our services include assisting Special Immigrant Juvenile Status children obtain Special Findings Orders in Family Court, representing individuals and families in both affirmative and defensive litigation to obtain Adjustment of Status, Citizenship, Green Card Replacement, U-visa, T-visa, Temporary Protected Status, and Asylum. We provide application assistance and interview advocacy for immigrant families and children at United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) offices and represent families in affirmative and defensive matters in New York Immigration Courts (EOIR).

MFJ applauds the prior commitments by the Council to assist migrants in New York City, particularly when responding to the prior demand for immediate, short-term pro-se application assistance; work which, despite reduced numbers, is still needed.

Notwithstanding, MFJ is urging the City Council to make deep investments into the City's immigrant legal services community, specifically with enhancements to initiatives that include IOI, Legal Services for Low-Income Immigrants, Low Wage Workers and "Protect NYC Families."

Specifically, we now must increase funding to non-profit organizations that will provide access to assistance on what is unprecedented demand for both Writ of Mandamus petitions and Writ of Habeas Corpus petitions due to recent decisions made by the current presidential administration and the appellate courts to circumvent the rule of law and deny many individuals a right to due process in immigration court.

1) Recent Immigration Law/Decisions

A recent Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) decision, [*Matter of Yajure Hurtado*](#), effectively eliminated Immigration Judge (IJ) discretion to determine bond for immigrant applicants seeking

relief in Immigration Court.^{1,2} This decision is further compounded by a February 6, 2026, decision issued by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, *Buenrostro-Mendez v. Bondi*, which takes a minority viewpoint interpreting § 235(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to mean that anyone who entered the United States without inspection is subject to mandatory detention without bond, no matter the amount of time residing in the United States.³

Additionally, increased requests by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for client check-ins at their local field offices are leading to higher rates of arrest and mandatory detention.⁴ ICE agents have broad discretion in reviewing client cases for compliance with court and ICE orders. As a result of increased ICE enforcement practices resulting in mandatory detention and Federal Court decisions resulting in the removal of bond as a remedy to release clients from detention, as of February 10, 2026, more than 18,000 Habeas Corpus petitions were filed in Federal District courts throughout the United States to argue unlawful detention and request immediate release from detention.⁵

Furthermore, with adjudication of Asylum petitions reaching periods of over 10 years or more from date of filing to interview, more individuals are seeking Mandamus relief in Federal Court to compel the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to swiftly provide interviews for pending asylum claims.⁶

Finally, on February 6, 2026, the Department of Justice (DOJ) proposed an Interim Final Rule (IFR) that would amend its own regulations to streamline administrative appellate review by the BIA of IJ decisions.⁷ Review of decisions on the merits would be discretionary; appropriate

¹ *BIA Decision Strips Immigration Judges of Bond Authority, All but Guaranteeing Mandatory Detention for Undocumented Immigrants - American Immigration Council*. (2025, September 12). American Immigration Council. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/bia-ruling-immigration-judges-bond-mandatory-detention-undocumented-immigrants/>

² On February 18, 2026, in *Lazaro Maldonado Bautista et al. v. Ernesto Santacruz Jr et al.* (--- F.Supp.3d ----, 2025 WL 3713987), U.S. District Court for Central California, vacated *Matter of Yajure Hurtado*, ordering the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to allow petitioners to file and receive decisions for bond determination hearings in Immigration Court. On March 6, 2026, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit granted the federal government's request for an administrative stay while the court considers the government's broader motion for a stay pending appeal laying out two key points, the first being that the District Court's December 18, 2025 Declaratory Judgment is temporarily stayed outside the Central District of California, remaining only in effect within the Central District of California, while the Ninth Circuit considers the government's motion, and the second being that the February 18, 2026 Enforcement Order that vacated *Matter of Yajure Hurtado* has been temporarily stayed pending a full decision from the Ninth Circuit on the government's emergency stay motion.

³ *Trump's Radical Mandatory Immigration Detention Policy Upheld by US Appeals Court - American Immigration Council*. (2026, February 10). American Immigration Council. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/trump-mandatory-immigration-detention-upheld/>

⁴ *New Report Details ICE's Expanding and Increasingly Unaccountable Detention System - American Immigration Council*. (2026, January 23). American Immigration Council. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-expanding-detention-system/>

⁵ *Immigrants Who Say Their Detention Is Illegal Have Filed More Than 18,000 Cases. It's a Historic High*. (2026, February 10). ProPublica. <https://www.propublica.org/article/habeas-petitions-immigrant-detentions-trump>

⁶ *Delay Actions In The Asylum Context: Avoiding Dismissal And Proving The Case - American Immigration Council*. (2025, July 18). American Immigration Council. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/practice-advisory/delay-actions-asylum-context-avoiding-dismissal-and-proving-case/>

⁷ On March 9, 2026, the Amica Center for Immigrant Rights, Brooklyn Defender Services, Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project, HIAS, the American Immigration Council, and the National Immigrant Justice Center filed

times for briefing would be set; and other aspects of the appellate process would ensure timely adjudications to avoid adding to the already sizeable backlog at the Board.

This proposed rule would in fact make summary dismissal now the default for any immigration cases subject to appeal to the BIA. For appeals of IJ decisions issued 30 days after publication, the BIA will summarily dismiss every appeal unless a majority of permanent Board members vote *en banc* to accept the case. If no vote happens within 10 days, the appeal is automatically dismissed. All dismissals will be issued within 15 days of filing. The IJ's decision is adopted as the Board's and becomes the basis for judicial review. Other changes will include cutting the appeal deadline from 30 to 10 days for cases subject to Asylum Cooperative Agreements; simultaneous 20-day briefing for the rare case accepted for review; no reply briefs; extensions only for "exceptional circumstances" under INA § 240(e)(1), and eliminating the possibility of reviewing the IJ transcript which serves as the basis for determining errors of fact or law.⁸

Footnote 8 of the IFR cites that between October 2023 and September 2025, the BIA sustained only 123 out of 55,065 case appeals on the merits, a review rate of just 2%, a number of cases so negligible that, if the IFR is implemented on March 9, 2026, with no injunctive relief filed to prevent the rule from going into effect, this rule will serve to effectively rubber stamp all remaining IJ decisions, requiring applicants who wish to have their appeal heard to petition for review by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

2) Implications for Clients

With clients facing increased risk of mandatory detention without the possibility for bond granted with the immigration court, requiring Habeas Relief in Federal Courts, many prospective and future clients risk the possibility of remaining in detention for years throughout the pendency of their hearing and any subsequent appeal. If the IFR goes into effect, it will require an appeal to the 2nd Circuit as the BIA will no longer be a possible avenue for credible appeal.

Treatment of detainees and services provided in detention centers are well below minimum standards for U.S. jails and prisons, with detained clients facing medical neglect, physical and sexual abuse, in some cases, death.⁹ Detainees are also held in detention for violations of civil law, preventing clients from receiving court-appointed legal assistance, and requiring detainees to retain a lawyer at their own expense.¹⁰ Increased detention also will not only exacerbate

a lawsuit, [Amica Center for Immigrants Rights et. al. v. Executive Office for Immigration Review et. al.](#), and [Motion for Preliminary Relief](#) to block the abovementioned interim final rule that would effectively eliminate meaningful appellate review at the BIA. As of this writing, both the lawsuit and Motion for Preliminary Relief are pending adjudication.

⁸*Immigration Appeals Updates Understanding New BIA Procedures When Does the Rule Start?* (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2026, from https://immigrantjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Practice-Advisory_BIA-Rule-Updates_Feb-2026.pdf

⁹ Das, A. (2025, March 10). *The Law and Lawlessness of U.S. Immigration Detention - Harvard Law Review*. Harvard Law Review. <https://harvardlawreview.org/print/vol-138/the-law-and-lawlessness-of-u-s-immigration-detention/>

¹⁰ French, D. (2026, February 12). A Very Dangerous Ruling in New Orleans. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/12/opinion/mass-detention-immigration-court-ruling.html>

family separation for [mixed-status households](#), but also for undocumented family members, including minor children, who will be separated into different detention centers.¹¹

Mandatory detention and increased appellate work will require non-profit legal service providers to potentially transform their current representation models to meet the increased demands of Habeas, Mandamus, and appellate work for current and future clients.

3) Increased Financial Request Support

In anticipation of the elimination of appellate review at the BIA, and the continuation of current policies and judicial decisions leading to prolonged detention of clients, and excessive adjudication periods, we ask the City Council to not only increase funding to initiatives that include IOI, Legal Services for Low-Income Immigrants, Low Wage Workers and “Protect NYC Families,” but also to fund legal services efforts that will support filing Habeas Corpus Petitions, Mandamus Petitions, and 2nd Circuit appeals.

Our office is receiving requests from prospective clients and clinic partners who are concerned that any future check-in by ICE will result in mandatory detention, regardless of whether the client has any prior incidents or activities that would make them subject to such detention. Many individuals are in removal proceedings and require counsel for complex immigration matters, but with removal and detention now becoming the default for most immigration court cases, and with the continued rhetoric and actions taken by the Federal Government against migrants and the immigrant community, funding current immigrant legal services while pivoting and creating new funding for Habeas Corpus Petitions, Mandamus Petitions, and 2nd Circuit appeals remains critical now more than ever.

As many migrants who received short-term pro-se application assistance get jobs, rent apartments, attend school, pay taxes, and contribute to our local economy, many worry as to how the lack of representation and mandatory detention will impact their future to remain; not only causing their new lives and positive contributions to our communities and our city to be upended, but also the benefits that we’ve received from their contributions within our communities.

While we can be proud of the assistance already provided, the job is far from complete. Even though priorities may have shifted, the need remains the same.

Proactive support by the Council to increase funding for increased representation, as the demand for these services will remain, is necessary if we wish to combat those who seek to separate immigrant families, while living up to our history as a city that seeks to support all regardless of immigration status.

For any questions about this testimony, please feel free to contact Ernie Collette at ecollette@mfilegal.org or 212-417-3824.

¹¹ *Divided by Detention: Asylum-Seeking Families’ Experiences of Separation - American Immigration Council.* (2025, March 27). American Immigration Council. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/divided-by-detention-asylum-seeking-families-experience-of-separation/>



Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget - Immigration Committee Hearing NICE Testimony

March 25, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Encarnacion, members of the Committee, Committee Council & finance team,

My name is Nilbia Coyote, and I am the Executive Director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE, located in Jackson Heights, Queens—proudly one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country.

For over 26 years, NICE has been a trusted community organization and a frontline responder for New York City's immigrant workers during some of our city's most difficult moments, as well as moments of opportunity and growth. Our deep roots in the community allow us to reach immigrants who are often considered "hard to reach," but who are in reality simply underserved, overworked, and navigating complex systems alone, as well as the current affordability crisis in our City.

Today, NICE's core purpose is to drive economic mobility and community integration among immigrant families through our workforce and life-skills model, the Pre-Apprenticeship Program for Life and Work. This program reflects what immigrant New Yorkers continue needing: jobs and legal services yes, but also the tools to build stable lives, such as English and digital literacy, and knowledge to navigate critical life skills & systems as transportation, housing, health, finance, identification to support their families, and become long-term contributors to our city.

We were encouraged to hear today about the importance of protecting and empowering immigrants through safe access to services and better coordination



**Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget - Immigration Committee Hearing
NICE Testimony**

across agencies so immigrant families are included in the city's broader **affordability** agenda, regardless of immigration status. These priorities are fully aligned with the work we do every day at NICE.

That is why we respectfully ask the City Council to continue championing immigrant workers by renewing initiatives such as the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative by renewing and enhancing our collective ask of \$4.9million; but also the Construction Site Safety Training, Welcome NYC, Legal Services for Low-Income Immigrants, Adult Literacy Forward, and Speaker's Initiatives. These programs translate directly into safer workplaces, higher wages, legal protection, English literacy, and economic stability for immigrant families across New York City.

Lastly, we urge the Council not only to continue existing funding, but also to open new funding opportunities in **Digital Inclusion and a Greener NYC workforce**, so immigrant workers are not left behind in the future of our city's economy.

Thank you for your continued support for immigrant New Yorkers and the organizations that work every day to protect and empower them.

This is not new to organizations like NICE — this is the work we do every day, and we stand ready to continue leading this work alongside the City to ensure immigrant New Yorkers are fully included in the future of this city.

Sincerely,

Nilbia Coyote

Executive Director

New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE)

Kristina Garrity
Pro Se Plus Project Coordinator
City Council Testimony
March 25, 2026

Good afternoon Chair Encarnacion and members of the Immigration Committee,

My name is Kristina Garrity, and I am the Coordinator for the Pro Se Plus Project, otherwise known as PSPP. We are a collaborative made up of four legal service providers and two-community based organizations. These include African Communities Together, Central American Legal Assistance, Catholic Migration Services, Masa, New York Legal Assistance Group, and UnLocal. I'm here today to advocate for the funding of *pro se* legal services through the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network or ASLAN. The \$5.7 million we are requesting would go not only to PSPP but also to Lutheran Social Services, CUNY Citizenship Now, and Catholic Charities.

When the Network was originally convened in 2023, the providers before you today were tasked with meeting the enormous gap in *pro bono* legal services for the hundreds of thousands of newly arrived New Yorkers who were looking to file asylum applications, request Temporary Protected Status, and obtain work authorization. Indeed, the founding of ASLAN was part of a broader effort to position New York City as a national model of what it means to welcome immigrants with open arms. Our duty was to straddle the world of light touch *pro se* provided by the Asylum Application Help Centers and that of full representation.

Nearly three years later, we can say that we have made good on this promise. PSPP alone has screened over 10,000 newly arrived community members and offered over 7,500 units of *pro se* services to individuals unable to retain full representation. We are proud to say that many of the community members whom we supported with initial applications have returned for other services, a testament to the relationship building embedded in ASLAN providers' unique approach to *pro se* service delivery.

Our shared commitment to meeting immigrant community members' needs – no matter how legally complex – can be seen in the ways that PSPP partners and our colleagues across ASLAN have pivoted time and time again since the second election of President Trump. Shortly after election results were released, Masa began offering comprehensive emergency planning for families. UnLocal ramped up their Know Your Rights presentations so that community members would be prepared for increased ICE activity and potential detention. African Communities Together started to hold mental health circles. In May, when ICE began unlawfully detaining law-abiding community members at their master calendar hearings, New York Legal Assistance Group's supervising attorneys began monitoring the situation and have become leaders in filing habeas petitions *pro se*. Since the implementation of pretermission and Asylum Cooperative Agreements this past winter, Central American Legal Assistance and Catholic Migration Services have worked tirelessly to file responses to pretermission and *pro se* appeals.

Our multi-year track record proves that we can be trusted to meet the needs of immigrant New Yorkers, regardless how quickly they shift and evolve.

Pro se respondents often belong to the most vulnerable immigrant communities. At a time when such communities across the country are under attack, it is critical that we provide them much needed legal support. Funding established *pro se* service providers capable of taking on complex cases gives us the flexibility necessary to respond to the demands of the moment and to prevent and reduce the harm of today's violent federal immigration policies and practices.

Finally, given that the current scapegoating of immigrant communities is an integral part of the federal administration's increasing turn towards authoritarianism, funding *pro se* services stops just being about ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to justice. It's about standing up for our City as a sanctuary and our country as a democracy.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCC)

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Testimony

to the New York City Council Immigration Committee Preliminary Budget Hearing

by Dr. Dmitri Daniel Glinski, President & CEO, RCC

March 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnacion. I am testifying here on behalf of RCC that my colleagues and I co-founded 15 years ago. Based in Washington Heights, we've worked across the city and beyond, organizing our diverse, interfaith and multiethnic community from ex-Soviet countries – which includes Jews, Muslims, and Christians, as well as many of those among us who are 'none of the above'. We believe in the separation of state from the church, the mosque, and the synagogue, whereby no faith or ethnicity should be either disadvantaged or privileged, whether in federal or city government or in immigrant services.

Throughout these years, we've been advocating for our people – from the level of the local community board and all the way to the United Nations. We've been providing them with immigration lawyers and pro se aid, Know Your Rights trainings, MOIA English classes, and other services – now and then, depending on whenever we've able to break through our community's systemic exclusion from funding.

Today, I am here to urge to advance our city's core values of equity and fairness, in relation to the refugees and *de facto* refugees from Ukraine, Russia, and the region. Census data shows that Russian speakers have been the third largest linguistic minority in NYC for decades, comprising over 2 percent of its population. And yet they, along with other diasporas from our region, are significantly underserved - and virtually not represented at all in contracting and subcontracting with immigrant-led community-based organizations, which makes it impossible for them to hire staff.

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Kremlin, thousands of Ukrainian refugees and Russian antiwar asylum seekers arrived to New York City. Most of them are natural allies of all those who have to defend our democracy today against what many of us see as the ongoing 'Putinization' of our federal Government. Yet in these four years just one Ukrainian CBO

received less than \$15,000 from the city and not a single CBO serving Russian asylum-seekers did. Nor has either community received at least a \$100,000 subcontract from any of the large social service providers, whose city contracts are in the amount of up to 40 million dollars per year. Meanwhile, our clients report not being able to get any real services from these large providers, in Russian or in Ukrainian. This is a shame, and a scandal.

Please note that, while our asylum seekers are being deported, straight into the hands of their persecutors, the New York-based business partners and promoters of our oppressors in Russia – that is, of the root cause of this migration - are wielding influence in our city, on both sides of the aisle, using their superprofits in real estate and on Wall Street. (Some of the widely-known collaborators of Russian government agencies and their proxies have even worked in our government – for example, in the post of the legislative director of my own State Senator Jackson. I am saying this with a heavy heart and awareness of the personal risks involved.) At the same time, Russian exiles with education, valuable skills, and public record of fighting for human rights and social justice are competing for entry level jobs in the private sector, their professional value and worth not being utilized by our Government offices and social service agencies. This is a shame, and a scandal too.

With deservedly high hopes for our new Mayor, Speaker, Committee Chair and other newly electeds, let's renew our City promise of equity and respect for all.

As a voter, I strongly support our Mayor's call for more progressive taxation. Beyond that, I urge our City to look into the questionable wealth linked to foreign human rights abusers and used to rig our politics and to silence and block our exiles and their CBOs for speaking inconvenient truth about them.

My three requests for the Committee are as follows:

1. Give budgetary incentives for large service providers to offer capacity-building subcontracts to small CBOs from severely underfunded diasporas - like ours.
2. Establish a truly representative council of immigrant-led CBOs under City Council.
3. Given the scale of migrant influx from my part of the world caused by war and political persecution, which has not been reflected in contracting, hold hearings on the situation of refugees and de facto refugees from Ukraine and Russia.

Thank you all for your time and attention.



Thank you to Chair Encarnacion and the other members of the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Rachel Jordan, and I am the Managing Attorney for Partnerships and Advocacy at Safe Passage Project, a non-profit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation. We currently serve over 1,600 children and youth who live in the five boroughs of New York City and on Long Island.

Safe Passage Project works closely with partner organizations through the ICARE Coalition, with the goal of providing high quality legal representation to as many unaccompanied children and youth as possible. Once we accept a client, we commit to their case until we achieve the best possible outcome for them - typically, a green card. Our clients' cases take three to seven years on average due to delays in visa availability and court backlogs. We receive funding from the City Council through UMFI, the SIJS Initiative, School-Based Immigrant Rapid Response, the Speaker's Initiative, and DoVE. The City Council's unwavering support for immigrant children through these initiatives has been groundbreaking on a national level, and it has been transformative for Safe Passage Project's clients and the scope of legal services we have been able to provide them. Yet the current level of support we are receiving from the City is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of our clients as we confront a federal administration determined to eviscerate all rights and protections for immigrant youth.

The Current Crisis and the Impact on Safe Passage Clients and Staff

The federal government's daily attacks on immigrant youth and their families have taken a severe toll on both our clients and our staff. Faced with the systemic stripping of due process rights in Immigration Court and an increase in brutal ICE enforcement tactics, Safe Passage Project's already hard-working team of attorneys and social workers are being pushed to the limit to prevent the unjust incarceration and deportation of our clients. It has become increasingly clear that the administration is specifically targeting Special Immigrant Juveniles, despite the fact that Congress provided a humanitarian pathway to lawful permanent residence for these young



people, and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has already granted them Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) after a state family court made the determination that they were subjected to abuse, abandonment, or neglect, and should not be returned to their country of origin.

Below is a brief snapshot of some of the challenges our clients and staff are facing.

1. Warrantless ICE Arrests of Special Immigrant Juveniles

- ICE continues to conduct aggressive enforcement operations across the country, including warrantless arrests of Special Immigrant Juveniles. Since November 2025, ICE has detained two Safe Passage Project clients with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and no criminal records, after subjecting them to unlawful arrests that appear to have been racially motivated. One client, who was arrested in Long Island while on his way to work in NYC, was released following the filing of a petition for writ of habeas corpus, while the other, a Brooklyn resident who was arrested by ICE while he was in Pennsylvania, remains detained while his habeas proceedings continue. In both cases, ICE stripped our clients of their SIJS deferred action and work authorization after their unlawful arrests. As Judge Gary Brown of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York put it in one client’s habeas case, this was “[a reprehensible act of unimaginable cruelty.](#)”
- Each of these habeas cases has required extra hours of work from Safe Passage Project attorneys, including training on this complex area of law, rapid registration applications to enable us to file in local federal district courts, and hours spent briefing the legal issues in each case.

2. Termination of Deferred Action for Special Immigrant Juveniles

- In 2025, USCIS terminated the program that provided deferred action, access to employment authorization, and a respite from deportation for Special Immigrant Juveniles. Last summer, Safe Passage Project supported plaintiffs and advocacy groups suing to restore access to deferred action for SIJS beneficiaries, and in November 2025, a federal court in New York ordered the government to reinstate



the policy. Despite the court's direction, the government has only granted deferred action to a handful of SIJS beneficiaries following the order.

- As a result, many of our clients with approved SIJS do not have access to work permits and Social Security numbers, and have lost a critical layer of protection from deportation while awaiting visas. This forces them into the shadows, thereby increasing their vulnerability to food insecurity, housing instability, and labor exploitation. As a result of this increased vulnerability, our Safe Passage social workers will need to expend more time connecting clients to food assistance programs, navigating shelter processes, providing mental health support, and connecting clients to city and state agencies for alternative forms of identification.

3. Widespread Firings of Immigration Judges & Hostile Board of Immigration Appeals Decisions Targeting Special Immigrant Juveniles

- The federal government has conducted record-breaking purges of experienced, even-handed Immigration Judges (IJs) since January 2025. The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) has since hired many IJs lacking immigration law experience, while promoting IJs with notably anti-immigrant records to leadership roles. The high-volume New York City immigration courts have been particularly impacted by this purge.
- Since January 2025, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) has issued an unparalleled number of precedential decisions reducing legal protections for immigrants, which have had the effect of maximizing deportations at the expense of due process rights in immigration courts. Recent rulings have allowed immigration judges to dismiss asylum claims without hearings, restrict the right to bond hearings for broad categories of immigrants, and speed up deportations of children with pending and approved Special Immigrant Juvenile Status in removal proceedings.
- The BIA recently announced a sweeping new rule that would permit it to summarily dismiss the vast majority of appeals before it, essentially stripping immigrants in removal proceedings of meaningful access to appellate review. While the worst of these changes have been temporarily enjoined by litigation,



there is no doubt that the Board will continue to wage its campaign to curtail immigrants' due process in favor of their swift deportations.

- These changes have forced our attorneys to expend additional hours and effort litigating even minor procedural issues, like seeking continuances. Because of the rise in removal orders, uncertainty around BIA policies, and the BIA's decision to forgo its traditional role as a neutral arbiter, our attorneys are now being forced to prepare all cases in removal proceedings for eventual review by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

4. Punishingly High Fees to Apply for Humanitarian Relief and Seek Appellate Review

- The H.R. 1 bill passed by the federal government in July 2025 has set exorbitantly high new fees for children and youth seeking humanitarian protection in the form of SIJS (at a present fee of \$250) and asylum (at a present fee of \$100 for an initial application, in addition to a \$100 annual fee for each year the application remains pending). Under the bill, EOIR has also massively increased its fees - it currently costs over \$1000 to file an appeal or to move to reopen a decision in immigration court. These fees are set to increase yearly.
- Safe Passage Project clients, the majority of whom entered the U.S. as unaccompanied children fleeing abuse, abandonment, neglect, and persecution in their home countries, often have no way to afford these prohibitive fees, and as a result, our organization must cover them. The strain of these costs is particularly pronounced in immigration court, as inexperienced and biased judges are increasingly being pressured to dismiss viable cases for relief, resulting in higher numbers of erroneous removal orders that cost our clients and our organization thousands of dollars to challenge.

Rising to the Moment

Safe Passage Project attorneys and social workers are not backing down. If our clients' cases now require our attorneys to expend additional hours on training and litigation in order to fully preserve our clients' rights, our attorneys will spend those hours. If more of our clients require our social workers to help them find shelter, food, and alternative identification because



they have lost access to work authorization, our social workers will do everything they can to connect them with the resources they need. But we are feeling the strain, and when each staff member is forced to work harder on each individual case, our organizational ability to take on new clients is inevitably reduced. For that reason, we strongly urge the Council to **grant our funding request of \$5,100,000** (an increase of \$674,944 from last year's funding), to ensure that Safe Passage Project can meet the increasingly complex legal and social work needs of immigrant children and youth in this historic moment.

###

NYC City Council Committee on Immigration Hearing

Date: Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Time: 12:30 PM

Oral Testimony

Zeinab Eyega, Executive Director

Sauti Yetu Center for African Women

Good afternoon Chair and distinguished members of the Council,

My name is Zeinab Eyega, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Sauti Yetu Center for African Women, a community-based organization based in the South Bronx. For over two decades, we have provided culturally responsive services to African immigrant women, youth, and survivors of gender-based violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget and its impact on immigrant New Yorkers.

I come before you today to highlight a critical and often overlooked issue in our city's response—the disproportionate vulnerability of African and Black immigrants to detention, deportation, and systemic exclusion from services. This vulnerability is compounded by a profound lack of linguistically accessible legal services tailored to the needs of African and Black immigrant communities.

New York City is home to one of the largest and most diverse populations of African and Black immigrants in the United States. With approximately 3.1 million foreign-born residents—nearly 38% of the city's population—immigrants are central to the fabric of the city. Within this population, Black immigrants represent a significant and growing segment. **African immigrants are one of the fastest-growing groups contributing to the city's Black population with approximately 13% of the population** with communities from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Mali, Senegal, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. Despite their significant presence, African and Black immigrant communities remain underserved in the city. They are largely invisible in policy and funding. As the City continues to respond to the broader immigration crisis, it is essential that we do not overlook communities that are deeply underserved, embedded in some of economically depressed areas like the Bronx, and are facing escalating risks.

Although New York City is a sanctuary city, African immigrants are disproportionately represented in immigration detention and are detained and deported at higher rates than many other immigrant groups. Recent increases in deportations across the United States have further intensified these disparities, disproportionately impacting African communities.



At Sauti Yetu, we are witnessing deeply concerning patterns. African and Black immigrants are navigating complex legal systems without adequate interpretation in languages such as French, Wolof, or Soninke, and without access to quality legal representation. As a result, many are unable to fully participate in their cases—leading to missed court appearances, case denials, and ultimately, deportation or removal orders.

As the Council considers the FY27 budget, we urge you to take a more targeted, equity-driven approach to immigration funding—one that recognizes and responds to the unique needs of African and Black immigrant communities that are currently underserved and under-resourced.

We respectfully offer the following FY27 budget recommendations:

- 1. Increase Investment in Culturally Specific Organizations:** Allocate dedicated funding to culturally specific, community-based organizations serving African and Black immigrant communities across NYC.
- 2. Strengthen Support for Immigrant Survivors of Violence:** Ensure sustained and expanded funding for programs serving immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.
- 3. Restore Sauti Yetu's Discretionary Funding:** For the past three fiscal years, Sauti Yetu Center for African Women has not received discretionary funding from the New York City Council. We respectfully request that our discretionary funding be restored to at least the FY23 of the following: Young Women's Initiative at **\$75,000.00**, DoVE at **\$134,000.00**, Speakers Initiative at **\$125,000.00** and the new initiative for Culturally Specific Gender-based Violence organizations for **\$200,000.00**. The discretionary fund supports critical services for immigrant women, youth, and survivors of gender-based violence.

NY City Council has made important commitments to supporting immigrants, but equity requires intentionality. Without targeted investments, African/black immigrant communities will continue to be underserved and disproportionately harmed.

The FY27 budget presents an opportunity to ensure an inclusive and equitable immigration services.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions.



**Testimony to the New York City Council City Council
Committee on Immigration**

March 25, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez, and I'm the Co-Director of the Street Vendor Project. I would like to thank Chair Encarnacion and the Committee members for the opportunity to testify today.

As the only organization that exclusively serves street vendors in New York City, SVP is the centralized hub for this underserved population, providing critical small business and legal services to vendors since 2001.

We respectfully request support from New York City Council to sustain and expand our essential **Know Your Rights Education for Immigrant Street Vendors (2241659)**.

A growing workforce of more than 23,000 entrepreneurs makes a living from the streets and sidewalks of New York City. According to a 2024 report by Immigration Research Initiative in collaboration with SVP, 96% of street vendors are immigrants, 81% vend as their main source of income, and 65% live in a household with one or more children.

Vendors are at increased risk in the current political environment because they work in public spaces, many lack access to licenses and permits, and are in urgent need of outreach and advocacy to make sure they know their rights – but in languages they know, and from people they trust. This dramatically increases the need for SVP's services as the organization provides accessible, multilingual outreach and education to vendors. From July 1, 2025, to March 1, 2026 just from support from this council initiative alone, SVP has engaged 392 individual vendors, provided KYR trainings attended by 161 immigrant vendors, and trained 184 volunteers to support with outreach.

With the Council's support, we have created vendor-specific immigration Know Your Rights materials in 7 languages (Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Bangla, Wolof, French, and English). Our multilingual team distributes these resources to immigrant vendors through weekly street outreach to vendor carts and trucks, commissary garages, to places where vendors work directly - to equip vendors with the tools they need to protect themselves while vending in public space

should they have an interaction with with immigration enforcement, while also connecting them to with legal resources and emergency family planning kits. We distribute whistles so vendors can warn each other when ICE is in the area, and we add vendors to our language-based text chats, so they can share and receive on-the-ground updates.

Our outreach model prioritizes one-on-one conversations with vendors, empowering vendors to become community ambassadors who share knowledge with their customers as they have deep connections in their neighborhoods. Additionally, because we are membership based, when we engage with vendors, we're engaging them in our community, collecting emergency contact information should a situation arise.

And to give an example – of this practice in work – just two weeks ago, one of our member leaders was detained by Immigration Enforcement on a Friday around 10 PM. She had memorized my number and called from detention, and because our team had collected her emergency contact information, we could quickly alert her family and network, we knew what medications she needed to contact her congressman to ensure she receives them – worked with the habeas project to file a petition within 24 hours. She didn't sign any paperwork and remained silent, because she knew her rights. All of the outreach work and trainings are effective in making sure our community is aware, and we can keep New Yorkers safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for considering our applications.

Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez

Co-Director

Street Vendor Project



**Arab American Family
Support Center**

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**TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE
THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION**

March 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Encarnacion and members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Maia Dillane, and I am the Senior Director of Strategy and Implementation at the Arab-American Family Support Center, known as AAFSC.

AAFSC serves roughly 20,000 people each year across New York City. Over 70 percent of our clients were born outside the United States, and many come from historically underserved communities. Our work centers on families: stabilizing them through challenging times; supporting them to maintain stability; and uplifting them to thrive.

Over the past several months, our staff, many of whom are also immigrants, have responded to a surge in fear, need for basic assistance, and mental health challenges in the communities we serve.

This growing need comes from inhumane federal immigration policies, hostile anti-immigrant rhetoric, cuts to public benefits, rising food and housing insecurity, and a spike in anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant hate. Our communities are increasingly being targeted. We see this in incidents like the recent attack on Muslim women in Bay Ridge.

Fear in our communities is profound. Mixed-status families are increasingly choosing to self-deport rather than risk detention or separation by ICE, tearing families apart - even those in the middle of the family reunification process. We have seen a sharp decline in community members applying for naturalization. This year, we did not host our annual citizenship celebration - usually a joyous occasion - because so few members of our community took the exam. Some were afraid to take the test, and others had their scheduled tests paused due to new restrictions.

AAFSC is a MOIA-established Legal Support Center. We create safe and supportive spaces and are a trusted resource for immigrants in a new city. We work with families who are experiencing language barriers, cultural differences, and mistrust of systems that have historically targeted them. That is why trusted community-based organizations like AAFSC and our partners play such a critical role in making sure immigrant New Yorkers have access to Know Your Rights information.

For families traumatized by conflict in their home countries and concerned about growing conflict in the Middle East, seeking legal help can feel like an additional threat to safety. Families also face rising application fees, long wait times for check-ins and court hearings, and widespread misinformation about legal rights - creating even greater fear and instability.

As a result, community-based legal service centers like AAFSC are overstretched, with demand far exceeding available resources.

City support is critical to our work. To meet the growing demand, we respectfully request:

- \$250,000 in funding through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative for our comprehensive immigration services, including family reunification, green card and asylum applications, and Know Your Rights workshops.
- \$325,000 in discretionary funding through Adult Literacy Forward for AAFSC's Adult Education and Literacy Program
- \$260,000 in funding through Access Health for SNAP and Healthcare Enrollment program, which supports immigrant and refugee families.

Equally critical is ensuring continued support and funding for community-based organizations like AAFSC to meet growing needs and continue to be on the frontlines helping immigrant New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time.



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Good afternoon. I would like to express my gratitude to the Committee on Immigration for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Tatiana Wolkowitz, and I am a Youth Guardianship Paralegal at The Children's Law Center ("CLC"), a legal services organization in NYC that has represented over 185,000 children in child protective legal proceedings in the New York City Family Courts as well as the New York State Supreme Integrated Domestic Violence Courts since 1997. Our driving purpose as an organization is to empower young people through legal representation and support – a mission we feel applies just as strongly to New York City's undocumented youth.

This year, CLC sought to expand our capacity to represent this demographic by creating our Youth Guardianship Project – an initiative focused solely on the representation of undocumented youth as they petition U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (or "SIJS") in Family Court. With IOLA funding, we have represented over 150 undocumented youth in just 6 months, as they took the first critical step in their pursuit of legal status.

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As you are likely aware, Congress created the SIJS designation to provide relief for young people facing desperate circumstances. A person who is SIJS-eligible is under twenty-one years of age, unmarried, dependent upon the juvenile court, unable to reunify with one of both parents due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment, and unable to return to their country of nationality for often heartbreaking reasons. Accordingly, the youth we serve are deeply vulnerable, due to both their age and undocumented status, and in need of holistic representation. We are so proud to say that all of our SIJS clients have been granted both guardianship and special findings orders from a Family Court, enabling them to move forward with their immigration cases with the security a legal guardian provides.

With the funds we received from IOLA in 2025, CLC has been able to provide holistic legal services to our clients by hiring two designated Youth Guardianship Paralegals, including myself, and shifting one staff attorney into a role focused exclusively on this population. Through in-depth interviews, document drafting, and hearing preparation, our team works diligently to ensure our clients feel informed, supported, and empowered. When needed, our social workers provide therapeutic support to clients to help them process trauma and connect their families to essential resources including therapists and medical care. As an organization, we are proud of the breadth of services we can offer our clients and have seen just how impactful our work is to so many.

Empowering young people through legal representation and support.

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A few weeks ago, at a separate hearing in front of this committee, my coworker shared a story about one of our clients. Today, I want to share a different story to demonstrate the depth of the work our team does, and how renewed or increased funding would support our mission. One of our SIJS clients is Samiya (name has been changed), a minor from Kazakhstan. Growing up, Samiya bore witness to her father's domestic violence towards her mother and intimidation of the rest of the family, living in terror in her own home. In 2024, Samiya fled Kazakhstan, where tensions between her and her father had become untenable, and moved to the United States. Living with her mother in the U.S. gave Samiya the relief of a life away from her father and the security of her mother's protection and care. As such, Samiya filed a petition for her mother to be named her legal guardian as well as for SIJS status.

With legal support, Samiya's life looks very different. She is taking steps towards establishing permanency in the U.S. where she is learning English and hoping to study graphic design someday. However, legal representation, alone, cannot resource Samiya with the emotional support she needs.

As her case progressed, Samiya's communication with her father seriously impacted her mental health. Despite having legal representation, Samiya lacked professional resources to help her cope with the trauma endured from her father's treatment. Thankfully, CLC's team of social workers have lent critical support to Samiya, outside of the courthouse, but there remain gaps in our capabilities. Many of our clients are afraid of using external resources like suicide hotlines, for example, out of fear their undocumented status will be revealed. Others lack access to therapists who speak their language. With renewed or increased funding, CLC's Youth Guardianship Project could target these gaps by hiring new team members to better serve, and increase our range of services for, vulnerable youth.

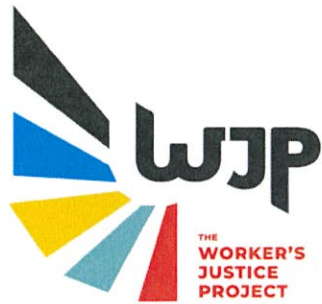
Unfortunately, Samiya's experiences are reminiscent of so many of our clients' who have overcome the unimaginable. Many have come to New York to escape political torture, gang violence, or domestic abuse. Others are here in search of a brighter future with educational and vocational opportunities, access to medical care, and a lawfully named guardian to guide and protect them.

While CLC has expanded our capacity to represent hundreds more children in their Family Court proceedings this year, SIJS applications continue to rise citywide. The Youth Guardianship Project's IOLA funding will expire at the start of July. We have submitted an application for renewed funding, but our project, and our clients have been holding our breath to see whether it will be granted. With renewed funding, our team could continue to use our expertise in Family Court to maintain a space of dignity and support for immigrant youth as they seek legal status while increasing our range of holistic support for clients' emotional needs.

We therefore ask, most sincerely, that this body continue to advocate for renewed IOLA funding for this project, not only for CLC but across the nonprofit sphere, to expand the impact of legal representation for hundreds more children in New York City. CLC works with ROCC, LAS, LLSNY and iCare to ensure that our clients are represented after family court. All of these organizations have depended upon IOLA funding to do this work, and this community of undocumented youth will be left with many fewer resources should the funding be cut.

We also ask that this body consider establishing a new source of funding outside of IOLA, whether for legal work or else for social work, therapy, community center funding, and know your rights campaigns, to provide relief to the same communities our Youth Guardianship Project aims to protect. For example: I know that this committee recently heard remarks on know your rights posters being posted in multiple languages throughout the city. Our organization commends those efforts. We believe that an expansion of these efforts could do even more to advise these communities not only of their constitutional rights for use in reactionary contexts, but also to advise these communities of pathways to citizenship for use in a proactive context to allow undocumented communities to seek status where applicable so that they can gain security in our city.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Council's decision-making and to highlight CLC's representation of immigrant youth.



TESTIMONY

Alejandro Grajales

Workers Rights Organizer
Worker's Justice Project

Presented to:

The New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
Chair, Elsie Encarnación

March 25, 2026

Testimony of the Workers Justice Project before the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration

Good afternoon, Chair Elsie Encarnación and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Alejandro Grajales, and I am a worker leader and workers' rights organizer at the Workers Justice Project. I am here to lift up immigrant New Yorkers—day laborers, domestic workers, and delivery workers—who keep our city running but are too often underpaid, exploited, and unprotected.

I want to begin by sharing my story. I came to New York as an immigrant and spent many years working in restaurants and delivery. I experienced wage theft firsthand and, like so many in my community, I lived in fear of speaking up because of my immigration status. I know what it feels like to stay silent even when things are wrong. But that changed when I joined the Workers Justice Project. I began organizing with Los Deliveristas Unidos, and today I am proud to serve as a workers' rights organizer, helping other workers find their voice and fight for justice.

In my work, I see greedy employers exploiting the current anti-immigrant climate. They feel empowered to steal wages and threaten workers to report to immigration to keep our communities silent. This fear is real—but so is our power.

Through the Workers Justice Project, we are changing the story. We show workers they are not alone, that they have rights, and that when we organize together, we can win. In recent months, we have recovered \$124,000 in stolen wages for day laborers, domestic workers, and tobacco processing workers. Los Deliveristas Unidos have recovered over \$20 million in wages from delivery companies that refuse to comply with minimum pay laws.

We are also creating safer workplaces. We have secured T-visa certifications for workers threatened with deportation or who have experienced workplace violence, giving them

protection and a path forward. None of this work would be possible without the support of the City Council and the funding that makes these programs possible.

As an worker leader and organizer, I am here to advocate for continued and expanded funding for programs that strengthen our communities and hold employers accountable:

- **Day Laborer Workforce Initiative** – \$4.97 million for five organizations
- **Legal Services for Day Laborers and Domestic Workers** – restore \$500,000
- **Construction Site Safety Training** – \$150,000
- **Worker Rights Organizing and Education Initiative** – new funding: \$5 million for five organizations
- **Low-Wage Worker Support Initiative** – \$250,000

These investments are more than numbers—they are lifelines for the workers and immigrant New Yorkers who keep our city running. They are a statement that New York values its workers, protects immigrant communities, and believes in justice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We urge you to support these priorities in this year's budget, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the Council to ensure that hardworking New Yorkers have the protection, support, and dignity they deserve.



TESTIMONY

Dalsa Diaz

Member of
Worker's Justice Project

Presented to:

The New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
Chair, Elsie Encarnación

March 25, 2026

Testimony of Dalsa Díaz

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

My name is **Dalsa Díaz**, I am from Colombia, and I am here as an immigrant worker in New York City.

I worked for a company called **Madison 4805**, in Borough Park, Brooklyn, where I experienced very difficult working conditions. We worked under constant pressure, without proper time to rest or eat, and in an environment where our rights were not respected. I even saw minors being exposed to these conditions.

Despite all the effort, many times we were not paid for our work. And when I decided to ask for my wages, instead of being paid, I was fired.

I know they took advantage of me for being an immigrant, and because of the fear many of us feel—that we don't have rights.

I reached out to **Workers Justice Project**, where for the first time I understood that we do have rights, no matter where we come from or what language we speak. With their support, I was able to raise my voice and take action. I am still in that process today, waiting for justice for the work I did.

But I am not here only for myself. I am here for many others who go through the same thing every day and are still afraid to speak up.

We are not alone. Workers Justice Project is often the only place where immigrant workers can find support, guidance, accompaniment, and the strength to defend our rights.

That is why today I ask you to **approve and continue strengthening funding for this work**, so more workers can access help, learn their rights, and not have to face these situations alone.

Supporting these programs is not just an option—it is an investment in the **dignity, justice, and well-being of our entire community**.

Thank you.

Testimonio de Dalsa Díaz

Buenas tardes, Chair y miembros del Comité. Gracias por darme la oportunidad de compartir mi historia.

Mi nombre es **Dalsa Díaz**, soy de **Colombia**, y estoy aquí como trabajadora inmigrante en la ciudad de Nueva York.

Trabajé para una empresa llamada **Madison 4805, en Borough Park, Brooklyn** donde viví condiciones laborales muy difíciles. Trabajábamos bajo presión constante, sin tiempo adecuado para descansar o comer, y en un ambiente donde no se respetaban nuestros derechos. Incluso vi como a menores de edad eran expuestas a estas condiciones. A pesar de todo el esfuerzo, muchas veces **no recibíamos pago por nuestro trabajo**. Y cuando decidí reclamar mi salario en lugar de pagarme, fui despedida.

Yo sé que se aprovecharon de mí por ser inmigrante, por el miedo porque muchas veces sentimos que no tenemos derechos.

Me acerqué a **Workers Justice Project**, donde por primera vez entendí que **sí tenemos derechos**, sin importar de dónde venimos o qué idioma hablamos. Con el apoyo de la organización, pude levantar mi voz y tomar acción frente a lo que estaba pasando. Hoy sigo en ese proceso, esperando justicia por el trabajo que realicé.

Pero estoy aquí no solo por mí. Estoy aquí por muchas otras personas que viven lo mismo todos los días y que todavía tienen miedo de hablar. Pero no estamos solos, tenemos a **Worker's Justice Project** son muchas veces el único lugar donde los trabajadores inmigrantes encontramos apoyo, orientación, acompañamiento y la fuerza para defender nuestros derechos como trabajadores inmigrantes.

Por eso, hoy les pido que **aprueben y continúen fortaleciendo los fondos para este trabajo**, para que más trabajadores puedan acceder a ayuda, conocer sus derechos y no tener que enfrentar estas situaciones solos. Apoyar este tipo de programas no es solo una opción, es una inversión en la **dignidad, la justicia y el bienestar de toda nuestra comunidad**.

Muchas gracias.



TESTIMONY

Maria Marcia Guiracochoa

Member of
Worker's Justice Project

Presented to:

The New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
Chair, Elsie Encarnación

March 25, 2026

Testimony of María Guiracocha

Good afternoon, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

My name is María Guiracocha, I am from Ecuador. I am a widow and the head of my household. I have three children who depend entirely on me.

Since I arrived in this country, I have worked in cleaning. I have looked for work day by day, worked in construction, in fire-damaged homes, doing difficult and physically demanding jobs. It is not easy, but I do it because everything for my children depends on it—the rent, the food, and their future.

In my most recent job, with a company called Cleaning Pass, I was led to believe I would have a stable opportunity. I was asked to buy my own materials and tools, and I went into debt to be able to work, trusting that promise.

But the reality was very different. After several weeks of working, when I asked to be paid, instead of receiving my wages, I was blocked from the platform. I was left without work, without pay, and with debt. It was a very unfair and painful situation.

But I was not alone. Thanks to the support of Workers Justice Project, I was able not only to report my case, but they also helped organize 13 other coworkers who went through the same situation. Through this collective effort, the District Attorney's Office was able to arrest the person responsible in North Carolina, extradite him to New York, and he has now been found guilty of several criminal charges. His sentencing will take place next month.

None of this would have been possible without the support of Workers Justice Project. I am here today because this is not just my story—it is a reality that many workers in this city face, where abuse continues to happen, often without immediate consequences.

That is why I ask you to approve funding to support organizations like Workers Justice Project, because this support changes lives, protects families, and makes justice possible. We work hard, we contribute to this city, and we deserve to be treated with dignity. Thank you.

Testimonio de María Guiracocha

Buenas tardes, muchas gracias por darme la oportunidad de hablar.

Mi nombre es **María Guiracocha**, soy ecuatoriana. Soy viuda y soy la cabeza de mi hogar. Tengo tres hijos que dependen completamente de mí.

Desde que llegué a este país, he trabajado en limpieza. He buscado trabajo día a día, he trabajado en construcciones, en casas dañadas, realizando trabajos difíciles y pesados. No es fácil, pero lo hago porque de eso depende todo para mis hijos: la renta, la comida y su futuro. En mi último trabajo, con una compañía llamada **Cleaning Pass**, me hicieron creer que tendría una oportunidad estable. Me pidieron que comprara mis propios materiales y herramientas, y yo me endeudé para poder trabajar, confiando en esa promesa.

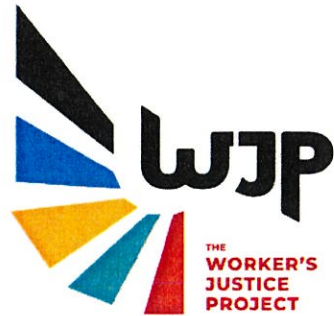
Pero la realidad fue muy diferente. Después de varias semanas trabajando, cuando decidí cobrar mi dinero, en lugar de pagarme, fui bloqueada de la plataforma. Me dejaron sin trabajo, sin pago y con deudas. Fue una situación muy injusta y muy dolorosa.

Pero no me quedé sola. Gracias al apoyo de **Workers Justice Project**, no solo pude denunciar mi caso, sino que también ayudaron a organizar a otras **13 compañeras** que habían pasado por lo mismo.

Gracias a ese trabajo colectivo, la fiscalía logró arrestar al responsable en **North Carolina**, extraditarlo a **Nueva York**, y hoy ya ha sido declarado culpable de varios cargos criminales. El próximo mes será su sentencia. Nada de esto hubiera sido posible sin el apoyo de **Workers Justice Project**.

Hoy estoy aquí porque esta situación no es solo mi historia, sino una realidad que enfrentan muchos trabajadores en esta ciudad, donde el abuso sigue ocurriendo y muchas veces sin consecuencias inmediatas. Por eso, les pido que **aprueben el presupuesto para apoyar a organizaciones como Workers Justice Project**, porque ese apoyo cambia vidas, protege a las familias y permite que la justicia sea una realidad.

Nosotros trabajamos duro, contribuimos a esta ciudad y merecemos ser tratados con dignidad. Muchas gracias.



TESTIMONY

Maria Gualan

Workers Justice Project

Presented to:

The New York City Council
Immigration Committee
Chair, Elsie Encarnación

March 25, 2026

Testimony before the New York City Council's Immigration Committee

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Committee. My name is María Gualán. I am a construction and cleaning worker and a member of the Workers' Justice Project.

I came to New York from Ecuador several years ago with the firm intention of building a better future for my family.

At first, working in construction and cleaning was extremely difficult: low wages, exhausting hours, and great instability. I often worried about not being able to cover basic needs. Like many immigrant workers, I felt fear — fear of losing my job, of being replaced, and fear of the consequences of my immigration status.

Things changed when I joined the Workers' Justice Project. Thanks to their support, I have been able to find occasional jobs that supplement my income. Those jobs have allowed me to pay my bills, feed my family, and have a little stability. In addition, the workplace safety training I have received has empowered me — I now know how to protect myself and demand fair treatment.

Being part of this community has given me confidence. I no longer feel alone; I know that together we can build a more just city.

For that reason, I ask the Council to continue supporting programs like the Worker Employment Initiative, Legal Services for Domestic Workers, and the Labor Rights Initiative. Workers like me sustain the daily life of this city. We deserve respect, opportunities, and a dignified future. Thank you for your attention and support.

Testimonio ante el Comité de Inmigración del Ayuntamiento de Nueva York.

Buenas tardes, distinguidos miembros del Comité. Mi nombre es **María Gualán**, soy trabajadora de la construcción y limpieza y miembro del Proyecto **Justicia Laboral**.

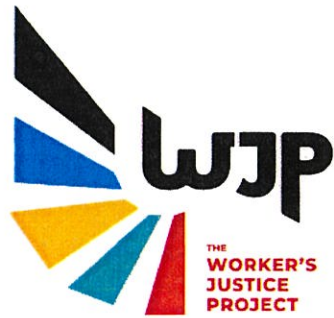
Llegué a Nueva York desde Ecuador hace varios años, con la firme intención de buscar un futuro mejor para mi familia.

Al inicio, trabajar en la construcción y la limpieza fue extremadamente difícil: sueldos bajos, jornadas agotadoras y una gran inestabilidad. A menudo, me preocupaba no poder cubrir las necesidades básicas. Como muchos trabajadores inmigrantes, sentí miedo: miedo a perder mi empleo, a ser reemplazada, y miedo a las consecuencias de mi situación migratoria.

Las cosas cambiaron cuando me uní al Proyecto de Justicia Laboral. Gracias a su apoyo he podido encontrar trabajos ocasionales que complementan mis ingresos. Esos trabajos me han permitido pagar las cuentas, alimentar a mi familia y tener un poco de estabilidad. Además, la capacitación en seguridad laboral que he recibido me ha empoderado: ahora sé cómo protegerme y reclamar un trato justo.

Formar parte de esta comunidad me ha dado confianza. Ya no me siento sola; sé que, juntas y juntos, podemos construir una ciudad más justa.

Por eso, pido al Consejo que continúe apoyando programas como la Iniciativa de Empleo para Trabajadores, los Servicios Legales para trabajadoras domésticas y la Iniciativa de Derechos Laborales. Los trabajadores como yo sostenemos el día a día de esta ciudad. Merecemos respeto, oportunidades y un futuro digno. Gracias por su atención y apoyo.



TESTIMONY
Wilfredo Villatoro

Workers Justice Project

Presented to:

The New York City Council
Immigration Committee
Chair, Elsie Encarnación

March 25, 2026

Testimony before the New York City Council's Immigration Committee.

Good afternoon, members of the Immigration Committee,

My name is Wilfredo Villatoro. I am a construction worker and a member of the Workplace Justice Project. I came to New York City from Honduras and have worked in the construction industry for the past 18 years. I currently work as a painter.

In this industry, we often face unsafe working conditions due to a lack of information and training. This puts our health, our safety, and even our lives at risk. Many times, because of fear related to our immigration status or employer abuse, we do not report these situations.

Personally, I have been a victim of wage theft and delayed payments. However, thanks to organizations like the Workplace Justice Project, workers receive guidance and training on essential issues. We are provided with important trainings, such as classes to obtain health and safety certifications like OSHA, as well as support in cases of wage theft, among many other benefits, simply by being members of the program.

As immigrant workers, we have always had concerns about our rights. For a long time, I believed that, because I was an immigrant, I had no rights, which made me live with fear and insecurity, especially at work. But thanks to programs like this, we are now informed about our rights and how to respond in different situations, always in accordance with the law.

For this reason, I respectfully ask the Council to continue funding programs such as Construction Safety Training, the Day Labor Workforce Initiative, and the Worker Rights Education and Organizing Initiative. These programs strengthen New York's workforce and defend the dignity of immigrant workers.

Construction workers like me take pride in our work, and we ask that the city continue investing in our safety, our rights, and our future.

Thank you very much for listening and for supporting immigrant workers.

Testimonio ante el Comité de Inmigración del Ayuntamiento de Nueva York.

Buenas tardes, miembros de la Comisión de Inmigración.

Mi nombre es **Wilfredo Villatoro**. Soy trabajador de la construcción y miembro del **Proyecto Justicia Laboral**. Llegué a la ciudad de Nueva York desde Honduras y he trabajado en la industria de la construcción durante los últimos 18 años. Actualmente me desempeño como pintor.

En esta industria, con frecuencia enfrentamos condiciones laborales inseguras debido a la falta de información y capacitación. Esto pone en riesgo nuestra salud, nuestra seguridad e incluso nuestras vidas. Muchas veces, por temor a nuestra condición migratoria o por el abuso de empleadores, no denunciemos estas situaciones.

En lo personal, he sido víctima de robo de salario y pagos retrasados. Sin embargo, gracias a organizaciones como el Proyecto de Justicia Laboral, los trabajadores reciben orientación y capacitación en temas fundamentales. Se nos brinda entrenamientos importantes, como las clases para obtener las certificaciones en salud y seguridad como OSHA, así como asesoramiento en casos de robo de salario, entre muchos otros beneficios, con solo ser miembros del programa.

Como trabajadores inmigrantes, siempre hemos tenido inquietudes sobre nuestros derechos. Durante mucho tiempo pensé que, por ser inmigrante, no tenía derechos, lo que me hacía vivir con miedo e inseguridad, especialmente en el trabajo. Pero gracias a programas como este, ahora estamos informados sobre nuestros derechos y sobre cómo actuar en distintas situaciones, siempre respetando la ley.

Por ello, solicito respetuosamente al Consejo que continúe financiando programas como la Capacitación en Seguridad en Obras de Construcción, la Iniciativa para la Fuerza Laboral de Trabajadores Jornaleros y la Iniciativa de Educación y Organización en Defensa de los Derechos Laborales. Estos programas fortalecen la fuerza laboral de Nueva York y defienden la dignidad de los trabajadores inmigrantes.

Los trabajadores de la construcción, como yo, nos sentimos orgullosos de nuestro trabajo y pedimos que la ciudad continúe invirtiendo en nuestra seguridad, nuestros derechos y nuestro futuro.

Muchas gracias por escucharnos y por apoyar a los trabajadores inmigrantes.

The Council -The City of New York – Finance Division
Preliminary Budget FY 2027
Preliminary Capital Plan FY 2027-20230, Mayor’s Management Report Fiscal 2026
YMPJ- March 25, 2026

INTRODUCTION:

- >Henry Lajara Accredited Representative w/Youth Ministries for Peace & Justice, Inc.
- >YMPJ is a community based organization founded in 1994.
- >Located in the South East Bronx: Bronx River/Soundview/Bruckner/Parkchester community
- >Presently we are the only DOJ recognized site in 10472 zip and 5 miles from the next rec site
- >Our immigration services assist our Bronx community & accommodates all Metropolitan NY
- >Diverse population covering all portions of our globe: Caribs, Central/South America, SEAsia, Europe, WAfrica...

SERVICES PROVIDED:

Since 2006 we have:

Guided our immigrant community through the complex world of immigration:

- >In-depth consultation: Evaluate their situation, provide the needed info to complete their call
- >File pertinent applications: naturalization, family reunification, adjustment of status, DACA
 ➔ All which will help them achieve their American dream ←
- >Representation before USCIS re: Natz, AOS – Stokes interviews, translation services...
- >Liaisons between government and state agencies: USCIS, NVC and US embassies abroad
- >We’re made up of (1) DOJ accredited representative & (1) on call Immigration Attorney
- >We’ve seen thousands of clients and helped saved thousands of dollars in attorney’s fees
- >We’ve also deterred our community from the services of “Predatory Notarios”

In these unpredictable times many of our clients are unsure on how to proceed with their cases. YMPJ is here to guide them towards the right path to make sure of their success.

IN ADDITION:

- > In 2016 YMPJ helped form the “Bronx Immigration Partnership” (BIP)
- >BIP is a group of Bronx based Legal Service Providers who address immigration issues.
- >Through our “list-serve” BIP confidentially, share cases and recommend best practices.
- >We support our community by providing legal clinics around current immigration trends KYR.
- >BIP’s Steering committee, we help plan our meetings to assure current matters are covered.
- >Our free tax service, supports our immigrant community; (ITIN numbers)
- >This assures the applicant that they are following law which may lead to a legal future

Our Services are Free and Confidential

CURRENT FUNDING:

- >Immigrant Opportunity Initiates (IOI) since 2006 via NYC Councilmember Amanda Farias
- >Legal Services CSBG since 2017

CURRENT FUNDING REQUEST:

- >With the new Fed administration, we see the need for Immigration services are non-stop.
- >Uncertainty, fear and confusion are amidst our community:
- >Can I proceed with an immigration benefit? Deportation? What will happen to my children?
- >These are the devastating questions posed to us on a daily basis.
- >Unfortunately these type of clients fall prey to predatory notaries.
- >We receive referrals from our local elected officials and accommodate all we can.
- >Consequently, our actual client numbers exceed the required contract amount.
- >YMPJ is here to help in all matters...

That’s why we ask for your continued support of core immigration initiatives like IOI
And that you recognize that these feats require your further assistance.

CLOSE: QUESTIONS?

Thank you for your continued support and for your consideration of these budget request. Our community will greatly benefit from these urgently needed services. Thank you.