

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

JOINTLY WITH

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION  
CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY  
WITH COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND  
WORKER PROTECTION

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April 15, 2025  
Start: 10:08 a.m.  
Recess: 1:01 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Alexa Avilés, Chairperson of the  
Committee on Immigration

Julie Menin, Chairperson of the  
Committee on Consumer and Worker  
Protection

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION:

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND  
WORKER PROTECTION:

Shaun Abreu  
Gale A. Brewer  
Shekar Krishnan

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Vilda Vera Mayuga, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection

Michael Tiger, General Counsel of the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection

Carlos Ortiz, Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs at New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection

Luisana, member of La Colmena

Amavilia, member of Mixteca

Madeleine Bravo, Legal Services Coordinator at La Colmena

Hildalyn Colon, Deputy Director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment

Jorge Paz-Reyes, Community Organizer at Mixteca

Nick Gulotta, self, former Director of Outreach and Organizing for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Natalia Nuñez Barragán, Senior Manager of Membership and Capacity Building at Immigrant ARC

Christian, self

Deborah Lee, Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit at the Legal Aid Society

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

Hannah Strauss, Supervising Attorney of the Immigration Court Help Desk and the Family Group Legal Orientation Program at Catholic Charities Community Services

Marc Valinoti, Assistant Director of Immigrant and DV Services at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

Sharon Brown, Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Raul Rivera, self

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Alice Davis, Deputy Director at Catholic Migration Services

Stephanie Rovine, Healing Centers Program and Development Director

1  
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, good  
3 morning. This is a microphone check for the Committee  
4 on Immigration joint with the Committee on Consumer  
5 and Worker Protection. This is being done in the  
6 Chambers. Today's date is April 15, 2025. This  
7 recording is done by Ginelle Yearwood.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and  
9 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for  
10 the Committee on Immigration joint with the Committee  
11 on Consumer and Worker Protection.

12 At this time, we would like you to place  
13 all electronic devices to vibrate.

14 If you wish to submit testimony today,  
15 you could do so via email at  
16 testimony@Council.nyc.gov.

17 If you wish to submit in-person  
18 testimony, you need to fill out an appearance card by  
19 the Sergeant-at-Arms desk.

20 If you need a translation device, please  
21 contact a Sergeant-at-Arms.

22 Please do not approach the dais. I  
23 repeat, do not approach the dais.

24 INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

25 INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

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INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Chair, we're ready to  
begin.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [GAVEL] This  
meeting is called to order.

Good morning, everyone. I am Council  
Member Alexa Avilés, Chair of the Committee on  
Immigration. Thank you for joining us. Today, we will  
be exploring how the City is combating immigration  
services fraud. I'd like to thank Council Member  
Julie Menin, Chair of the Committee on Consumer and  
Worker Protection, for Co-Chairing this important  
hearing. I'd also like to thank the representatives  
of the Administration, members of the public, and my  
Committee Colleagues.

Please note, we have interpretation  
available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Mandarin.  
If you are in the Council Chambers today and  
interested in listening to this hearing in Spanish,  
Haitian Creole, or Mandarin, there are headsets  
available in the rotunda. If you would like to  
testify and require interpretation in Spanish,  
Haitian Creole, or Mandarin, please indicate on your

witness slip form, or inform the Sergeant if you have  
already submitted your slip.

As is becoming a tradition, I'd like to  
begin our hearing by reminding everyone that New York  
City has always been and will always be a city of  
immigrants. In fact, according to the most recent  
annual report of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
Affairs, immigrants and children of immigrants make  
up 60 percent of the New York City population. This  
number does not even begin to include those who are  
neighbors with, friends with, or in community with an  
immigrant. This city is special because of the people  
who live here, and we must continue to stand up  
against bullying threats to our community.

In today's hearing, we will hear from the  
Administration about their efforts to prevent  
immigration services fraud and support fraud victims.  
Over the past year, complaints of immigration  
services fraud in New York have increased, and  
advocates have consistently been ringing the alarm on  
these growing threats. Oftentimes, immigration  
services fraud becomes more rampant in periods where  
demand for legal services increases. This could be  
because of increased immigration or because of

1 immigration legal landscape has become so much more  
2 complicated. There is increasing significant concern  
3 around fraud that will occur as access to immigration  
4 benefits is destroyed by this current Presidential  
5 Administration. The Trump Administration has  
6 decimated immigration relief for numerous parolees  
7 and temporary protected status recipients, and is  
8 clearly uninterested in stopping this destruction  
9 anytime soon. The Trump Administration is  
10 complicating access to work permits, threatening  
11 green card holders, making immigrants scared to pay  
12 their taxes, to go to the doctor, to take their  
13 children to school, and to access critical services.  
14 The people whose lives are catastrophically changed  
15 by this draconian decision-making from our current  
16 President are likely to become desperate to find ways  
17 to protect themselves or their families from  
18 deportation. Unscrupulous actors prey upon this  
19 desperation, and immigrants can find themselves  
20 overcharged, lied to, and in some instances have  
21 their immigration cases irreparably damaged by  
22 fraudulent providers. In some cases, fraud may also  
23 be more subtle. The complexity of immigration law  
24 often requires support from a professional attorney,  
25

1  
2 and in New York, there are a lot of requirements that  
3 service providers must follow to ensure that they do  
4 not overstep their jurisdictions and provide legal  
5 advice. The provision of specific legal information  
6 and defense must be in the form of a professional  
7 lawyer, because without this expertise, immigration  
8 cases could be filed improperly and cause significant  
9 issues.

10 I've just covered some of what this  
11 hearing will be about, and I will now take a moment  
12 to describe what this hearing is not about. A  
13 wholesale attack on our city's bona fide legal  
14 service providers. The President recently issued an  
15 executive order purporting to target immigration  
16 lawyers with additional scrutiny and legal sanctions  
17 in retaliation for lawsuits filed against their  
18 Administration. Let me make one thing abundantly  
19 clear. This Council stands with organizations and  
20 providers who offer expert legal assistance and  
21 compassionate wraparound services to our immigrant  
22 community members and their families. In fact,  
23 immigrant-serving organizations are some of the only  
24 institutions standing in the breach as ICE disappears  
25 community members from our neighborhoods. The Council

1  
2 has a proud history of funding these experienced and  
3 courageous providers of immigration services and will  
4 continue to do so in the months and years to come.

5           This hearing will examine the City's  
6 efforts to connect individuals to seeking immigration  
7 services with those bona fide providers and help them  
8 steer clear of the unaccredited ones. The City must  
9 ensure that immigrants are accessing proper  
10 professional legal services and not led astray by  
11 unscrupulous actors or non-legal service providers.  
12 The City must also ensure that immigrants who are  
13 victims of fraud are able to submit a complaint and  
14 find some resource that relieves them for some of the  
15 damages that incur. We look forward to hearing from  
16 the Administration on how they are informing,  
17 empowering, and protecting our immigrant communities.

18           At the Council's last hearing on this  
19 topic in 2021, the Committee heard from the  
20 Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and the  
21 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I'm grateful  
22 that DCWP will testify today and look forward to  
23 hearing their testimony. I'm disappointed, however,  
24 that MOIA has elected not to attend today's important  
25 hearing. It is a shame that the public will not be

1  
2 able to hear MOIA share their work their office is  
3 doing to combat immigrant services fraud. I  
4 understand that MOIA will be submitting written  
5 testimony, and I look forward to following up with  
6 them with questions.

7           Lastly, the Committee on Immigration will  
8 hear Council Member Won's bill, Introduction 980,  
9 which increases penalties for violations of  
10 requirements that apply to immigration services. I  
11 look forward to hearing more from Council Member Won  
12 on this bill and her support as we seek to improve  
13 the services provided to immigrants.

14           I would like to thank all the Committee  
15 Staff for their work on this hearing, including  
16 Nicole Catá, Senior Legislative Counsel; Rebecca  
17 Barilla, Policy Analyst; Carolina Gill, Principal  
18 Capital Analyst; and Florentine Kabore, Unit Head. I  
19 would also like to thank the Council's Oversight and  
20 Investigations Division for their support, including  
21 Meg Powers, Acting Deputy Director; Zachary Mayer-  
22 Casalas (phonetic); Assistant Deputy Director, Katie  
23 Sinise (phonetic); Investigative Policy Analyst; and  
24 finally, I have to thank my Staff, Chief-of-Staff  
25 Edward Cerna; Deputy Chief-of-Staff Christina

2 Bottego, and my Legislative Fellow Cate Byrne, and  
3 everyone working in the background to make this  
4 hearing run smoothly.

5 I will now turn it over to Council Member  
6 Menin for her opening statement.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you so much,  
8 Chair Avilés. I'm Julie Menin, Chair of the Committee  
9 on Consumer and Worker Protection, and we want to  
10 welcome you to today's joint hearing on Combating  
11 Immigration Services Fraud, as well as a hearing on  
12 Introduction Numbers 205 and 980.

13 When I previously served as Commissioner  
14 of the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection,  
15 President Obama had announced a series of broad  
16 administrative reforms to the immigration system.  
17 This unfortunately created new opportunities for  
18 fraudsters looking to profit from immigrant  
19 vulnerability. At that time, in response to the  
20 increased risk for immigrant New Yorkers, I co-led a  
21 task force in partnership with the Office of the New  
22 York Attorney General and the Mayor's Office of  
23 Immigrant Affairs that dedicated increased  
24 enforcement resources and conducted a public  
25 awareness campaign to stop predators from taking

1  
2 advantage of our immigrant communities. Once again,  
3 recent rapid changes in federal immigration and  
4 enforcement policy have created unfortunately a ripe  
5 environment for immigration services fraud, and  
6 comprehensive action by the City is absolutely  
7 necessary to combat this increase in vulnerability  
8 for immigrant New Yorkers.

9           At today's hearing, we look forward to  
10 learning more about the Administration's work to  
11 educate and protect New Yorkers from immigration  
12 services fraud and to enforce laws that regulate the  
13 behavior of immigration service providers.

14           The Committee on Consumer and Worker  
15 Protection will also be hearing feedback on  
16 Introduction Number 205, sponsored by Council Member  
17 Hanif.

18           In closing, I want to thank our Committee  
19 Staff and my Staff for their hard work in putting  
20 together today's hearing and my Colleague, Council  
21 Member Avilés, for all of her hard work in making  
22 today happen.

23           I want to first of all recognize our  
24 Colleagues who have joined, Council Member Abreu,  
25 Council Member Brewer, and we will acknowledge

1  
2 additional Colleagues as they come in, and I'm now  
3 going to turn it over to the Public Advocate to make  
4 a statement.

5 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Thank  
6 you so much, Madam Chair. My name is Jumaane  
7 Williams. As mentioned, I'm the Public Advocate of  
8 the City of New York. Thank you, Chairs Menin and  
9 Avilés, for holding today's hearing and allowing me  
10 opportunity to provide a brief statement.

11 These are pretty dire times for many New  
12 York communities, including our immigrant  
13 communities. The Mayor has officially begun saluting  
14 Kristi Noem and ICE in public. While we must continue  
15 to condemn the Mayor for his inability to put the  
16 safety of New Yorkers over himself, we must be laser-  
17 focused on what this means for our communities. It  
18 has now been confirmed that the Mayor engaged in quid  
19 pro quo, a fact that was confirmed by the judge in  
20 his dismissal, a fact that the Mayor continues to lie  
21 about through omission, and his new platform puts all  
22 of us in danger and none more than our newest New  
23 Yorkers and immigrants who are afraid. I now believe  
24 that the Mayor believed there wasn't a quid pro quo  
25 because he believes in Donald Trump and his MAGA

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2 agenda and believes if he was going to do it anyway,  
3 it's not a quid pro quo. It is, and we're all  
4 suffering from it. History's not going to be kind to  
5 the Trump Administration and it's MAGA policies.  
6 History won't be kind to the disgrace of Mayor Adams  
7 and his Adams Administration.

8           The byproduct of many of his decisions is  
9 an environment that allows fear and disinformation to  
10 spread like wildfire throughout our city. An  
11 environment such as this opens a gap in our society  
12 where scams, fraudsters, and bad faith actors can  
13 take advantage of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.  
14 These actors must be stopped, penalized, and held  
15 accountable for violations of law and decency. One  
16 such actor impersonated a number of federal law  
17 enforcement agents and demanded huge sums of money in  
18 exchange for expedited visa applications. Another  
19 culprit posed as an attorney and solicited bribes  
20 from individuals seeking legal pathways toward  
21 citizenship. Make no mistake, increase in these kinds  
22 of scams and scammers, which have always been here,  
23 are a result of the President and the Mayor's dual  
24 efforts to criminalize and obscure the legal  
25 immigration process. It is crucial that elected

1  
2 officials and advocates make every effort to educate  
3 our constituents on these scams and prosecute those  
4 who think they can profit from exploiting an already  
5 broken system. Every New Yorker deserves the  
6 opportunity to be a part of our great city. I'll  
7 continue to stand by my Colleagues and the advocates  
8 on the ground in order to protect the rights and  
9 opportunities that we are entitled to. We will not  
10 back down in the face of this corruption,  
11 exploitation, and disinformation.

12 I want to thank the legal services and  
13 many of the service providers who continue to do the  
14 best they can in some very tough situations. I am  
15 worried that the Mayor doesn't really care about  
16 what's happening and the harm that's being caused,  
17 and I don't think New Yorkers can look to him for  
18 leadership, but I'm asking those who are in agencies,  
19 who are in charge of agencies, who are working in  
20 agencies, who know what the right thing is to do, to  
21 do the best they can with what they have, where they  
22 are in tough situations. Thank you.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Public  
24 Advocate Williams. Thank you for your steadfast

1  
2 advocacy and support of immigrant New Yorkers and  
3 your leadership.

4 I guess now, with that, we will turn it  
5 over to the Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

6 SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL CATÁ: Thank you,  
7 Chairs. We will now hear from the Administration. We  
8 will hear from the Commissioner of the Department of  
9 Consumer and Worker Protection, Vilda Vera Mayuga;  
10 Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs, Carlos  
11 Ortiz; and General Counsel, Michael Tiger.

12 Before we begin, I will administer the  
13 affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right hand.

14 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
15 whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before these  
16 Committees, and to respond honestly to Council Member  
17 questions?

18 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I do.

19 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I do.

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I do.

21 SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL CATÁ: Thank you. You  
22 may begin when ready.

23 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you for the  
24 beautiful pronunciation, by the way, all the names.  
25 That was really nice.

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2           So, good morning, Chair Menin, Chair  
3 Avilés, Public Advocate, and Members of the  
4 Committees. My name is Vilda Vera Mayuga,  
5 Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker  
6 Protection, DCWP. Today, I am joined by our General  
7 Counsel, Michael Tiger, and Assistant Commissioner of  
8 External Affairs, Carlos Ortiz. Thank you for the  
9 opportunity to testify on immigration services fraud  
10 and related legislation as we continue our shared  
11 mission to protect immigrant New Yorkers from harm  
12 and exploitation.

13           DCWP is a key resource for all New  
14 Yorkers, providing fundamental consumer and worker  
15 protections and financial empowerment programming  
16 across the five boroughs. We are dedicated to  
17 ensuring that consumers who have been exploited or  
18 deceived have a recourse, that workers have a  
19 passionate defender of their rights, and that all New  
20 Yorkers have the opportunity, the support they need  
21 to improve their financial health. All of these  
22 protections and resources are available to New  
23 Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. In the  
24 past three years, we have helped deliver more than  
25 1.3 billion dollars back to New Yorkers through debt

1 relief efforts, restitution, and financial  
2 empowerment programming.  
3

4 In New York City, DCWP protects immigrant  
5 consumers in several ways, using our broad consumer  
6 protection powers. This includes laws and rules we  
7 enforce regarding immigration service providers,  
8 which are businesses that charge fees for any kind of  
9 immigration-related service. DCWP also licenses  
10 employment agencies, which are businesses that  
11 provide job search assistance for a fee. Lastly, we  
12 use our signature consumer protection law, which  
13 applies to all businesses in New York City, to  
14 prohibit deceptive and unconscionable business  
15 practices against New Yorkers.

16 Immigration service providers are not  
17 lawyers, and there are prohibitions and limits to the  
18 types of services they can provide to consumers  
19 seeking immigration-related assistance. We have also  
20 found employment agencies to similarly target  
21 immigrant communities and individuals. DCWP conducts  
22 enforcement of immigration service providers and  
23 employment agencies through field inspections and  
24 attorney-led investigations that lead to actions  
25

1 before the Office of Administrative Trials and  
2 Hearings or state court.  
3

4           Fraudulent immigration service providers  
5 and employment agencies remain an ongoing challenge  
6 for us due to their flight-by-night nature. Many  
7 operate out of temporary storefronts, private  
8 residences, instant messaging apps, or online  
9 platforms, only to disappear after being paid by a  
10 consumer. Additionally, due to fear of government  
11 interaction, immigrant communities often hesitate to  
12 file complaints, which are essential to an  
13 investigatory process. Regardless, DCWP continues to  
14 use its civil enforcement authority where and when we  
15 can to hold unscrupulous businesses accountable, to  
16 educate New Yorkers on their rights, and to encourage  
17 consumers to come to us when those rights have been  
18 exploited.

19           In 2025, we have escalated efforts to  
20 better support immigrant communities in light of  
21 recent events. For example, last month, I convened a  
22 roundtable of community leaders and legal advocates  
23 to discuss and identify emerging trends of consumer  
24 harm and ways to strengthen our collaboration to  
25 support New Yorkers. We have also engaged with each

1  
2 of the City's District's Attorney's Offices and the  
3 New York State Attorney General's Office to establish  
4 sustainable partnerships and reduce duplicative  
5 efforts, improve information sharing, and better our  
6 interagency coordination. Recently, our field  
7 enforcement team conducted proactive inspections of  
8 business advertising themselves as immigration  
9 service providers as well as employment agencies. In  
10 the past two months, the team conducted over 750  
11 inspections resulting in almost 80 summonses.

12 We have also stepped up our  
13 investigations, including major results against  
14 immigration service providers and employment  
15 agencies, such as 100,000 dollars in penalties  
16 against Horizonte de Esperanza Court and a trial  
17 decision of 1.6 million dollars with significant  
18 consumer restitution against CMP Employment for  
19 illegal activity targeting immigrants. Lastly, under  
20 our consumer protection law, we investigated ASA  
21 College after receiving photographs of false and  
22 deceptive advertisements the for-profit school was  
23 using in New York City subways. These advertisements  
24 were clearly targeted to immigrants with promises of  
25 assistance in obtaining certain visas if one were

2 enrolled at the school. Our efforts resulted in a  
3 settlement agreement with ASA, ultimately putting it  
4 out of business and stopping further harm to  
5 immigrant students.

6 As I mentioned to the Committees before,  
7 we always want to ensure that our enforcement is  
8 paired with education so that we are empowering  
9 consumers with the information they need to protect  
10 themselves on the front end. For example, we are  
11 currently running a digital education campaign across  
12 social media platforms to highlight and educate New  
13 Yorkers under protections related to immigration  
14 service providers. Last week, we coordinated a  
15 citywide day of action mobilizing volunteers across  
16 the boroughs to distribute educational materials  
17 connecting with over 5,500 New Yorkers and ensuring  
18 that they are aware of their rights under our laws.  
19 This builds on our efforts over the past three years,  
20 conducting nearly 600 immigrant-focused outreach  
21 events to 63,000 New Yorkers on the protections and  
22 services we offer regardless of immigration status.

23 Turning to today's legislation,  
24 Introduction 205 would require DCWP to conduct  
25 outreach, education, and advertising about fraudulent

1  
2 schemes committed by immigration service providers  
3 and how to avoid them. The advertisement requirements  
4 includes television, internet, radio, print, subway,  
5 and LinkNYC kiosk. The legislation would also require  
6 the agency to report annually on its outreach and  
7 advertising efforts. We support the intent of this  
8 bill and are committed to sustainable interventions  
9 to help New Yorkers avoid common fraudulent schemes.  
10 However, we have concerns with the overly burdensome  
11 advertising mandates which will require significant  
12 new resources. We look forward to working with  
13 Council on this legislation and ensuring that New  
14 Yorkers are equipped to avoid fraudulent schemes by  
15 bad actors.

16           Next, Introduction 980 would increase  
17 civil penalties for immigration service providers for  
18 violations of DCWP's laws and rules. We support  
19 Introduction 980 and look forward to working with all  
20 of you on this bill.

21           I would like to reiterate that DCWP's  
22 protections and resources are available to all New  
23 Yorkers regardless of immigration status. Especially  
24 as it relates to the issues we are discussing today,  
25 we encourage anyone who has been harmed by fraud or

1  
2 misrepresentations to please contact our agency so we  
3 can get to work assisting you. Thank you again for  
4 the opportunity to testify on today's bills and our  
5 essential work uplifting all New Yorkers. We look  
6 forward to our continued partnership with all of you  
7 to protect our city's residents, and I welcome any  
8 questions you may have for further discussion.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
10 Commissioner.

11 So, we'll just jump into the questions.  
12 So, what are the primary types of immigration  
13 services fraud that you are seeing, and are there  
14 types of frauds or fraud or schemes that target  
15 particular immigrant communities?

16 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you, Council  
17 Member. I think generally the patterns sort of repeat  
18 in terms of what is offered and it could be people  
19 pretending to be attorneys. We know that the reliance  
20 in the word notario particularly for the Spanish  
21 speaking countries, right? Where you have to be an  
22 attorney to really be a notary and it's not the  
23 reality in the U.S. and so people will follow that.  
24 Charging for forms that are otherwise free from the  
25 government directly and basically providing

1  
2 immigration advice that... obviously, we know it can be  
3 so dangerous for somebody who is not an expert and  
4 professional duly certified to provide that advice.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: One thing I  
6 wanted to add to what I've been hearing a lot  
7 recently is folks who engage with immigration service  
8 providers that claim to have special relationships  
9 with the government, that seem to make promises they  
10 can't keep, for example, and that leads immigrant  
11 consumers down a path that is dangerous for their  
12 status.

13 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: And the immigrant  
14 consumers don't know what's been submitted, if  
15 anything, so there's a lack of clarity from the  
16 immigrant about whether something was submitted and  
17 what exactly documentation they, and also getting  
18 documentation back that they submitted to the  
19 provider.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right. And your  
21 testimony also noted social media, the use of  
22 WhatsApp and WeChat, which we see as a significant  
23 proliferator of fraudulent scams. We'll talk more  
24 about that later, but so how does DCWP investigate

1 fraud that is rampant in a specific immigrant  
2 community, such as the fraud on WhatsApp or WeChat?

3  
4 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Right. No, thank  
5 you. So, I mean, like I said, right in my testimony,  
6 we're proud of the work that we do that is for  
7 everybody, regardless of immigration status. So, I  
8 think we have different cases that we've done that  
9 may not be specifically about immigration services,  
10 but have a focus on the immigrant community. I gave  
11 the example of ASA College that basically was  
12 promising regularizing your immigration status simply  
13 by becoming a student at that institution. We have  
14 other cases that, again, that they just will target  
15 the immigrant community because they feel they might  
16 not be as knowledgeable about their rights so that is  
17 something that we do see. But generally, when  
18 somebody files a complaint, we will definitely be  
19 looking at it. In the case specific of immigration  
20 service providers, our Consumer Services Unit will  
21 definitely flag it for our attorneys because we  
22 recognize that this type of industry requires a  
23 different approach than trying to contact a business  
24 and try to mediate because then they're just going to  
25 disappear. Once they obtain people's money, they

2 might engage them a little longer, but once they find  
3 out that a government agency is looking into them,  
4 they might disappear. So, we make a little bit of a  
5 different assessment and take a different approach  
6 with that industry by having an attorney's review and  
7 determine what additional information we may need for  
8 a complainant to get more data and be able to decide  
9 on the next steps and the General Counsel oversees  
10 that unit. Is there anything else to add?

11 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: No, I think you  
12 covered sort of how we handle in a general sense.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And then for  
14 something such as where it's happening on social  
15 media, where there isn't necessarily, well, I guess  
16 there's an entity behind an account, but not  
17 necessarily a brick-and-mortar entity. How does the  
18 agency handle that type of investigation?

19 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: It's going to  
20 depend. I mean, we rely a lot, obviously, on the  
21 consumers that are giving us the information on any  
22 more details that may help us identify the individual  
23 behind the account. I think it's important to stress  
24 that we recognize how difficult it could be for an  
25 individual to come forward and report an issue that's

1  
2 happening where they feel that they've been targeted  
3 and scammed, and we do want people to know that it  
4 doesn't have to be the individual to file the  
5 complaint either. It could also be a friend or a  
6 relative, a community-based organization could bridge  
7 that gap with us to provide the information if  
8 there's fear. But when it comes to, yeah, using  
9 WhatsApp, it is a challenge that we encounter. We're  
10 still going to be depending on information coming  
11 from the complainant.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think to  
13 add into that point, the industry of immigration  
14 providers historically has had challenges because of  
15 its fly-by-night aspect. I think WeChat and WhatsApp,  
16 social media, only exacerbate that issue. And part of  
17 the communication we do on the education side is very  
18 much focused on preventative measures. Ensuring that  
19 you're going to a brick-and-mortar business, ensuring  
20 that a business has proper surety bond signage up,  
21 ensuring that you're receiving contracts, that  
22 they're not taking your originals. These preventative  
23 measures ensure that you're not falling into a  
24 deception from a business operating off of WhatsApp.

1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: However, so  
3 obviously these types of crimes, right, are very  
4 particular and do require some very particular  
5 expertise. Does DCWP, I'm going to say this wrong at  
6 least 10 times, forgive me, does the agency have in-  
7 house capacity to investigate cyber crimes, or how  
8 does the agency engage in that type of investigation?

9 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you. I'm  
10 really glad you brought that up because it's  
11 certainly, right, and we don't do criminal  
12 investigations. We're a civil enforcement agency. And  
13 that is also one of the reasons why we have the  
14 relationships, right, of establishing connections  
15 with the Attorney General's Office or the District  
16 Attorney's Offices because there are some aspects of  
17 this industry that depending on the case are  
18 definitely going to be better suited for a criminal  
19 investigation or agencies that have certain powers  
20 that we don't have just based on being a civil  
21 enforcement agency.

22 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah. I mean,  
23 that's, I think, a reality, but that's why, as the  
24 Commissioner has said, we're doubling our efforts to  
25 have information sharing with the District Attorney's

1 Office, with the Attorney General's Office. And I  
2 think it's still important for complaints to be made  
3 because even if we can't handle it directly or we  
4 determine that we are not the agency best in a place  
5 to help this individual consumer or pursue this  
6 individual investigation, we have contacts at  
7 different offices across the five boroughs, and we  
8 can talk to them and figure out what's the best  
9 approach overall, marshalling all of the City's  
10 resources to move forward.  
11

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So in this  
13 instance, again, I guess, just last week I had a case  
14 in my office where someone sent 1,500 dollars to a  
15 person on WhatsApp because it was recommended by a  
16 neighbor that this was a speedy way to get their  
17 immigration services bumped up. He sent his entire  
18 life savings to an unknown entity. What happens? Can  
19 you walk me through how DCWP handles this case?

20 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: So, thank you for  
21 that question. And again, I want to reiterate  
22 something that the Commissioner said that if, for  
23 example, the consumer doesn't want to come forward, a  
24 family member, an advocate can come forward on their  
25 behalf. I think the important part is having some

2 sort of contact information that we can continue a  
3 conversation to understand the facts. So, if we got  
4 that type of complaint, we would review it. As the  
5 Commissioner said, all immigration service provider  
6 complaints that come in through our consumer services  
7 unit now go directly to a lawyer for review. And that  
8 lawyer would look at, see if it's connected to a  
9 brick-and-mortar location, or if there's any contact  
10 info with a person that we can identify. And we can  
11 do research to see what we know about that  
12 individual, whether there are any aliases. But  
13 ultimately, if we think it goes beyond what we can  
14 reach, whether we think it's criminal, maybe the  
15 person who is holding the WhatsApp account is not  
16 even in this country. And that's why, as I said,  
17 we're redoubling our efforts to talk to District  
18 Attorney's Offices who might be better resourced and  
19 might have jurisdictional authority that might be  
20 better used to approach some of those cases. But in  
21 the first instance, it will go to a lawyer, we'll  
22 look at it, and we'll see what we can do based on the  
23 laws that we have, and we'll make a determination  
24 about whether this is something that we can pursue,  
25 or whether there are different actors within the

1 regulatory space in New York City who might be better  
2 positioned to take the lead on it.  
3

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, how much of  
5 those kinds of cases are referred out for next step  
6 to handle?

7 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I don't think I  
8 have those numbers right here for you right now. And  
9 honestly, what we want to do, and one of the reasons  
10 we're happy to be here today is just to, for you, for  
11 the Council Members and individual members to hear  
12 from us that to talk to people in your community,  
13 talk to your organization so they can go and make  
14 complaints to us. Because we're not getting hundreds  
15 and hundreds and hundreds of complaints, even though  
16 we know the harm is out there, and it's important  
17 that we hear from you and we hear from organizations  
18 and we hear from stakeholders and make complaints  
19 through our portal, our consumer complaint portal,  
20 which is used for all the consumer protection  
21 complaints, can make a complaint there. Again, it  
22 doesn't have to be the individual, it can be a family  
23 member, it can be an advocate, but it's very  
24 important that we all work together to get the facts  
25 on the ground so we can make those assessments.

2 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I think, if I may  
3 add, Chair Avilés, it's part of why it's important,  
4 right, Introduction 205, which is all about outreach  
5 and increasing the ways that we reach individuals.  
6 Because I'm proud of the work that we've done, I'm  
7 not going to tell you not, right? I mean, we do get  
8 out there, we partner with all of your offices, we  
9 partner with some of the organizations that are even  
10 here today, and it's about getting the word out  
11 because, unfortunately, in the case of your  
12 constituent, they're probably not going to get their  
13 money, and you're right, this is their life savings.  
14 I mean, back when I was at the Attorney General's  
15 Office in 2010, I think it was, I was there, similar  
16 situations, and it's heartbreaking, obviously, to  
17 meet with these individuals and tell them, thank you  
18 for coming and telling me about this, let's try to  
19 stop the conduct, but I don't know if I can get you  
20 the money back. Because it is the nature of the  
21 business, they fly by night, they disappear, they're  
22 gone, you can't track them anymore. And, you know,  
23 obviously the hope is that through more outreach that  
24 we'll continue doing and strengthening by some of the  
25 things that are in Intro. 205, and just more

1  
2 partnership, we continue to get the word out, and  
3 individuals, right, that, like you said, a neighbor  
4 said, I mean, I joked other times, I think at other  
5 hearings that my mom will get her advice from her  
6 hair salon, right, and it's just like, oh my gosh,  
7 your daughter's a Commissioner. But things like that,  
8 right, where you really want to get who's the trusted  
9 voice, who is the trusted voice where people are  
10 getting the information, how do we convince them to  
11 come to us or report on behalf of someone else so  
12 that then we can have more information to do the  
13 enforcement to the extent that we can, or partner  
14 with others that may have other tools that we don't  
15 have?

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I guess 100  
17 percent I think we are clear and hold consensus that  
18 preventative engagement is critical. However, it does  
19 beg a question around how the City is building its  
20 apparatus. If it understands that, let's say, people  
21 are victims of fraud through social media, it begs  
22 the question how are we building our apparatus to be  
23 able to track that and combat that? And so I guess  
24 what I'm not entirely hearing is how the agency is  
25 building its own capacity to be able either to

1  
2 investigate and/or address that side of it, and maybe  
3 that's not your role in particular, but we know cyber  
4 crime is probably higher than maybe almost any other  
5 crime so what I'm curious to understand is how the  
6 agency is earnestly addressing, building its own  
7 capacity to be able to support people and/or the City  
8 engage in as much prevention and response to the  
9 crimes.

10                   So, in terms of just really quickly, and  
11 I'll pass it over to my Co-Chair here, have there  
12 been any types of changes and/or frequency of  
13 immigration service fraud since the November  
14 presidential election or inauguration? Have you seen  
15 any changes?

16                   COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I mean, I think  
17 we've only received eight complaints so far this year  
18 in 2025, so we haven't seen an uptick, at least not  
19 yet. We have received 48 this year regarding  
20 employment agencies that sometimes we've seen them  
21 trying to offer their services under the guise of  
22 trying to find somebody a job. We'll continue to  
23 obviously monitor and it's one of the things that has  
24 complaints come in and we get the word out

2 anecdotally what we hear, we can see what trends, but  
3 so far has not been a big jump on complaints.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it, got it,  
5 thank you.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say  
7 on the day of action that we held, I think it was  
8 last week at 10 locations across the city, people in  
9 the streets, our folks in the community, they were  
10 definitely receptive and wanted to talk with our  
11 volunteers about this issue. Immigration service  
12 providers in particular, we were able to distribute  
13 information 10, 11 languages. So, within that  
14 context, I think there was definitely questions to  
15 the community and I think, again, to the  
16 Commissioner's point, why we are supportive of Intro.  
17 205, albeit it would require new resources, why  
18 Intro. 982 is a good approach as well to addressing  
19 higher penalties for illegal activity. So, yeah,  
20 definitely anecdotally I could say it was definitely  
21 some good feedback from the community.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Thank you. I  
23 mean, I think it's from my perspective, there has  
24 been a clear uptick in fraud in communities. I think  
25 unfortunately what we're also seeing is a clear

2 distrust or not knowing the local apparatus, where do  
3 you go for help and not wholly trusting in that as  
4 well so I think we have a double-edged challenge as a  
5 City.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I agree and  
7 I think for us, the work of the agency and the  
8 successes that we've been able to bring New Yorkers  
9 that have been able to come to us is something we're  
10 very proud of, but spreading the word of the name  
11 Department of Consumer Worker Protection is part of  
12 my, I guess, bailiwick and what I want to work on  
13 more and more because I do think once folks do get to  
14 Mike's team or to our Office of Labor Policy and  
15 Standards or to Office of Financial Empowerment, I do  
16 think that they have really strong outcomes coming  
17 out of them.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, thank you, I'd  
19 like to recognize we've been joined by Council Member  
20 Hanif.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you so  
22 much.

23 Number of questions, but I just want to  
24 start with the fact that MOIA is not here. As you  
25 were testifying and we're talking about such an

1  
2 important issue, it just strikes me as appalling and  
3 unbelievable that the City agency that is charged  
4 with working with our immigrant communities is not  
5 here, and I have to say as someone who has led three  
6 City agencies, I cannot recall a single time during  
7 my tenure as Commissioner that either myself or other  
8 fellow Commissioners simply wouldn't come to a  
9 hearing. The fact the whole agency is not here, and I  
10 know you're here and we so appreciate that, so it's  
11 not, it is just more, we have to say on the record  
12 how appalling it is that the agency that is charged  
13 with working with our immigrant communities is  
14 failing to show up on such an important issue. And  
15 honestly, it's a slap in the face not only to the  
16 City Council, but to immigrants all across New York  
17 City. So, with that said.. and we can't really have a  
18 fulsome hearing. You know, we just, we really can't.  
19 We're working obviously on the important work that  
20 you all do as an agency, but not having MOIA here is  
21 really shocking.

22 In terms of enforcement strategy, I know  
23 you talked a little bit in your testimony about the  
24 enforcement strategy that you're doing. Can you  
25

1  
2 distinguish between how much of it is proactive as  
3 opposed to responsive to complaints?

4                   COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Of course. Thank  
5 you, Council Member. Certainly, most of it, I mean,  
6 we've done a big push for proactive investigation  
7 combined between immigration service providers,  
8 businesses that we've identified and employment  
9 agency. We've done 750 by identifying, doing our own  
10 research and identifying places that either advertise  
11 as such or our inspectors have observed when they're  
12 doing their work. If there is a complaint, of course,  
13 we can take a look, but those usually when they come  
14 in, we're going to be doing what General Counsel Mike  
15 Tiger was explaining to make sure that we run them by  
16 an attorney so we don't scare away a business that we  
17 want to pursue. But most of the ones we've done  
18 recently have been proactive investigations by  
19 identifying the places and going out and finding them  
20 and I think we've issued about 80 summonses as a  
21 result of those.

22                   CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And in your  
23 testimony, you talked about the enforcement you've  
24 done in the past two months. Can you talk in a  
25 broader sense about how many inspections of

immigration service providers the agency has done  
annually since 2022?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Okay. Thank you,  
Council Member. So going backwards since 2022, we've  
done over 600 inspection of ISPs. We did not conduct  
any in 2022. We did 44 in 2023, 32 in 2024, and 541  
this year.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And how many  
inspectors do you have?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We have an active  
head count of 87 in our Enforcement Division that  
does include also our operations and admin folks. But  
I would say about 32 are actively out there on this  
and other issues. Some are specific to tobacco  
enforcement or petroleum inspections.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would  
just note that about 18 of those 87 have been  
assigned to other operations, the Sheriff's task  
force, for example, or the Mayor's Office of  
Assessments.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And how are you  
receiving the complaints about immigration services  
fraud, and how would you say the complaints are then

1  
2 being addressed? If you could talk about the  
3 sequencing.

4 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I'm so sorry. Can  
5 you repeat that?

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Oh, sure. So how  
7 are you receiving the complaints about immigration  
8 services fraud? I know obviously the portal and other  
9 ways, but if you could talk specifically about how  
10 you're receiving these complaints.

11 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you, Council  
12 Member. Yes, so like you mentioned, the portal is one  
13 way, and then sometimes we get them through a  
14 community-based organization or a Council Member's  
15 office. Council Member Won, for example, worked  
16 really hard in actually helping us identify after  
17 they saw flyers advertising an immigration service  
18 provider on Roosevelt Avenue, and that is the case  
19 that we actually did resolve last year for 100,000  
20 dollars in penalties. Unfortunately, we didn't have  
21 complainants or individuals come forward that we  
22 could get restitution for, but we did resolve at  
23 least that case. So that's one example that came from  
24 a Council Member's office.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: How many languages  
is the portal in?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Is the portal in?

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah. In other  
words, I'm concerned about language access and I just  
want to understand that element of it.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: It can be in any  
language. It can be translated into any of the  
languages for people to use it so it's friendly in  
that way.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: So there are no  
barriers, you feel, in terms of language access?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: No. Absolutely not.  
Even, I mean, in education, we have eight people in  
our Outreach Team that speaks eight languages other  
than English, for example, also to counter that with  
our education. But yeah, in terms of complaints  
coming in, I don't see a barrier for people to do it  
in a language where they're comfortable.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I wouldn't  
say, though, that there's no barrier, of course, to  
the portal. There's still tech issues, I mean, people  
having to use technology, for example, which is why  
we want to diversify the mechanisms of how we get

1 complaints, whether that's the portal, of course,  
2 which has been driving more complaints to us  
3 naturally, but also 3-1-1, in-person meetings, we are  
4 very accessible with direct phone numbers that lead  
5 to our staff and direct emails lead to our staff. So,  
6 I think these are all techniques to make sure that we  
7 get the complaints in and that we're addressing where  
8 people might have troubles with accessing government.  
9

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah. I'm concerned  
11 because we all know in this climate, people are not  
12 going to go onto the portal and report this so what  
13 other ways is the agency working to try to address  
14 that issue and get over the distrust and mistrust of  
15 government?

16 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: 100 percent, and  
17 that's why we were mentioning before that one of the  
18 ways is like, it doesn't have to be the individual,  
19 right? It could be a relative, it could be a friend,  
20 it could be a community-based organization, it could  
21 be a Council Member, it could be over the phone, it  
22 could be an email, there's different ways. It could  
23 be anonymous. Obviously, the challenge with an  
24 anonymous complaint is that we can't have that  
25 interaction with a complainant to get more follow-up

2 questions answered that would assist in developing  
3 our investigation, but anybody can file it on behalf  
4 of an individual and not identify that individual, at  
5 least not immediately. If we need more information,  
6 we'll engage in that back and forth to see what we  
7 can get and getting the comfort level to be high  
8 enough for the individuals who's impacted so that we  
9 can help them. It is very stressful. I often say,  
10 it's easy for me to say, please come, we'll help you,  
11 but I'm not the one going through it. So, we don't  
12 take it lightly that it is a big challenge for people  
13 to overcome and just even take that first step. So  
14 sometimes, for example, when you go to the portal, in  
15 the case of worker protection, for example, people  
16 can just ask a question. Perhaps you don't want to  
17 really file a complaint yet. You just have a  
18 question. So, we're going to figure out whatever  
19 ways. It's part of, I think, what we're here today to  
20 continue finding ways to improve what we do and how  
21 we do it, and that's why we held a round table a  
22 couple weeks ago with also those in this space so  
23 that we could get that feedback. It's like, how can  
24 we make sure that people really come to us and tell

2 us so that we can do our best to stop the illegal  
3 behavior?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say  
5 also on the outreach side, just to jump in quickly,  
6 Chair, I'm sorry, that in the past three years, we've  
7 done about 2,000 outreach events. I would say 600 of  
8 those were with audiences or subject matter that  
9 directly pertained or had an immigrant focus. I  
10 think, for me, it's incredibly essential that the  
11 agency maintains relationships with community-based  
12 organizations. That leverages our resources  
13 appropriately to reach into communities that  
14 otherwise wouldn't have access to us. It is an  
15 ongoing project, as the Commissioner maintained, and  
16 we always have to reinvigorate those relationships,  
17 but it's something that we're committed to doing and  
18 sustaining.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: I mean, one  
20 recommendation would be to work with sister agencies,  
21 DOE, HRA, where there's going to be a lot of touch  
22 points in making sure you're doing a robust  
23 advertising campaign that, again, is disseminated  
24 through those sister agencies I think would be really  
25 important to do.

2 A question about OATH. So, I know the  
3 number of complaints regarding immigration service  
4 providers has increased from 2022 to 2023 and 2024,  
5 but the number of cases at OATH has not increased.  
6 There were just four such cases in 2023 and 2024  
7 combined. What accounts for that difference?

8 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Thank you, Chair.  
9 I mean, the number of complaints that you're seeing  
10 in that data set that reflects any complaint with any  
11 amount of information that's come into the portal.  
12 Unfortunately, often we see that there is threadbare  
13 information. That's why we want to sort of continue  
14 to build trust so we continue to have ongoing  
15 conversations. But it is a challenge that we face  
16 that sometimes the complaints come in through the  
17 portal or through 3-1-1 without sufficient  
18 information. Or, again, another one of the systemic  
19 challenges that we and other regulators face is the  
20 fly-by-night operations of many of these businesses,  
21 and so sometimes we'll begin an investigation and  
22 then by the time our lawyers are engaging and  
23 drafting a summons, there's no one to serve anymore.  
24 And that's a real challenge. It's not just us. But  
25

2 from year to year, that can affect the number of  
3 summons as we actually file.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. I have more  
5 questions, but I now want to turn it over to my  
6 colleagues.

7 I know Council Member Hanif was going to  
8 make an opening statement, I believe.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yes, thank you. Hi,  
10 everyone. Good morning.

11 I'm Council Member Shahana Hanif. Thank  
12 you to Chairs Avilés and Menin for holding today's  
13 important hearing and for including my Intro. 205 on  
14 the agenda. I'd also like to thank Chair Avilés and  
15 Council Members Narcisse, Ung, Marte, Krishnan, Lee  
16 for introducing this bill alongside me.

17 I'm the proud daughter of two Bangladeshi  
18 immigrants and I was raised in Kensington in  
19 Brooklyn's Little Bangladesh, and I now have the  
20 privilege of representing my community as a Council  
21 Member for the 39th District. When I was a child, my  
22 parents weren't yet citizens, and I know from my  
23 upbringing that when you have precarious immigration  
24 status, there is an ever-present sense of anxiety. My  
25 parents were living typical Brooklyn lives, working,

1 raising children, and making friends in their new  
2 community. But at the same time, they were fearful  
3 that everything could be stripped away in seconds.  
4 This is an experience all too familiar to immigrant  
5 New Yorkers, arriving in a new place where you may  
6 not speak the language, may not understand the local  
7 laws, and are simply trying to build a life and stay  
8 in the place you now call home. This is where  
9 immigrant legal service fraudsters thrive. These bad  
10 actors, who are oftentimes not lawyers, prey on New  
11 Yorkers by charging high fees for bad services that  
12 may actually harm their immigration cases. What is  
13 even more frustrating is that City agencies and our  
14 network of contracted non-profit organizations can  
15 often provide these needed services for free or at  
16 low cost. For immigrants who are often living  
17 paycheck to paycheck, falling victim to fraud can be  
18 financially devastating. I was driven to introduce  
19 this bill after speaking with a recently arrived  
20 asylum seeker at a Key to the City event in my  
21 District who told me about the toll that fraud took  
22 on her family. This longstanding issue has become  
23 even worse following the recent increased volume of  
24 new arrivals. The City's Department of Consumer and  
25

2 Worker Protection describes the number of complaints  
3 on this issue as at an all-time high, and the newly  
4 established State Office of New Americans also  
5 describes an uptick. I'm grateful that DCWP is  
6 conducting outreach and education about fraudulent  
7 schemes committed by providers of immigration legal  
8 services, including through their Consumer Bill of  
9 Rights regarding immigration assistance service  
10 providers. Intro. 205 would strengthen this work by  
11 requiring outreach to include information about  
12 common fraudulent schemes and how to avoid them and  
13 to be conducted through specific media, including  
14 television, the internet, radio, print, subway  
15 advertisements, and LinkNYC kiosks. Outreach  
16 materials would also be distributed in public places.  
17 The bill would also require the Department of  
18 Consumer and Worker Protection to report annually on  
19 its outreach and education efforts. I urge my  
20 Colleagues to join this bill as a sponsor, and I look  
21 forward to the continued question and testimonies  
22 here. Thank you so much.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council  
24 Member Hanif. Council Member Brewer, would you like  
25 to ask your questions?

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
3 much. I Chair the Oversight and Investigations  
4 Committee, and there's a division there, wonderful  
5 investigators and attorneys, and they conducted  
6 observations in five Queens business advertising  
7 immigration-related services, mostly offering  
8 immigration services as part of a separate business,  
9 and they found noncompliance with City law in all  
10 five businesses, all things included, not posting the  
11 mandated signage, disclaimers, fee schedules, all  
12 wrong, and at least one business advertised it as an  
13 immigration consultant, which is absolutely  
14 prohibited by law. How can you handle, obviously this  
15 is probably very prevalent, how do you handle  
16 something like this?

17 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Well, I think part  
18 of the partnerships that we always seek is things  
19 like this. Obviously, if anybody observes this kind  
20 of conduct, we want them to reach out to us so that  
21 we can check if it's worked out, we've already looked  
22 at these businesses, or it warrants another visit,  
23 and we can proceed with summonses, and all of that,  
24 so we are constantly just, again, the proactive  
25 inspections that I was mentioning that we're trying

2 to do, not just by checking for places online that  
3 may be advertising as immigration service providers,  
4 but also as our inspectors are out conducting  
5 inspections of other businesses if they identify one  
6 that falls in this category to also look and make  
7 sure that they visit and enter and address any issues  
8 that they observe.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think, in  
10 general, our practice for our inspectors is they go  
11 in and they will have a checklist that they work off  
12 of that verifies compliance with the law. If they  
13 observe any particular violations, they will issue a  
14 summons, and that summons will be adjudicated by a  
15 judge at OATH. It's possible that these locations  
16 could have been covered in our current sweep, so if  
17 the addresses can be provided to us, we would be  
18 happy to double-check that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm sure we're  
20 doing it. I know this is very common, so I just  
21 wanted to bring it to your attention that we're  
22 trying to be supportive of your efforts.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: No. Thank  
24 you, and I think, I live off of Roosevelt Avenue as  
25 well, and I see the same activity that you're

2 describing, and hence why communities like around  
3 Roosevelt and other parts of our city, they need  
4 these more proactive inspections to ensure that  
5 illegal behavior is tampered down.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The other  
7 question I have is just this, the technology is so  
8 sophisticated now, so my question is, again, I know  
9 we don't always want to work with NYPD. I have great  
10 respect for them, but they have thousands of people  
11 watching the websites, as you know, like over a  
12 thousand, so my question is to try to be proactive,  
13 do you work with, I don't know if the AG, you know  
14 better than I, does that. I don't know if the DA does  
15 that. I know what they do, but I don't know if they  
16 have that kind of capacity, so my question is, do you  
17 work with other agencies that are constantly scouring  
18 the web for illegal actors? Obviously, they're  
19 looking probably for more criminal, and you're  
20 looking for more civil, but you know, unfortunately,  
21 they're all illegal, so my question is, what are you  
22 doing to work with other agencies on not just  
23 reference, but also proactively watching the web,  
24 which is full of this kind of activity?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yeah. No, thank you so much. We'll be doing more of that, you know, as time goes on in what we're seeing, right, with the current federal administration, because obviously, as was mentioned, during the remarks by Chair Avilés, right, we do see that people tend to, there's just more opportunity for scams when there's different administrations coming in with different approaches to our immigrant community. We work, as we mentioned, with the District Attorney's Offices and the Attorney General, and we'll continue to do that in having these discussions as well in terms of what we can do proactively with them to identify places that we should all be looking at, or, you know, instead of just reacting to a complaint that comes in.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So, they are doing that kind of proactive web research, as far as you know?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I don't know the specifics of how they're approaching these cases, but we definitely have the relationships now to be in touch with them and work together to address it as an issue.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: PD does. Go ahead.  
3 I'm sorry.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We can make  
5 sure to follow up with all the DA's offices again,  
6 and the AG about any type of cyber capacity they  
7 might have.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And the  
9 other question is, just fake, you know, keeping  
10 websites up to date. Our information, this is more  
11 MOIA than you, indicates, according to the brief that  
12 we read, that's maybe not your website, but MOIA's  
13 website is not up to date so how do you keep your  
14 website up to date and, you know, it's hard for us  
15 because our agencies cannot work in silos. We all  
16 have to work together. So, I guess, like, do you look  
17 at other agency websites because you're concerned  
18 about consumer issues? How do we keep all of our  
19 websites up to date so that there is information  
20 because the public relies on them so much.

21 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Well, we do  
22 definitely look at our website and we are constantly  
23 looking to update it and put things that are relevant  
24 or, you know, very timely in terms of cases and  
25 what's up to date, any updates that we have to rules

2 and enforcement that we do in different industries.

3 And we do work with other agencies, and so if we  
4 observe something, we would raise it, you know, we  
5 would bring it to their attention to address and make  
6 sure that we'll keep collaborating. But it's  
7 certainly great feedback that we can bring back for  
8 just in general on addressing the issue of making  
9 sure that all of our websites are up to date.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank  
11 you.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council  
13 Member.

14 In that vein, do you connect individuals  
15 impacted by immigration services fraud with trusted  
16 legal service providers?

17 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: So, we do refer them  
18 to MOIA's legal assistance groups so that they can  
19 get services through them.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, I'm sorry,  
21 just for clarification, are you directing people to  
22 MOIA who is then directing people to other people?

23 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say  
3 that we use the information available on MOIA's  
4 website with respect to the legal, I forget the name  
5 of it now.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: They rebranded  
7 that one.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Support  
9 centers.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, legal  
11 support.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes,  
13 that's, yes.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, which brings  
15 a particular challenge because MOIA's website is  
16 woefully out of date. It doesn't have links that  
17 work. They refer people to ActionNYC when they  
18 rebranded it to Legal Service Center. It is a vortex  
19 mess. So, we're referring to people to get referred  
20 to other people. I would suggest you referring  
21 directly to the legal service providers.

22 Do you have a relationship with the legal  
23 service providers or are you simply moving everyone  
24 to MOIA?

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We know the  
3 legal service providers as well that MOIA engages  
4 with. So, perhaps something we can take under  
5 advisement of how we can more directly get people to  
6 that location if there's something wrong with the  
7 website.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: There's a lot  
9 wrong. And it's not new information, which is the  
10 incredibly irritating and responsible thing of this  
11 whole mess.

12 How does DCWP determine where an  
13 immigrant who's a victim of victim services fraud is  
14 directed to? So, is it to provider? When does it go  
15 to, let's say, the Office of New Americans or the  
16 AGs? What's the assessment of how you direct people?

17 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you, Chair. I  
18 want to make sure you understood correctly. And if  
19 it's not, obviously, let me know. I know you will.  
20 But I think, so if it's somebody who needs services,  
21 which I think can happen, I think both can happen, I  
22 guess, maybe is what I'm trying to say, right? If  
23 it's a case that we identify and we're like, you know  
24 what, it's not going to be much that we can do or  
25 another government agency already has an open case

2 related to a particular immigration service provider,  
3 then we would suggest that that individual goes that  
4 way. We wouldn't do it without speaking with the  
5 individual because we're going to respect that  
6 person's information and who they reach out to  
7 initially. If they need services, we heard your  
8 feedback, so we're going to be looking at that to  
9 make sure that they are connected with a proper legal  
10 services provider, the Office for New Americans, they  
11 have their own hotline for similar providers, but my  
12 understanding is that it's two separate (INAUDIBLE).  
13 I used to oversee the Office for New Americans at the  
14 State, I had some knowledge there, but I don't know  
15 how they've potentially made changes. So, we  
16 generally do go through our sister agency in the City  
17 and, if there's other coordination, of course, we can  
18 continue to pursue that so there's more avenues of  
19 assistance for these New Yorkers.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Has the agency had  
21 the experience of people calling you back and saying,  
22 I can't get in touch with anyone, in particular,  
23 legal service providers?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I've had  
25 not had that experience or my team when they're

1  
2 engaging with folks in outreach events or in terms of  
3 constituent cases.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Well, would they  
5 know where to call back?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes. I  
7 would say that by accessing our team and what we do  
8 at outreach events, it's not 3-1-1. We have direct  
9 phone numbers to all of our team members and we also  
10 have a general intake line that we monitor.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. I have that  
12 experience all the time. If we send people to MOIA's  
13 Legal Services, they often call back and say, no  
14 one's calling me back, I cannot find a legal service  
15 provider, where do we go, so I'm a little surprised  
16 that you are not sharing that experience, but I guess  
17 I'm glad.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think  
19 customer service has always been something that we've  
20 held paramount and, in particular, my background too  
21 is community liaison. Perhaps like an elected  
22 official's office, I've gone through those same wars  
23 to a certain degree and I think from my team  
24 particularly, it's critical that we are responsive  
25 and communicative.

1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I think what  
3 it leads to is certainly nothing in your bailiwick as  
4 an agency, but the fact that we know as a City that  
5 the demands for legal service provision are  
6 significantly higher than we have been willing to  
7 invest in, like we know that is 100 percent a clear  
8 fact, so we do have a challenge of having infinitely  
9 more need than we have been willing to support so  
10 we'll continue to deal with that in our various  
11 capacities.

12 How does DCWP monitor immigration  
13 services for targeting New Yorkers in different  
14 languages? I guess you mentioned, Commissioner,  
15 earlier that you have staff that speak eight  
16 different languages. So, across this very vast city,  
17 how are those, I suspect it falls to those eight  
18 inspectors to kind of manage what is coming in in  
19 various languages?

20 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: So, these are  
21 actually not inspectors. The eight that I was  
22 referring to are from our Outreach Team in terms of  
23 the education that we provide to be able to make  
24 those connections in the language that people feel

1 most comfortable having conversations and it also  
2 obviously builds the trust.

3  
4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it.

5 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA:

6 In terms of monitoring in various  
7 languages, I don't think we have that data, but I  
8 will say that part of the inspectors going out and  
9 doing their patrols and things like that, if they  
10 observe something, not using just English, but a  
11 language that they may speak, because we do have a  
12 number of capabilities also related to languages  
13 other than English in our inspection team, they will  
14 know those as well so it'll be part of the work that  
15 they're doing on the field or we would have done it,  
16 they might have a list of places because we would  
17 have done the research ahead of sending them out to  
18 do proactive investigations as well and that's going  
19 to cover a number of languages also.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. So, is the  
21 agency able to follow up in language of whatever  
22 language is incoming?

23 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes, yes. If it's  
24 not that somebody already speaks it, then we're very  
25 comfortable using Language Line.

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I seem to  
3 remember from our budget hearing, at least, so we  
4 have about 400 active headcount, about half of those  
5 folks speak a language other than English, and I  
6 think in total it covers close to 40 languages, if  
7 I'm not mistaken.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can you say that  
9 one more time, you have 400 what? We have 400 active  
10 headcount, 400 people in the agency..

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Oh.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: And then  
13 half of those folks speak a language other than  
14 English and in terms of languages covered, it's about  
15 40, I think.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. Thank you.

17 In terms of, are there priorities given  
18 to certain languages or communities or fraud types?  
19 Are you seeing any shifts around that?

20 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: No, I don't think we  
21 have any data right now to lean us in one way or  
22 another. I think we can certainly follow the trends  
23 of the languages in the city, but we don't have  
24 enough to point us one way or another.

1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. And I guess  
3 a quick question in terms of the testimony, you  
4 mentioned in the past two months that the team  
5 conducted 750 inspections, obviously that is a very  
6 large amount. Is that resemblance of what you do on a  
7 monthly basis or was this a unique circumstance?

8 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: It was a unique  
9 circumstance, Council Member Chair Avilés. Basically,  
10 what we do in the numerous industries that we go and  
11 enforce different rules on is that we might look at  
12 trends but we may look at what's happening right now.  
13 And we know that ever since the change in  
14 administration in Washington, this is an area where  
15 we should focus and sort of flood this space in a  
16 particular way and we'll continue but I don't think  
17 it will be to that extent. Similarly, I'll give you  
18 the example of every year we do a sweep of places  
19 that do tax preparation when it's tax season coming  
20 up because we want to again remind people that, okay,  
21 this is happening, people are going to be looking for  
22 these services so how do we address that issue? So  
23 we'll do things like that, home improvement  
24 contractors, a lot of work happens in the summer when  
25 it warms up so we might like do certain focus in

1  
2 different times of the year, and this was one where  
3 we decided to do a very aggressive approach to make  
4 sure that we identified all these places and can see  
5 it and then of course we will be doing follow-up,  
6 it's not that all of a sudden we're going to go from  
7 750 to nothing but I don't think it'll be in the 750  
8 number.

9 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah, just to  
10 piggyback off, Chair, exactly what the Commissioner  
11 is saying, this is not a one and done thing. We need  
12 to look at like what are going to be the results of  
13 these adjudications so just to refresh everyone's,  
14 remember we issue summonses, they then have to be  
15 adjudicated at OATH so we don't actually get to issue  
16 the penalties directly so it has to go through the  
17 system of adjudication, and so I think once we see  
18 what the results of that are, what summonses get  
19 upheld, which businesses were out of business but we  
20 still are getting complaints about, we'll reassess as  
21 2025 goes on and we will reallocate resources again  
22 as we look at the results of this first wave.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. I'd like  
24 to recognize we've been joined by Council Member De  
25

1  
2 La Rosa and Council Member Joseph. Thank you for  
3 being here.

4 In terms of, I totally get being  
5 responsive to trends that are happening around the  
6 city, particularly in vulnerable communities, can you  
7 give me a sense though of like what would be the non-  
8 flood inspection level around immigration service?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Council  
10 Member, it's, I think it's part of what Mike was  
11 saying earlier in terms of having to evaluate what is  
12 occurring after this first sweep. In general,  
13 whenever we, the way our operations, our field  
14 enforcement happens is we have proactive inspections  
15 that occur, we have cadences that we might put on a  
16 particular industry, and certainly if we ever issue a  
17 summons that is adjudicated and the party is found  
18 guilty, that is put on a kind of a path to be re-  
19 inspected again sooner. In terms of, I guess that's  
20 all to say that while we're still evaluating, I think  
21 we have to come back to you in terms of how we would,  
22 where we expect the numbers to lie in a non-flood  
23 scenario.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You know, I think,  
25 listen, we are well aware that the agency's mandate

2 is much, much bigger than the amount of staffing it  
3 has been allocated, very well aware of that and, in  
4 fact, I think it is irresponsible of the City to  
5 continue to place mandates on an agency and starve  
6 the workforce that is supposed to implement that. So,  
7 you know, I think it's to recognize that you are  
8 operating under severe staffing limitations and so  
9 this, but it is important to understand what the  
10 general cadence of the enforcement mechanism is  
11 because if the field understands that this only  
12 happens once a year, it operates very effectively  
13 around that and we know this is a consistent issue  
14 across communities across New York City. So, I guess  
15 I'd love to understand a little bit more and  
16 certainly even with the inspections that were done,  
17 would love to understand how many of those happened  
18 in my District and particular, you know, I think what  
19 we see enormous fraudulent activity impacting the  
20 Chinese community in particular on multiple fronts so  
21 I'd love to see some more focused enforcement and  
22 support in that community is particularly vulnerable  
23 to fraud.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We can get  
25 you the numbers for those inspections.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Particularly because there are so many dialects and the community can be very isolated and not trusting for very valid reasons of civil entities.

So, I'd like to turn it over at this point to Council Member Hanif for her questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much. Commissioner Mayuga and Carlos, great to see you.

So, could you share how the current budget for immigration services fraud outreach is divvied up? I know that DCWP is supportive of my bill, Intro. 205, but the costs are what are concerning, so I'd like to know just how are you spending the funds outside of, of course, salaries on outreach materials? Is there a set number of workshops that you're conducting? Is there a set amount of resources being allocated to actual trusted service providers? Are you able to elaborate on that?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Okay. Thank you, Council Member. So our budget, I apologize because I didn't bring numbers on our outreach team for the budget specifically. We can certainly circle back with what that is. It wasn't too long ago we just testified for the budget. It's not broken down for

2 ISP specifically in terms of outreach. I think one of  
3 the things that we try to do when we do outreach,  
4 yes, we'll have days of action like we had recently  
5 for this specifically. And last year we were having  
6 the one on worker bill of rights, right? Once we put  
7 out that bill of rights that based on the legislation  
8 passed by this Council and we'll have another one of  
9 those coming up again closer to the summer. But,  
10 generally, our outreach will cover a number of  
11 issues, if not, general overviews of the agency  
12 because we do want people to try to understand the  
13 different things that they can come to us for, and  
14 sometimes it also obviously depends on who we're  
15 partnering with if they have a particular area of  
16 focus that we want to stress, whether it's the  
17 Libertistas, right? We're going to make sure that  
18 they know about those rules that apply to them or  
19 again, just making reference to our free taxpayer  
20 program, okay, these are the things we want you to  
21 pay attention but also know these other piece about  
22 us generally and try to get people, honestly, I try  
23 to just get people to follow us on social media  
24 because it's the way that information is received by  
25 most people, right, @helloDCWP for anybody who's

2 listening and is not following us yet, to please  
3 follow us and get information that way. So, there's  
4 no specific numbers in terms of outreach for ISPs  
5 because it's just all of outreach, and we can get  
6 back to you on what that number is.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So like you're  
8 saying like every sort of material includes a menu of  
9 the services offered or the rights that...

10 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: No. We have specific  
11 ones like for example, the immigration, the consumer  
12 bill of rights for immigrants, right? Like that's  
13 going to be one thing. There's obviously a budget  
14 that was spent on that in terms of photocopies and  
15 distribution of that. I just don't have the numbers  
16 in front of me.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say  
18 in terms of the outreach team wise, it's just five  
19 folks on that team. We don't have like particular  
20 contracts necessarily with providers that facilitate  
21 outreach. All the outreach we do is our own with our  
22 partners in the communities and then we do have  
23 literature that we've developed that it did have a  
24 cost and we update periodically. We have our consumer  
25 tip book for immigrants. We have a consumer bill of

1  
2 rights for immigration service providers. So that's  
3 kind of all existing in-house and we can figure out  
4 the numbers for you there.

5 In terms of this bill, 205, which we are  
6 supportive of, I anticipate and I think your  
7 essential staff should have these numbers already,  
8 but it's about 1.7 million we would anticipate in new  
9 budget. That is around 680,000, that is new staff. In  
10 particular, an outreach coordinator, somebody to  
11 develop contacts with ethnic media channels, for  
12 example, procurement for the advertising campaign,  
13 two folks to work on complaint intake systems and  
14 reporting analysis to help guide our eventual  
15 reporting as well as enforcement. And then...

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And how many people  
17 would that be?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: That's five  
19 people.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Additional five?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: That's an  
22 additional five, yes.

23 And then in terms of the OTPS for the  
24 advertising campaign, we anticipate based on the  
25 prescription that is in the bill that that's close,

1  
2 upwards of a million dollars. With TV ads alone being  
3 around 500,000, if we want to also consider subway  
4 ads, bus shelters, all these things, I think that's  
5 where the OTPS would land if the bill would be passed  
6 as is. I think for that reason, we've wanted to  
7 highlight that these are budget realities that we  
8 have to face so I think we're supportive of the bill  
9 and want to talk through these real numbers with you  
10 all as we negotiate this in redlining.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: No. Absolutely, and  
12 I appreciate that because you all are already doing  
13 incredible work to get the word out at a time when  
14 we've got fraudsters preying on our community, which  
15 is a longstanding issue, and then you've got the  
16 federal administration and our top leaders also  
17 targeting our community and detaining them, deporting  
18 them without due process. And we have to talk about  
19 those issues as something that we're going to see far  
20 more of an uptick with and a normalization of like  
21 that this is normal, that yeah, immigrant  
22 communities, because the federal administration  
23 thinks what you said or what you think isn't fine by  
24 our rules, you're not going to be allowed in our  
25 country anymore, and I think our city has a distinct

1  
2 and unique role to play in this particular political  
3 moment, which is why I want to push for the  
4 additional funding to be something that is seriously  
5 considered because of the ways in which people are  
6 isolating and are experiencing a different level of  
7 fear that's not just as they're trying to get their  
8 citizenship status done or reunited with their family  
9 members.

10 For the five outreach folks that are on  
11 the team, what are their roles?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, we've  
13 broken up that team's kind of ambit to focus on kind  
14 of turf areas that they cover. The turfs really are  
15 focused partly a little bit on where they live, but  
16 also their language capacity as well. I think both of  
17 those things help them facilitating outreach, both in  
18 the mornings and the evenings and weekends.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And it's like  
20 street outreach, like what's the?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: So, my  
22 preference usually is for folks to be able to do  
23 presentations or remarks to captive audiences. We'll  
24 go to your monthly meeting, we'll go to a tenant  
25 association meeting, things like that. The second

1  
2 preference I would have then is probably canvassing,  
3 direct outreach, like meeting folks at high transit  
4 subway hubs, engaging with them with our literature,  
5 our worker bill of rights, our consumer tip booklet.  
6 And then also we do high visibility events like  
7 tabling, for example. So, I kind of rank order that  
8 outreach and that sort of priority myself. I think  
9 it's a way for us to really have dedicated time with  
10 New Yorkers because again, to reiterate, I think the  
11 work that we do is incredibly essential for folks  
12 living in New York City.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then alongside  
14 the street canvassing and the presentations, is there  
15 like a set of community leaders that the team is  
16 meeting with on a regular basis, or is there like a  
17 round table that happens with trusted immigration  
18 service providers, and what kinds of digital media  
19 and PSAs has DCWP engaged in to get the word out?

20 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you. Yes, so I  
21 think Mixteca is still here, and I know that recently  
22 I went and spoke with community leaders from the  
23 organization. That was really exciting to talk to  
24 them because it's like, okay, I'm going to give you  
25 the tools and they become sort of ambassadors, right,

1  
2 of all this information that is correct information  
3 to share with their community, so we do things like  
4 that. I mentioned a round table we did recently with  
5 organizations, especially to talk about immigration  
6 service providers, and we do plan to continue doing  
7 those in a quarterly basis so that we can continue  
8 engaging and re-evaluating and making sure it's like,  
9 okay, what is it, what's going on, what are we  
10 seeing, any changes that we should be making or  
11 consider any issues that we're seeing, so we'll plan  
12 to continue doing that. In terms of social media,  
13 sometimes we partner also with organizations on  
14 Facebook Live events, to provide information. So,  
15 we'll broadcast those as well and continue. We do  
16 have a digital campaign that's been ongoing for the  
17 last month or so specific to immigration service  
18 providers so we'll do things like that as well.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it. And then  
20 how are you assessing how the agency is doing in  
21 terms of outreach? Like, is there a sort of, do you  
22 guys have deliverables that you're like, we have to  
23 meet this objective?

24 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes. Carlos' team is  
25 quite amazing. I mean, they do have targets that

1  
2 they'll share with me to make sure that we're all  
3 aligned on how many presentations we're aiming to  
4 complete. We look at prior year numbers and see how  
5 we can either surpass that or meet it or adjust  
6 depending on how successful we were or make any  
7 particular changes we might need to make. In terms of  
8 social media, we can certainly see followers. If it's  
9 like on our website, you can see how many clicks  
10 there are and things like that. So, we do track  
11 things in a way that we believe will be helpful for  
12 us to assess whether we were successful or not and  
13 how it informs what we do in the future.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. And then  
15 my final question is, could you just describe the  
16 relationship of DCWP and MOIA on this issue? And I  
17 know that there's the referral process, but how else  
18 are you two agencies engaging?

19 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you. Yes, we  
20 work together with them. Certainly, one of the main  
21 issues here will be to obviously refer individuals to  
22 the providers that are accessible through MOIA. We've  
23 heard the issues with the website, so we're going to  
24 be working on that to make sure that we're checking  
25 to make sure that individuals do receive the guidance

1  
2 that they need, and certainly when we're doing  
3 outreach and education is another area where we  
4 collaborate with them. Obviously, especially we're  
5 trying to target the immigrant population, they're  
6 going to be strong partners with us as well.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yeah, I'd  
8 say MOIA, we collaborate on a number of events  
9 together. You know, as recently as that day of action  
10 last week, MOIA contributed a number of volunteers to  
11 help staff locations, but also with the language  
12 capacity. There are the referrals that you refer  
13 complaints to us as we refer folks to their services  
14 as well. I think on the advocacy level, we're in  
15 constant discussions too about what's happening  
16 across the country. So, they've definitely been close  
17 partners with us in this space.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: On that piece, the  
19 advocacy around the state and Fed, could you just  
20 describe what's going on and any updates? And then  
21 I'll...

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, I  
23 think the particular... I'm sorry.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: No, go ahead.  
25

1  
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'm sorry.  
3 I think at that particular moment that comes to mind  
4 of where we had discussions with respect to our free  
5 tax prep program and what we should be communicating  
6 out to folks about filing their taxes in this  
7 particular moment. I think we have guidance up on our  
8 website now. Any first time ITIN filers should really  
9 meet with the legal service provider first, for  
10 example, and that's some of the work that we're doing  
11 ourselves to make sure that communications are clear  
12 between our agencies on that issue.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you. A  
14 couple more questions, and then I'm going to turn it  
15 back over to a couple of Colleagues who have  
16 questions. Earlier when you were answering a question  
17 by Chair Avilés, Commissioner, you mentioned that  
18 you're directing people to MOIA. Since MOIA refuses  
19 to be here, how do we know what those outcomes are of  
20 those referrals?

21 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We can certainly get  
22 those outcomes and bring them back to you and share  
23 them with you. Is it specific about people who reach  
24 out and get referrals?

25

1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah. Because I  
3 mean, if you're referring people directly to MOIA, we  
4 don't then know what the outcome is. We don't know if  
5 people are having their issues answered. We don't  
6 know how the agency is responding. It's like we're  
7 dealing with a black box because they're refusing to  
8 be here today. So, I mean, it's pretty insane that we  
9 now have to rely on you to get an answer from MOIA,  
10 but that is what it is.

11 Are you following up with victims of  
12 fraud? Like, what's the agency followup? So, if  
13 someone has been victimized by an immigration service  
14 provider, then what type of followup are you having  
15 directly with the victims?

16 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Well, we certainly  
17 do a lot of communication with them in terms of  
18 questions that we may have to assess the case and how  
19 far we can take the investigation to make sure that  
20 we get the information that we feel is necessary to  
21 move the investigation forward. And, of course,  
22 making sure that then they are receiving the services  
23 that they need from a legitimate source.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And in the past few Fiscal Years, how many cases of fraud does DCWP receive from MOIA?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I don't think we have for the past few Fiscal Years. I know in my communications with MOIA that I've received, MOIA and OASO, this year at least four. Last year, I think, a similar number as well.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Those are Calendar Years. I'm sorry.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you. I understand Council Member Joseph has some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chairs. Quick question around Protecting Immigrant New Yorkers Task Force. Does DCWP and MOIA still meet with members of this task? If not, would it be helpful for the task force to reconvene?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We participate in the PINY Task Force.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How many meetings have you've had so far this year?

1  
2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: The PINY  
3 Task Force is, I think it's a separate organization.  
4 They've had two meetings, I believe, this year.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And you've  
6 attended the meetings and shared resources with them?

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes. I  
8 mean, I think we've been a part of the PINY Task  
9 Force since I started the agency almost nine years  
10 ago.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: With this  
12 landscape right now, with the federal effective, how  
13 does DCWP handle immigration service fraud cases with  
14 the landscape changing every minute because  
15 everything is something new. What we knew today is  
16 not what's happening tomorrow so how are you handling  
17 that on the ground?

18 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: As soon as we get a  
19 complaint, one of the things that we were sharing  
20 earlier is that our team knows to refer it to an  
21 attorney so that we can look into it further without  
22 doing outreach to the business right away because our  
23 experience is that they'll disappear as long as they  
24 get outreach from a government agency so we want to  
25 be very strategic about it so that's one way that

1 we're working with it. Obviously, we want to do more  
2 education. It's part of the reason we're supportive  
3 of the bill to get more outreach done so that  
4 individuals know to come forward and let us know of  
5 anything that they're seeing. And then at the same  
6 time, as our inspectors are out conducting their  
7 field work, if they identify also other issues, they  
8 will bring them back for us to make an assessment and  
9 see if it warrants a different approach.  
10

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Since January of  
12 2025 until today, how many complaints have you  
13 received?

14 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I think it's eight.  
15 Eight complaints.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And how do you go  
17 about, I wasn't here for the beginning of the  
18 meeting, sorry about that, but how do you go about  
19 when you receive a complaint, what are the steps that  
20 you take?

21 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Go ahead.

22 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: So, as the  
23 Commissioner mentioned, Council Member, if a  
24 complaint comes in through 3-1-1 or DCWP's own  
25 portal, it goes to our Consumer Services Unit, which

2 is our intake unit for consumer complaints and, for  
3 this category, all the immigration service provider  
4 complaints go to a lawyer who will assess the  
5 complaint, see if we have enough information to  
6 pursue an investigation, reach out to any contact  
7 provided with the case and also determine whether  
8 this is a complaint that while there are facts, would  
9 be better handled by another agency like a District  
10 Attorney's Office or the Attorney General. One thing  
11 we were talking about earlier was that we are  
12 redoubling our efforts to have good relationships  
13 with the five District Attorney's Office, with the  
14 Attorney General so, if we think this might be part  
15 of a bigger criminal investigation, we know that we  
16 can send it there. And likewise, the District  
17 Attorneys can send us stuff if it's something that's  
18 more ripe for civil enforcement.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is any of these  
20 cases ever involved in NYPD?

21 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: No. I mean, not in  
22 recent memory.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you,  
24 Chairs.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. We'd  
3 like to acknowledge we were joined by Council Member  
4 Krishnan.

5 I'd like to follow up on the task force.  
6 I want to make sure that we're talking about the same  
7 task force. So, the PINY Task Force is being  
8 convened. Who sits at that table and who's convening  
9 it?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, from  
11 our team, it's our Director of Community Affairs and  
12 some attorneys from Mike's team that would join those  
13 meetings. I think there are, when I've gone to those  
14 meetings, there've been representatives from the  
15 District Attorney's Offices. I think ONA had a  
16 representative as well. I think we're talking about  
17 the same PINY Task Force that was convened by NYIC  
18 for many years. I know, in most recent months,  
19 they're rethinking how they want to operate and like  
20 in terms of agenda setting and having certain chairs  
21 and vice chairs, and I think that's been kind of  
22 what's taken up the agenda for most initial meetings,  
23 but they have further meetings that are coming down  
24 the line that I think will be quarterly that, of  
25 course, we will continue participating in and making

2 sure our staff is available with information and  
3 updates on our end.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, who's driving  
5 it in particular, like is it ONA or?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I thought  
7 it was NYIC. I feel a little bit weird maybe talking  
8 about it when it's not ours, but...

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: It's not yours,  
10 yeah.

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I can find  
12 out for sure.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But you are  
14 participating.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: But we are  
16 there for sure.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you can speak  
18 to what is happening there. We'll follow up,  
19 obviously. It's not your task force, but you are  
20 there.

21 In terms of, let's see, I just wanted to  
22 follow up on, I'm sorry if I missed this. Can you  
23 note just for the record like what the outreach, I  
24 may be conflating these things, so your budget may be  
25

2 different, but the outreach and like education,  
3 campaign part of your budget is what?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I don't  
5 think we didn't have a particular number with respect  
6 to our campaign, our current OTPS for campaigns in  
7 general. I will say that we have five staff members  
8 on our team that currently do outreach. And then with  
9 respect to Introduction 205, if it were to advance, I  
10 think we'd anticipate that being about 1.7 million.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, the 1.7  
12 million includes the five FTE?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: No. So, I'm  
14 sorry. The 1.7 million would be another five FTE  
15 outside of the five I'm mentioning. So, we currently  
16 have five outreach folks, and then for this bill, we  
17 have a request for five FTE.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I understand. But  
19 outside of the FTE though, obviously purchasing  
20 digital ads, doing all that manner of work requires  
21 resources. Is there an allocated budget for printing  
22 flyers and doing digital outreach?

23 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: You mean currently?

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Correct.  
25

2 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We do. That's what I  
3 was saying. I don't have the number in front of me.  
4 We had it like for the budget hearing, and we just  
5 didn't bring it today, but it's easy to share. Yes.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And you  
7 mentioned that you also receive cases from the  
8 District Attorney.

9 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah, we could. We  
10 haven't recently, but again, we've really doubled  
11 down on sort of rekindling those relationships,  
12 making sure we have that dialogue. And these are  
13 conversations we've been having since the beginning  
14 of 2025. So, we're hopeful that if District Attorneys  
15 find something that's really more prone for civil  
16 enforcement, which may happen for a variety of  
17 reasons, they have our contact, they have my email,  
18 they have my colleagues' emails, and they can reach  
19 out to us. We're hopeful that will bear fruit as we  
20 proceed in 2025.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And in terms  
22 of, I guess I'd like to know from your perspective,  
23 what are the tools that you think you need in order  
24 to maximize this work, to address this issue, or  
25 address many of these issues.

2 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes, yes. I really  
3 think when it comes to immigration service providers,  
4 we just really need people to come forward. We really  
5 struggle getting complaints in so that we can look  
6 into them. And then from there, really have a better  
7 sense of where we're getting stuck in terms of moving  
8 an investigation forward. But we really have a hard  
9 time getting individuals to let us know what's  
10 happened to them quickly because, as we said, and I  
11 know that all of you know this as well, these fly-by-  
12 night operations are very difficult to catch,  
13 especially if there's too much time that goes from  
14 the moment that the action took place to the moment  
15 that we find out about it and get enough information  
16 to move it forward. So, I'll start with that. I'll  
17 pass it over to Mike Tiger for follow up.

18 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah. I agree with  
19 everything the Commissioner said, of course. But  
20 also, this really isn't all hands-on deck. I think we  
21 all recognize this from all the different government  
22 stakeholders that we should be working together, and  
23 so I think the biggest thing is beyond even  
24 resources, beyond what's going on in individual  
25 investigations, building the sustained trusting

2 relationships in different communities, and that's  
3 where the Council and individual members can really  
4 be invaluable and your staff can be invaluable in  
5 building that rapport, sending people to us that we  
6 can build up investigations. This was mentioned  
7 before, but we actually had a successful case in the  
8 Horizonte case at OATH last year, and we worked hand  
9 in hand with Council Member Won's staff to build up  
10 that case, and that was very helpful so I think if we  
11 all work together, I think that is like the most  
12 important thing to just have that constant drum beat  
13 to build up the trust so people can provide  
14 complaints that we can do investigations and it  
15 becomes a virtuous cycle.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in terms of  
17 the timeframe or from the moment of notification or  
18 are you providing summonses on the spot when you walk  
19 in and you see all this stuff, you give them a  
20 summons. From that time to potentially OATH, what's  
21 the length of time that that normally takes?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yeah. I  
23 don't have those numbers with exactitude right in  
24 front of me, but it can take months. It takes months  
25 typically for the time between a summons is issued

1  
2 and then it's ultimately adjudicated OATH. And of  
3 course, businesses have the opportunity to seek  
4 adjournments. They sometimes default and are able to  
5 vacate the defaults and it gets put back on a  
6 calendar. And that's not an immigration specific  
7 issue. That's just the way that items are adjudicated  
8 generally. So, I can't give an exact number of like,  
9 oh, in this case, it'll be definitely this amount of  
10 months before we get something that's finally  
11 resolved. Once something is actually heard in the  
12 Hearings Division at OATH, businesses also have the  
13 right to appeal within OATH to their Appeals Unit. So  
14 from the time we actually have a final adjudication  
15 that can actually be collected upon, a summons that  
16 has issued penalties, it can take a big chunk of the  
17 year.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I think that  
19 the nature of the challenge that we're facing here,  
20 when you see upon return, most of them have up and  
21 left. We're not going to be able to draw enforcement  
22 in a real way if cases drag on. Obviously, we always  
23 support due process and we want that due process. But  
24 do you have any recommendations around how we can  
25

2 speed up that process to ensure there is actual  
3 accountability and people are following the law?

4 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I think that's  
5 something that we want to give a little more thought  
6 to. I think it's definitely a systemic issue. That is  
7 a challenge that we have experienced throughout the  
8 years. I don't want to give an ad hoc recommendation  
9 right now, but I think you raise a very real concern,  
10 Council Member, and I think we can talk internally  
11 and discuss whether we have more concrete  
12 recommendations for the Committee.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. Do you have  
14 any last-minute questions?

15 Okay. I think we may have, give it one  
16 last look before you're off the hook.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That rhymed.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I know, I'm  
19 talented. Hold on one second.

20 Okay. Just one thing that continues to  
21 arise, and I think this is related to some earlier  
22 questioning. Is DCWP tracking any fraudulent websites  
23 that are popping up relevant to someone's immigration  
24 case, such as fraudulent websites that maybe mimic  
25 the Department of Justice?

2 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I don't think we  
3 have a systemic list that we're developing, but the  
4 issue that you're raising, we are familiar with. And  
5 if we see, obviously, if we get a tip or a complaint  
6 that focuses on a certain site, we'll start to  
7 develop that list and that'll be in our files, but we  
8 don't have a systemic list of all sites that are  
9 mimicking government sites.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. When you  
11 actually search for USCIS, the second search is a  
12 fraudulent site that mimics exactly that site. It is  
13 a huge problem.

14 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Is this the one  
15 that's mentioned in the report that just has like  
16 periods in between, or no periods in between?

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I don't remember,  
18 I don't recall, but this site has been noted by legal  
19 service providers across the board, particularly with  
20 all these mandates that are coming from the federal  
21 government and also the new scams of people receiving  
22 direct emails, receiving correspondence through mail  
23 that says they should be deporting themselves. Is  
24 that something that has come to the awareness of the  
25 agency?

2 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I mean, I think  
3 we're publicly aware of that. We haven't gotten  
4 individual complaints about it, but we are aware, we  
5 read the same reports that you have seen. But, again,  
6 if any of your constituents faces that and has like  
7 an actual letter that they can forward to us, that  
8 always will be helpful?

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah.

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: There are a  
11 few community-based organizations that have raised  
12 this question of the information coming out to self-  
13 deport, and that's a conversation we're having with  
14 them as well off the back of our round table we had  
15 the other week.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in the  
17 instance of this particular website that is clearly  
18 fraudulent and very, very dangerous, how does the  
19 agency begin to try to address this issue?

20 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I mean, it's  
21 definitely something we're looking at, and that's why  
22 of course we're engaging with all the other  
23 regulatory stakeholders in the city. That's something  
24 we can talk with those partners about what's the best  
25 approach. It can be a challenge to take down

1  
2 fraudulent websites. It's something that we deal with  
3 in different subject matter areas that we regulate.  
4 But it's definitely a real harm, and we recognize  
5 that. And definitely, it's something we're thinking  
6 about and thinking about with partners about the best  
7 way to approach.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. I guess with  
9 that, obviously we have a ton of work to do. I thank  
10 you for your time and being here in the work that you  
11 do. I would just continue to encourage proactive  
12 enforcement. What is clear is severe noncompliance  
13 with our laws across the city, and I hope our City  
14 will continue to invest in this agency's capacity to  
15 maximize its work and protect New York City residents  
16 because immigrants and non-immigrants alike, that is  
17 what the work of the agency is so thank you.

18 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you so much.

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: And we'll  
20 continue to have folks monitor the hearing as well.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

22 And now we will open for public  
23 testimony. I remind the members of the public that  
24 this is a government proceeding and that decorum

1 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of  
2 the public shall remain silent at all times.

3  
4 The witness table is reserved for people  
5 who wish to testify. No video recording or  
6 photography is allowed from the witness table.  
7 Further, members of the public may not present audio,  
8 video recordings as testimony but may submit  
9 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-  
10 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

11 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
12 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-  
13 at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,  
14 you will have two minutes to speak on today's  
15 oversight hearing topic, Combating Immigration  
16 Services Fraud, or on the legislation on today's  
17 hearing agenda, Introduction 205, Introduction 980.

18 If you have a written statement or  
19 additional written testimony you wish to submit for  
20 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony  
21 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written  
22 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72  
23 hours of the close of this hearing. Audio and video  
24 recordings will not be accepted.

1  
2 The following languages are available for  
3 interpretation, English, Spanish, Mandarin, and  
4 Haitian Creole.

5 For in-person panelists, please come up  
6 to the table once your name has been called. Now I  
7 will call our first in-person panel. Madeleine,  
8 Hildalyn, Luisana, Amavilia, and Jorge.

9 Okay. And we've also been joined by  
10 Council Member Bottcher.

11 Good afternoon. Would you like to start?

12 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon, members of  
14 the Council. I am a member of La Colmena. It's an  
15 organization for immigrants' rights in Staten Island.  
16 Today, I wish to not share my name, but it is  
17 important to raise my voice about what's happening in  
18 my community. At this moment, I feel a huge fear, and  
19 I feel the fear amongst people, in regards to the new  
20 registry of immigration, and the risk of deportation,  
21 and how our lives could be in a detention center.

22 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 INTERPRETER: For this reason, I'm very  
24 grateful with La Colmena, because it's a very  
25 trustworthy source of support.

2 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3 INTERPRETER: And they're doing everything  
4 that's possible to respond to questions and to guide  
5 the community amongst so much uncertainty.

6 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7 INTERPRETER: I support the projects  
8 Intro. 0205 and Intro. 0980.

9 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

10 INTERPRETER: Because these can protect  
11 immigrants to not fall into the hands of dishonest  
12 actors.

13 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 INTERPRETER: Please continue pushing  
15 these initiatives in favor of the immigrant  
16 community.

17 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18 INTERPRETER: And do not forget La  
19 Colmena.

20 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 INTERPRETER: Because it does need a  
22 strong support in Staten Island.

23 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 INTERPRETER: Thank you for your time.  
25

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE)

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Dear Members of the Council,  
I am a member of Mixteca, and I come today to testify  
in regards to the abuse and injustices I have  
suffered from an immigration attorney.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I have lived in the U.S. for  
more than 25 years.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And I have been looking for  
documentation for several years because I wanted to  
be part of this community.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: With a formal status.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: However, I've been looking  
for an attorney for several years, someone who can  
help me and my husband.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And on February of 2024, I  
did find a lawyer who told me he could help me with  
my military parole.

1  
2           AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3           INTERPRETER: Because my son was in the  
4 Marines.

5           AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6           INTERPRETER: And several attorneys had  
7 already said that I had no case.

8           AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9           INTERPRETER: However, this attorney  
10 promised me that he could help.

11          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12          INTERPRETER: But when it was time to sign  
13 the agreement.

14          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15          INTERPRETER: They didn't offer  
16 translation.

17          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18          INTERPRETER: And because of need.

19          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20          INTERPRETER: Because I needed it, I  
21 signed it without confirming.

22          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23          INTERPRETER: So later on during the  
24 process, the attorney treated us in a horrible way.

25          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

2 INTERPRETER: And he only took part of our  
3 money.

4 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 INTERPRETER: The first incident happened  
6 on December 18 of 2024.

7 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 INTERPRETER: When I requested an update  
9 on my status of adjustment.

10 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11 INTERPRETER: And he told me that I had to  
12 present a medical exam.

13 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 INTERPRETER: I told him I was receiving  
15 chemotherapy.

16 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17 INTERPRETER: And that I was having  
18 trouble getting the medical exam certified.

19 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 INTERPRETER: However, I had not been  
21 informed of this request beforehand.

22 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 INTERPRETER: And when I asked him why he  
24 had taken so long.

25 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1

2

INTERPRETER: In presenting my request.

3

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

4

INTERPRETER: Mr. Leonard Hecht.

5

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6

INTERPRETER: Started shouting at me.

7

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8

INTERPRETER: He threw our papers to the

9

floor.

10

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11

INTERPRETER: And started screaming at us

12

that we didn't know what he was already doing for us.

13

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14

INTERPRETER: Then he threw us out of the

15

office.

16

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17

INTERPRETER: And my husband, Enrique

18

Pastor, witnessed this mistreatment.

19

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20

INTERPRETER: His assistant, who's, I only

21

know him by the name, Larry.

22

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23

INTERPRETER: Intervened and spoke with

24

him.

25

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1  
2 INTERPRETER: And later on, Mr. Hecht left  
3 the office and he did apologize for his behavior.

4 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 INTERPRETER: We came back on January 9th  
6 of 2025.

7 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 INTERPRETER: To do a followup on my case.

9 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

10 INTERPRETER: And sometime before, during  
11 the process, we had agreed that I would pay 6,500  
12 dollars.

13 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 INTERPRETER: For the whole adjustment of  
15 the status.

16 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17 INTERPRETER: But he had said that I would  
18 only need to pay 3,000 dollars to present the  
19 request.

20 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 INTERPRETER: So that same day he called  
22 us.

23 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 INTERPRETER: So he called us to the  
25 office and said he would not pay, he would not

1  
2 present the request until I would pay the total  
3 amount of 6,000 dollars.

4           AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5           INTERPRETER: When I questioned the sudden  
6 change in disagreement.

7           AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8           INTERPRETER: He got irritated, he started  
9 complaining.

10          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11          INTERPRETER: And he told us that this  
12 country did not want us because we were too ignorant  
13 and poor.

14          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15          INTERPRETER: He seemed frustrated.

16          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17          INTERPRETER: He was telling us he was  
18 just trying to protect us.

19          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20          INTERPRETER: And he started raising his  
21 voice, accusing us.

22          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23          INTERPRETER: Of not wanting to pay him.

24          AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

2 INTERPRETER: So, I asked for someone who  
3 would speak Spanish there.

4 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 INTERPRETER: And he asked me why if I had  
6 been living here for 25 years I did not speak  
7 English.

8 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 INTERPRETER: I requested an interpreter  
10 again.

11 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 INTERPRETER: And he told us that his  
13 parents knew seven languages.

14 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 INTERPRETER: And, again, he questioned,  
16 he asked me why I didn't know English.

17 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18 INTERPRETER: And he said that unless I  
19 gave him all of the money, he wouldn't bring me an  
20 interpreter.

21 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

22 INTERPRETER: I told him I didn't want to  
23 continue the case with him.

24 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

2 INTERPRETER: And he said that I needed to  
3 pay the whole amount of 6,000 dollars.

4 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 INTERPRETER: So, at first he didn't want  
6 to return the documents.

7 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 INTERPRETER: So, on Wednesday, March 26,  
9 I called again to ask for my documents.

10 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11 INTERPRETER: And with Larry's help, he  
12 said we could pick them up.

13 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 INTERPRETER: But he left it very clear  
15 that he wouldn't return any money.

16 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17 INTERPRETER: We paid a total of 3,500  
18 dollars.

19 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 INTERPRETER: And he never presented our  
21 request.

22 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 INTERPRETER: This whole process affected  
24 me too much.

25 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1  
2 INTERPRETER: Because I was also in the  
3 middle of chemotherapy.

4 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 INTERPRETER: My mental and emotional  
6 health.

7 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 INTERPRETER: My mental and emotional  
9 health really took a fall because at some point I had  
10 the hope that I would get my documentation. And at  
11 the end I just lost 3,000 dollars.

12 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 INTERPRETER: We have worked too hard to  
14 have a dignified life here in the U.S.

15 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

16 INTERPRETER: And it's unfair that they  
17 abuse and treat us like this.

18 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

19 INTERPRETER: That's why I present my  
20 testimony today so that the Council will pass the  
21 laws that will benefit our community.

22 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 INTERPRETER: The immigrant community that  
24 helps this city so much.

25 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1  
2 INTERPRETER: Thank you for your time.

3 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
4 LANGUAGE)

5 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

7 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
9 LANGUAGE) Thank you.

10 MADELEINE BRAVO: Thank you. Good  
11 afternoon, Chair and Council Members. My name is  
12 Madeleine Bravo, and I am the Legal Services  
13 Coordinator at La Colmena, an immigrant rights  
14 organization proudly rooted in Staten Island. At La  
15 Colmena, we hold regular community sessions to hear  
16 directly from our community, listening to their fears  
17 and questions. With the support of our trusted  
18 consultant attorneys, we also offer consultations to  
19 provide accurate, reliable information. Too often,  
20 our community comes to us after encountering  
21 misinformation, especially online and through word of  
22 mouth. In some cases, community members have paid  
23 over 3,000 dollars and have been misled by  
24 individuals claiming to be attorneys, claiming that  
25 they can offer a sped-up citizenship process, going

1  
2 as far as creating fake USCIS documents, and  
3 impersonating judges. More recently, we've seen  
4 people arriving at our doors with deportation notices  
5 or unsure how to navigate the new immigrant registry  
6 requirements. These situations create fear and  
7 confusion and, in that confusion, people become  
8 vulnerable to exploitation. We are gravely concerned  
9 that predatory actors will exploit this  
10 vulnerability, preying on our community by offering  
11 false promises and charging outrageous fees, putting  
12 people's future at serious risk. This is why we fully  
13 support Intro. 0205 and Intro. 0980. These measures  
14 are critical to protect our immigrant communities  
15 from fraud and abuse. We urge this Council to  
16 continue standing with us and to never forget Staten  
17 Island, and thank you for your time and for your  
18 commitment to justice.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.  
20 We will not forget La Colmena and Staten Island.

21 HILDALYN COLON: Good morning. My name is  
22 Hildalyn Colon, and I'm the Deputy Director of New  
23 Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE, located in  
24 Jackson Heights, Queens. I want to bring another  
25 perspective that I think that we have talked on is

1  
2 the importance of this type of legislation, but I  
3 think the example of the person or one of our members  
4 show that this is a gentleman that have a license  
5 that is behave this way and treat this person this  
6 way. So, part of the legislation that we put in here,  
7 and that I hope that you guys approve, is putting  
8 everybody under the same bar. Part of the biggest  
9 challenges that we see are not what I think some of  
10 what describe is that we are challenging with non-  
11 profit organizations that represent themselves and  
12 provide legal services even that they're not DOJ  
13 accredited, or they don't have a lawyer and a  
14 guidance, which I will tell you, for non-profit like  
15 us, it becomes a nightmare. Because what the members  
16 in the community are feeling is, but that community  
17 organization told me yes, and you tell me no. And I  
18 have a person here sitting next to me that go through  
19 the same process, as we have a similar offering in  
20 NICE. We have open, and I will speak to both of us,  
21 that organizations like us have open legal services  
22 provided under the guidance of an attorney because of  
23 the need because we cannot offer everything, and I  
24 think part of the issue is that the need for us to  
25 provide in different levels of immigration. I think

1  
2 that is one of the key things that we see here. The  
3 other issue that I want to raise is the part that we  
4 need to have examples. I know Vilda and I know DCWP,  
5 but the cases that they come forward have never come  
6 to the press, have not seen. Part of the community,  
7 and this is from my years of experience of actually  
8 prosecuting immigration fraud in the DA's office, is  
9 that communities need to see that when I come  
10 forward, works. And that is part of the problem that  
11 we have seen lately. I will tell you from my  
12 experience, it cannot be the color of the day. This  
13 issue about immigration fraud has to be a continuous  
14 process, not only one time.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,  
16 Hildalyn. I just want to make sure, just for clarity,  
17 you're suggesting that there's bad actors both in the  
18 for-profit space and the non-profit space. I would  
19 assume they're all held to the same standard. There  
20 are legal ways and requirements. I just want to make  
21 sure I'm understanding what you're saying.

22 HILDALYN COLON: Well, I think there's an  
23 issue, right? Immigration law is a federal issue,  
24 right, and in order to provide organizations like us  
25 and others, especially non-profits, the goal here is

1 that we become DOJ accredited. This is how a person  
2 that, and I'm going to use an example, as a  
3 coordinator, right, we need the guidance of an  
4 immigration attorney to provide legal advice. In the  
5 pathway, what we're trying to do is funding  
6 organizations like us to address that path because  
7 that's how you take some of the bad actors of the  
8 non-profits to operate in this wiggle room, I'm  
9 helping, but I'm providing immigration services, but  
10 I'm doing this. I think that's one of the things that  
11 all non-profits that wants to get into this field as  
12 a level basic, we need to get to DOJ accredited  
13 because that's kind of like having a license. The  
14 other thing that we haven't discussed but that I will  
15 recommend from my experience, we need to get all  
16 these people that are providing in New York City  
17 immigration services registered. Right now, DCWP  
18 cannot ask you, you can't even answer, how many are  
19 out there because they have something to lose and  
20 they did the same approach with the employment  
21 agencies. They forced them to register. They need to  
22 cost them. We need to get them out there because I  
23 will tell you, we provide services in the epicenter  
24 of fraud land. Jackson Heights, Roosevelt Avenue, my  
25

2 God, you can see anything that you can think of. And  
3 the thing is that if you don't force them to come out  
4 and there's some kind of registration, like it's not  
5 going to happen. We need to figure out a way, how do  
6 we deal with the bad actors? The lawyers have the bar  
7 to basically to deal with them, but then this  
8 organization, non-profits, right now they're in limbo  
9 and it's a misguidance because we're here to help  
10 you. This is where the wiggle room starts to unfold.  
11 I don't know if that answered your question.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, no, it  
13 definitely helps. I think the struggle is capacity  
14 and ensuring that we're arming everyone with  
15 sufficient capacity to be able to provide.

16 HILDALYN COLON: But I think I will tell  
17 you, and this is capacity can be divided. I think  
18 that part of the process that it was lacking here in  
19 this issue is that there are some cases that could  
20 receive by non-profits instead of like the Catholic  
21 Migration Services. I think we have to determine who  
22 need a representation or who is not. And I think  
23 right now part of the biggest challenge right now  
24 that we are foreseeing is that everybody's doing  
25 their immigration case on pro se base because nobody

1 can represent you. Asylum cases take at least 10  
2 years. So, it's rarely who's going to be with you for  
3 so long. That is part of the process.  
4

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Got it.  
6 Thank you. And thank you around the suggestion of  
7 registration. I think this goes to like so many  
8 different issues. I appreciate the testimony. Thank  
9 you.

10 Jorge.

11 JORGE PAZ-REYES: Good afternoon, Council  
12 Members. Thank you so much for the opportunity to  
13 testify today. My name is Jorge Paz-Reyes and I'm the  
14 Community Organizer at Mixteca, a community-based  
15 organization located in Sunset Park. We serve both  
16 the immigrant community and we have been over a  
17 decade in the area. I'm here with community partners  
18 from La Colmena, NICE, as well as community members  
19 from these organizations to express the importance of  
20 combat immigration fraud. At Mixteca, we offer a  
21 range of social and legal services to immigrant  
22 families, and actually, we were DOJ accredited  
23 recently. Their support is invaluable, but the lack  
24 of constant on-site legal counsel still represents a  
25 barrier, underscoring the urgent need to better

1  
2 educate and protect the community. I want to kind of  
3 second what Hildalyn said here of the importance of  
4 bringing visibility to the issues that have happened  
5 and also creating a space that is safe for community  
6 members to present these cases and talk about it. I  
7 think when we found out there was going to be this  
8 hearing, we did a little bit of a campaign within  
9 Mixteca to talk to different community members and we  
10 got a lot of people come forward talking about the  
11 immigration fraud. However, it was really challenging  
12 to get them here to testify. There is a fear of  
13 immigration, of persecution. A lot of them do not  
14 want to share their names. And also, kind of goes  
15 right now, this recommendation that when we present  
16 things like that, we shouldn't have cameras on  
17 community members because unfortunately, this is the  
18 climate that we have right now. I wanted to talk  
19 specifically about a community member that was victim  
20 of fraud, especially within this fraud of VAWA. So  
21 VAWA is a pathway for serving survivors of domestic  
22 violence to apply for immigration relief. Without  
23 relying on their abusing, this is a critical  
24 protection, but in the wrong hands, it can be very  
25 fraudulent and it could be harmful. We had a

1  
2 community member that spent over 27,000 dollars. The  
3 family and the community members currently seeking  
4 mental health at Mixteca, and we're providing all the  
5 supports because it has devastated her, and her only  
6 support system is her son and her son was accused of  
7 abusing her. So, at the interview with immigration,  
8 she had to tell the truth. She had to tell that the  
9 lawyer actually was lying and she was denied the  
10 opportunity. However, this case wouldn't have become  
11 so important in attention if it hadn't been covered  
12 by the news. This was very related to a Bronx lawyer  
13 that had done this for years, thousands of cases.  
14 That's why here at Mixteca, with La Colmena, NICE,  
15 we're kind of bringing this perspective of a small,  
16 mid-sized community organizations and the importance  
17 of creating pathways and laws such as 205 and 980 to  
18 make sure that we're protecting the community. Thank  
19 you so much and we really urge for you guys to pass  
20 this bill. Have a great day.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Jorge.  
22 And we just want to thank all of you, La Colmena,  
23 Mixteca, NICE, for all the work that you are doing  
24 under some pretty difficult circumstances because you  
25 hold both the heart and the challenges that our

1  
2 community is facing while it's actively being  
3 attacked by the federal government so thank you for  
4 the work that you're doing and thank you for your  
5 testimony.

6 The next panel is going to be Nick  
7 Gulotta and Deborah Lee and Christian.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And just as they're  
9 coming up, I just want to take a moment to recognize  
10 we've been joined in the balcony by Empowering Our  
11 Families Initiative Youth Leadership Institute, thank  
12 you so much for joining, and Pearls and Ivy  
13 Foundation Scholars. We're so happy that you're all  
14 here with us today.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Nick, if you'd  
16 like to start.

17 And we are adding Natalia Nuñez to this  
18 panel.

19 NICK GULOTTA: Thank you, Chairs Avilés  
20 and Menin for being champions on this issue. My name  
21 is Nick Gulotta and, while I serve as the Chief-of-  
22 Staff to Council Member Julie Won, I'm here to  
23 testify in my personal capacity as someone who's  
24 worked on this issue for many years and as the former  
25

1  
2 Director of Outreach and Organizing for the Mayor's  
3 Office of Immigrant Affairs, MOIA.

4 As the federal government implements  
5 cruel anti-immigrant policies and eliminates critical  
6 consumer protections, New York City can step up to  
7 protect immigrants by passing Intros 980 and 205.

8 With every new executive order, New Yorkers are  
9 targeted with scams, false promises, and misleading  
10 claims. Signage, flyers, palm cards, and digital ads  
11 from notarios that are meant to trick immigrants to  
12 believing that they are seeking assistance from an  
13 attorney have never been more brazenly advertised  
14 than they are today. The current civil penalty for an  
15 ISP for improper advertisements or engaging in  
16 prohibited conduct is a mere 3,500 dollars for a  
17 first violation. That amounts to a slap on the wrist.

18 The going rate for a single asylum application can be  
19 as high as 5,000 dollars on Roosevelt Avenue. Intro.  
20 980 doubles DCWP's current penalty schedule, raising  
21 the minimum penalty to 7,500 for a first violation  
22 and going up to 20,000 for repeat violations. This is  
23 a critical step to make examples and deter bad actors  
24 who seek to take advantage of New Yorkers. Council  
25 Member Hanif's Intro. 205 expands and makes essential

1 and well-considered updates to Local Law 63 of 2017.  
2 But it's also necessary that MOIA and DCWP conduct  
3 meaningful ISP fraud-specific outreach. The sort of  
4 all-inclusive outreach tactics, like including a  
5 message about ISP fraud in a 30-minute Know Your  
6 Rights presentation or in a flyer with a list of  
7 other resources, while important, are not a  
8 replacement for a dedicated outreach campaign that  
9 Intro. 205 requires. Historically, the City has had a  
10 complaint-driven approach to investigating notarial  
11 (TIMER CHIME) fraud, and I'll wrap up, but the  
12 evidence of deceptive business practices are in plain  
13 view in our communities. We can start by requiring a  
14 minimum number of annual and educational visits and  
15 inspections to the thousands of businesses with the  
16 words notario or multi-services in their names. And  
17 similar proactive investigations can be done on  
18 digital ads over Facebook, WeChat, WhatsApp. Would  
19 also just like to mention that we'd highly recommend  
20 a sort of worst landlord's watchlist approach to  
21 inform New Yorkers about bad actors and popular scams  
22 for DCWP's website. And I'm happy to answer any  
23 questions.  
24  
25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.  
3 No, I think that's a great idea. I like to call it  
4 the shame list. Yeah, no, very good idea. And I think  
5 also Hildalyn's point of really advertising and  
6 letting folks know, not only can claims result in  
7 positive response to the community, but that we are  
8 there doing that work is really important to send the  
9 message that we are standing with people and we're  
10 standing against these fraudulent issues. I also just  
11 thank you. I think the minimum number of  
12 investigations is definitely something we should  
13 pursue because as you saw, the agency seems to have a  
14 slapdash response so thank you for your testimony.

15 JORGE PAZ-REYES: Thank you so much. And  
16 I'll just say, I think that they do an incredible job  
17 at being responsive to complaints when they get them.  
18 But if we're relying on people to come forward  
19 despite the stigma, despite the risks, we're never  
20 really going to address this issue in its full form  
21 so I would highly recommend a minimal number.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I'd agree  
23 with that. Certainly not to say that they're not  
24 doing anything. They are responding, but there is a  
25 serious shame that is connected to the experience of

1  
2 having been victimized by fraudsters that I don't  
3 think we discussed at all. We should have discussed  
4 how we address the shame and stigma around that. But  
5 these are all interim important measures that we  
6 should be pursuing, including the legislation so  
7 thank you for your work.

8 JORGE PAZ-REYES: Thank you.

9 NATALIA NUÑEZ BARRAGÁN: Good afternoon,  
10 Members of the Council. My name is Natalia Nuñez  
11 Barragán. I'm the Senior Manager of Membership and  
12 Capacity Building at Immigrant ARC. Immigrant ARC is  
13 a coalition of over 80 legal services providers  
14 delivering service across the New York State. Our  
15 mission is to increase access to legal justice and  
16 legal counsel for immigrants New Yorkers by  
17 mobilizing legal service provider and addressing  
18 systemic barriers to justice. Immigrant ARC applauds  
19 the New York City Council's work to combat  
20 immigration services fraud, whereby unscrupulous  
21 individuals who are neither licensed attorneys or  
22 accredited representative. These prey upon those  
23 needing legitimate legal services by misrepresenting  
24 the natural service they are qualified to provide.  
25 Today, our immigrant communities are under

1  
2 unprecedented attack, threats that weaken both our  
3 cities and its economy. We have witnessed  
4 indiscriminate enforcement, illegal detentions, and  
5 racial profiling with arbitrary quotas that mandating  
6 that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement,  
7 ICE, officers make 75 enforcement arrests per day.  
8 President Trump has ordered immigration authorities  
9 to detain individuals, quote, to the fullest extent  
10 possible. This significantly increased the number of  
11 people held in ICE and Customs and Border Protection.  
12 These facilities that government experts and federal  
13 courts has previously deemed as barbaric and  
14 unconstitutional. All this creates conditions that  
15 are ripe for the proliferation of immigration service  
16 fraud. I-ARC members see the consequence of notarial  
17 frauds firsthand, and I'm bringing an example of one  
18 of our members. The illegal project is currently  
19 serving two clients (TIMER CHIME) who has previous  
20 came by a man named Fernando Aguilar, who has charged  
21 these two victims around 6,000 dollars and 13,000  
22 dollars just to file an asylum application with a  
23 scheme that brings biometrics appointments and a  
24 genuine letter from the U.S. Department of Homeland  
25 Security. All these examples demonstrate the kind of

1 fraud that victims might face at this moment. Our  
2 recommendation from I-ARC, and you can see it more in  
3 the summation of the testimony, we want to expand and  
4 promote community resources for education. I think  
5 that's the first thing that we need to promote  
6 education for all our services providers. Just like  
7 Immigrant Help New York that we have a different  
8 language access and community face and know your  
9 rights and how to introduce when ICE attentions comes  
10 to you. The ABA's Commission of Immigration has  
11 states fight notarial fraud, as does the American  
12 Immigration Lawyers Association that I also cited on  
13 the document. We also want to expand public funding  
14 for legal representation, because this is the bare  
15 minimum that we could do for our immigrants in New  
16 York. Expand and have free access to legal  
17 representation. I also want to note that Immigrant  
18 ARC is part of Protecting Immigrant New Yorkers,  
19 known as PINY Task Force, which was created in 2013  
20 and strengthened the enforcement against unauthorized  
21 practice of immigration law, and is led by NYC, New  
22 York State Attorney General Office, District  
23 Attorney's Offices, Local Government Consumer Affairs  
24 Department, and different federal agencies. We invite  
25

1  
2 other organizations to join and keep this initiative  
3 alive in this moment that we need it more than ever.  
4 Thank you so much.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,  
6 Natalia, for all your work and recommendations. I  
7 appreciate your testimony.

8 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon, my name is  
10 Christian. I am not using my last name to protect my  
11 identity.

12 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 INTERPRETER: I'm here to talk about how I  
14 was defrauded by someone who said she was my  
15 attorney.

16 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17 INTERPRETER: After I came to the U.S. in  
18 New York City, I was desperate to find someone to  
19 help me file for asylum.

20 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 INTERPRETER: I found someone on Facebook  
22 who said she was an attorney.

23 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 INTERPRETER: We talked on WhatsApp, and  
25 she said she could help me.

1

2

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3

INTERPRETER: She later sent me the

4

instructions on how to transfer money.

5

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6

INTERPRETER: And I paid her a total of

7

1,570 dollars.

8

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9

INTERPRETER: She sent me a copy of my

10

asylum application and said that it had been

11

submitted.

12

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13

INTERPRETER: And she later asked me to

14

appear on a videocall for an immigration court

15

hearing.

16

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17

INTERPRETER: I remember she asked me to

18

dress formally.

19

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20

INTERPRETER: I appeared at the hearing by

21

Google Meets.

22

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23

INTERPRETER: My attorney appeared

24

virtually, and I remember the judge wearing a black

25

robe.

1  
2 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3 INTERPRETER: And the judge, who spoke  
4 Spanish to me, told me that I had eight days to pay a  
5 little over 5,000 dollars.

6 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7 INTERPRETER: And that if I didn't pay at  
8 that time, I would owe 25,000 dollars.

9 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

10 INTERPRETER: The judge told me that I  
11 should work with my attorney in order to pay this.

12 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13 INTERPRETER: This was the first time I  
14 was working with an attorney so I had no idea this  
15 was unusual.

16 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17 INTERPRETER: I only learned because I was  
18 working with law school students who sat with me  
19 during the hearing and then informed me that the  
20 immigration court judge should not have been charging  
21 me any money and that my attorney was probably  
22 tricking me into paying this money.

23 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 INTERPRETER: They also told me the asylum  
25 application and the receipt notice looked fake.

2 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3 INTERPRETER: So I had no idea because I  
4 can't read in English.

5 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 INTERPRETER: I got scared when the  
7 students told me I had been defrauded.

8 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 INTERPRETER: I'm not even sure if this  
10 attorney was a real attorney.

11 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 INTERPRETER: This is wrong, and there  
13 should be information given to immigrants to be able  
14 to protect ourselves against fraud.

15 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

16 INTERPRETER: And thankfully, I'm now  
17 working with an attorney at the Legal Aid Society.

18 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

19 INTERPRETER: Other immigrants are being  
20 defrauded like me.

21 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

22 INTERPRETER: And in this time, immigrants  
23 are just afraid of saying anything about their rights  
24 or how they should be treated fairly in this country.

25 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1  
2 INTERPRETER: Thank you for letting me  
3 speak.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
5 LANGUAGE)

6 DEBORAH LEE: My name is Deborah Lee, and  
7 I'm the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law  
8 Unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you for this  
9 opportunity and the opportunity to testify. I'm  
10 testifying today alongside Christian. We are not  
11 including his name to protect his identity.

12 Non-citizens across this country and in  
13 New York City are living under siege under this  
14 current federal administration with a constant  
15 prospect of detention and deportation. Our federal  
16 government can now expel non-citizens and perhaps  
17 also U.S. citizens to a country where they have no  
18 lawful status, to a prison there for an indefinite  
19 sentence, and can do this without regard for court  
20 orders and to provide these people due process. Our  
21 government is also encouraging the dismissal of  
22 asylum claims because initially filed applications,  
23 including those by unrepresented individuals, are not  
24 deemed sufficiently legally detailed. And our  
25 government is using the Internal Revenue Service to

1 hunt down immigrants and to cancel lawfully obtained  
2 Social Security numbers to force non-citizens to live  
3 in fear and go underground. For these reasons, as  
4 well as over 243 policy actions by this  
5 Administration, non-citizens are at high risk of  
6 being a victim of immigration services fraud.  
7 Unscrupulous attorneys and non-attorneys can and will  
8 use this climate of fear to further exploit non-  
9 citizens who are desperate for any help to navigate  
10 our increasingly hostile immigration legal system.  
11 With a dearth of immigration legal service providers,  
12 non-citizens often find themselves paying for  
13 immigration legal help that they cannot afford. At  
14 Legal Aid, we have heard repeated accounts of clients  
15 like Christian who have been defrauded in order to  
16 take their money. We need the City to invest more in  
17 immigration legal services for non-citizen New  
18 Yorkers as well as provide robust community education  
19 efforts to investigate fraud-related crimes. Thank  
20 you for the opportunity to appear today.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
23 you so much for all the work that you are doing and  
24 your partnership. Thank you.

25 DEBORAH LEE: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: The next panel,  
we're going to have Hannah Strauss and Marc Valinoti.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you.  
Please begin.

HANNAH STRAUSS: Hi. Good afternoon, and  
thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My  
name is Hannah Strauss and I'm the Supervising  
Attorney of the Immigration Court Help Desk and the  
Family Group Legal Orientation Program at Catholic  
Charities Community Services. Each year, our  
programs, ICH and FGLOP, serve thousands of  
unrepresented immigrants. We provide critical  
education and guidance on deportation proceedings and  
potential forms of immigration relief as well as  
application assistance. We are uniquely situated  
within the immigration courts and we provide first-  
come, first-served consultations, so we find that  
we're often the first free attorneys that people are  
able to speak to about their immigration cases.  
Unfortunately, today marks the final day of both ICH  
and FGLOP as the federal government has chosen to  
terminate our contracts as of midnight tonight.  
Still, Catholic Charities remains deeply committed to  
serving New York's immigrant community through our

1 broader legal services. Because of our wide reach,  
2 Catholic Charities regularly hears from immigrants  
3 who have been the victims of fraud. We have seen many  
4 heartbreaking examples that are echoed through the  
5 panelists who have already spoken today, including we  
6 have seen notarios who charge fees to complete asylum  
7 applications or other types of immigration  
8 applications only to file them incorrectly with  
9 incorrect information or not at all. Often, the  
10 immigrant is unaware that the notario is unable to  
11 provide legal advice or represent them in their court  
12 proceedings. We have also seen scammers posing as  
13 immigration attorneys, tricking migrants into  
14 believing that they have applied for asylum, as the  
15 panelists spoke about, by issuing fake notices and  
16 even fabricating entire virtual court hearings. This  
17 causes not just financial loss but also serious harm  
18 to legitimate cases where these individuals are  
19 attending fake hearings instead of their government-  
20 scheduled hearings. We have also seen many instances  
21 of these 10-year visa schemes where immigrants are  
22 misled into filing baseless applications (TIMER  
23 CHIME) that lead to the immigrant being placed into  
24 removal proceedings. We have also seen immigration  
25

1  
2 service providers who charge outrageous fees for  
3 asylum applications and tie the work to installment  
4 payments. They often then abandon those cases when  
5 the individual is no longer able to pay and the  
6 individual is left with no application filed and the  
7 money lost. Catholic Charities strongly supports  
8 Intros 980 and 205, currently under consideration,  
9 which aim to increase penalties for fraudulent  
10 practitioners and improve fraud prevention and  
11 reporting. These measures are essential to protecting  
12 our most vulnerable neighbors from life-altering  
13 harm. Thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you very  
15 much.

16 MARC VALINOTI: Good afternoon. My name is  
17 Marc Valinoti. I'm the Assistant Director of  
18 Immigrant and DV Services at NMIC. So, I don't want  
19 to be redundant with my other peers and colleagues  
20 who have testified. I do want to highlight a very  
21 common practice we see as an immigration service  
22 provider. Instances of fraud range from the  
23 extravagant, which a gentleman just presented, but  
24 all too often they're very similar and simplistic  
25 schemes. I know the Consumer Protection Department,

1  
2 you know, I have faith that they're doing good work,  
3 but there should be many, many more complaints being  
4 filed in a city of this size. To illustrate, a client  
5 is promised employment authorization and a path to  
6 getting a green card. For anyone who's been surviving  
7 or supporting a family without status for years or  
8 decades even, this is an invaluable proposition no  
9 matter the cost. As we talked about, the attorney or  
10 notario prepares an application that they know will  
11 never be approved. They rush the client through the  
12 process, don't ask any relevant questions, and have  
13 them sign without explaining. As mentioned in this  
14 hearing, we frequently see or are seeing now  
15 fraudulent Violence Against Women Act applications  
16 with bogus claims of domestic violence that the  
17 victim has not even been asked about. There's also,  
18 of course, phony asylum claims for people who have  
19 been here for years or decades when a claim normally  
20 needs to be filed within one year. The scam relies on  
21 the fact that victims become eligible for a temporary  
22 work card while the app is pending. Therefore,  
23 someone with a totally and facially baseless app will  
24 receive an employment card by default. This is very  
25 powerful in inducing and propagating fraud because

1  
2 it's in their hands. They can see progress on their  
3 case, but they don't understand that the government  
4 issues these temporarily and that it has nothing to  
5 do with the validity of the case. It is a very  
6 insidious problem to educate people on. We are in  
7 favor of both measures, but (TIMER CHIME) also  
8 increased legal funding because the best way to  
9 explain to someone that they should not seek out a  
10 bad actor, that they shouldn't file anything, is a  
11 one-on-one conversation where you establish trust  
12 with the client and tell them that, unfortunately,  
13 there's nothing for them, but we find ourselves  
14 warning people more and more, like, please, do not  
15 waste money. It will get you in trouble, and it will  
16 just leave you with thousands of dollars poorer.  
17 Thank you very much for the opportunity.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you so much.  
19 Council Member Brewer has a question.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
21 much. Both NMIC and Catholic Charities are the best.  
22 Catholic Charities, so with that cut in funding,  
23 what's Monsignor Sullivan going to do to keep people  
24 doing the same work, if anything?

25

1  
2 HANNAH STRAUSS: That's a great question.  
3 Right now, we're searching for additional funding. I  
4 think we've applied for funding from the City. We've  
5 applied for foundation funding, and we're hoping to  
6 hear back so that we can keep our staff, keep our  
7 team together, and keep doing the work that we are  
8 doing now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What kind of money  
10 are you looking for? What was the cut approximately?

11 HANNAH STRAUSS: It was 1.2 million was  
12 our contract for ICH and FGLOP.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

14 HANNAH STRAUSS: Thank you.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Great. Thank you  
16 both for coming today and testifying.

17 And our last in-person panel, before we  
18 go to Zoom, is Sharon Brown and Raul Rivera, if you  
19 could please come down. Thank you.

20 As was stated by my Co-Chair, there is  
21 actually no video recording, but you can submit  
22 transcripts of the recording to the Sergeant-at-Arms.

23 RAUL RIVERA: (INAUDIBLE)

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Sorry. I can't hear  
25 you.

1  
2 RAUL RIVERA: We're not recording from the  
3 table. We've been told many times. We understand it.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: So that's  
5 permitted? Okay. Thank you for the clarification.  
6 Okay. Do you want to?

7 RAUL RIVERA: Only from the witness table.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Do one of you  
9 want to begin?

10 SHARON BROWN: Hello. My name is Sharon  
11 Brown. Before I begin, release the hostages, let  
12 Yahweh's people go, defend Israel, and happy holy  
13 week.

14 For immigration, to combat fraud, we need  
15 to know who people are. There should be a immigration  
16 fraud database created of illegals who cross the  
17 border when we catch them, and we also should have,  
18 when people cross the border, we should have videos  
19 and we should also have pictures taken at the border  
20 so we can identify who it is and put out the videos  
21 and put out the pictures so that someone might be  
22 able to identify who they are, what country they come  
23 from, or whatever. We should not have the immigrants  
24 as the only one that are getting cash cards and all  
25 of these different things. It should be for our

1  
2 veterans, our military homeless, and those who  
3 defended our country. We do want to take care of the  
4 immigrants who come here who need sanctuary, whether  
5 they cross the border or not. But we need to know who  
6 they are. And when they do get here and they actually  
7 need sanctuary, we need to make sure that we help  
8 them with funding or whatever it is they need when we  
9 actually determine they need our help. There's  
10 circumstances in their country or something going on  
11 that they need sanctuary, we will actually afford  
12 that to them. But for those who are abusing it and  
13 coming across, we need to make sure that we have a  
14 database and we can get them out of the country. We  
15 need to make sure the people that are crossing the  
16 border weren't returning from being trafficked or  
17 something like that so we definitely need a database  
18 because some people that are (TIMER CHIME) crossing  
19 the borders may have started out as Americans younger  
20 or something like that. We just need to know who they  
21 are.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay.

23 SHARON BROWN: Thank you.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you.

25

1  
2 RAUL RIVERA: Council Member Alexa Avilés,  
3 Chair of the Immigration Committee, your actions have  
4 raised serious concerns about your commitment to  
5 representing the interests of American citizens and  
6 native New Yorkers. Specifically, your defense of  
7 individuals like Mahmoud Khalil, a known Hamas  
8 sympathizer, is alarming. As a representative of  
9 District 38, your primary responsibility is to serve  
10 the people of New York City. Instead, your actions  
11 seem to prioritize the interests of certain groups  
12 like ProBono.net over those of your constituents. Key  
13 concerns, lack of representation, your defense of  
14 Hamas sympathizers suggests you're not prioritizing  
15 the safety and well-being of American citizens and  
16 native New Yorkers. Conflict of interest, your  
17 actions may be seen as conflicting with the interests  
18 of the community you serve, particularly given the  
19 role as Chair of the Immigration Committee.  
20 Questionable alliances, your association with  
21 individuals or groups perceived as sympathetic to  
22 Hamas raise questions about your allegiances,  
23 commitment to the people of New York City. Call to  
24 action, re-evaluate your priorities. We urge you to  
25 reassess your priorities and ensure that your actions

1 align with the interests of your constituents.  
2  
3 Transparency and accountability, provide transparency  
4 regarding your association and actions and be held  
5 accountable for your decisions as a representative.  
6 Serve the community, focus on serving the people of  
7 District 38 and New York City rather than the special  
8 interest groups. Conclusion, as a Council Member,  
9 your role is to serve the people, not special  
10 interest groups. Your actions have raised serious  
11 concern and it's essential to address these concerns  
12 promptly. Thank you to our 72nd United States  
13 Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, for sending back  
14 Mahbub Khalil back to where he belongs. Thank you so  
15 much.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Completely off  
17 topic. Moving on.

18 Next, we're going to have Christopher  
19 Leon Johnson.

20 If you cannot... decorum in the Chamber and  
21 if you cannot do that, you can be dismissed.

22 Mr. Johnson.

23 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, Chair  
24 Avilés. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I just  
25 came from Housing, about security guards. While at

1  
2 the same time, about to say about the unions, but  
3 that's a different story. By the way, unions are part  
4 of the reason that the immigration frauds are  
5 happening because what happens is some of these  
6 immigration lawyers fund these unions under the  
7 table. What happens is that these politicians are  
8 scared of these unions, so they're empowered to do  
9 what they want. They're empowered to do what they  
10 want and that's what happens with these immigration  
11 lawyers. At the same time that the City Council needs  
12 to be more in government and really do their job and  
13 themselves as Council Members, as Council Members,  
14 not outsourcing this type of stuff to the non-  
15 profits, that you'd be surprised at getting money  
16 from these same immigration lawyers, so-called  
17 immigration lawyers, immigration services, to educate  
18 the people about what's a real immigration lawyer,  
19 what's your rights as an immigrant, what services you  
20 need to get, what services you can get as an  
21 immigrant, how much you got to pay. The City Council  
22 needs to design a unit within the City Council to  
23 designate certain non-profits that are eligible to do  
24 immigration services for constituents that's coming  
25 from the border. Let's keep that 100 percent. But

1  
2 like I said, everybody knows a lot of fraud in this  
3 city because there's a lot of lawyers that they see  
4 this as a lot, they know the process of getting a  
5 green card or getting a visa or getting like a work  
6 permit, like a worker's permit, and they know every  
7 loophole, every exploitative loophole. But until  
8 these City Council Members here disassociate  
9 themselves from these so-called lawyers and these  
10 advocates, nothing's going to change here. So that's  
11 all I got to say. Thank you and enjoy your day.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Mr.  
13 Johnson.

14 And next we will move to virtual on Zoom,  
15 we'll call Alice Davis and Stephanie Rovine.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

17 ALICE DAVIS: Hi. Good afternoon,  
18 Committee Chairs Avilés and Menin and Members of the  
19 Committee on Immigration and Consumer and Worker  
20 Protection. Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
21 regarding Bills 205 and 980. My name is Alice Davis  
22 and I'm the Deputy Director at Catholic Migration  
23 Services. Catholic Migration Services provides free  
24 legal services and information to low-income New York  
25 City residents in three main areas, immigration,

1 workers' rights, and housing. For over 50 years, our  
2 Immigration Unit has provided both removal defense  
3 and affirmative legal assistance to immigrants  
4 residing in New York City. More recently, our Pro Se  
5 Plus team, which was created a few years ago, has  
6 worked with unrepresented asylum seekers with legal  
7 orientation, screenings, triage, and application  
8 assistance. To review some of what some of the other  
9 providers have said, the immigration process is often  
10 very long and expensive and complicated. And in  
11 recent years, the availability of quality and  
12 affordable immigration legal services has become very  
13 scarce. As a result, we are seeing that many of our  
14 immigrant clients have turned to notarios who falsely  
15 advertise immigration legal services, even though  
16 they have no legal training or not authorized to  
17 perform some of these services. We applaud the City  
18 Council for taking measures to protect New York City  
19 immigrant populations from fraudulent immigration  
20 services providers, and we feel that it is critical  
21 at this time to implement these additional  
22 protections. We have seen instances of providers who  
23 hold themselves out as non-profits but have charged  
24 exorbitant fees to prepare asylum applications. On  
25

1 many occasions, we have cleaned up and corrected the  
2 mistakes of notarios, including the use of incorrect  
3 applications and the submissions of applications to  
4 incorrect government offices, and we have found that,  
5 in essence, our immigration team is spending an  
6 inordinate amount of time (TIMER CHIME)

7  
8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.  
9 Thank you.

10 ALICE DAVIS: Thank you.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Next, we have  
12 Stephanie Rovine.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

14 STEPHANIE ROVINE: Hi. I'm Stephanie. I'm  
15 the Healing Centers Program and Development Director.  
16 It's an honor to be here today with so many people  
17 doing such important work on behalf of the community  
18 that we're all working with, and I'm here to just  
19 speak briefly about the importance of continued  
20 funding for the Healing Center during such a critical  
21 and scary time. The Healing Center's been a pillar of  
22 hope and strength to families and survivors of  
23 gender-based violence for 25 years with a specialty  
24 in working with immigrant survivors, and we walk with  
25 survivors along diverse dimensions of their lives,

2 including their immigration processes. We're taking a  
3 lot of care at this time to refer to accurate  
4 sources, to credible lawyers, and to protect our  
5 participants, not only from threats by outside  
6 scammers, but also by intimate partners and people  
7 who know them well and understand how to capitalize  
8 on fears and misinformation. And we wanted to speak  
9 as well to the need for continued City Council  
10 support. It's a very scary time for non-profits to be  
11 so heavily dependent on federal funding. We've been  
12 able to radically expand our programming throughout  
13 the past two years with federal funds, and we're  
14 seeing our partners who support immigrant  
15 communities, who promote accurate information, and  
16 who protect people against being frauded and scammed  
17 suddenly losing funding with three days of notice.  
18 This is one of the most important inflection points  
19 in our history, and we're more dependent on City  
20 Council funding than we've ever been. And we're  
21 completely committed to not allowing these events to  
22 hinder or prevent our mission of serving survivors of  
23 gender-based violence for 25 years. And we work with  
24 survivors who are in the midst of going through  
25 immigration processes and securing, at the same time,

1 orders of protection, working through the most  
2 vulnerable things that have happened to them in  
3 support of counseling, or who are just starting to  
4 turn to us now after being alone and isolated for  
5 years (TIMER CHIME) and years and have never turned  
6 to someone before.  
7

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.  
9 Thank you.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
11 Stephanie, for your testimony and your work.

12 We have now heard from everyone who  
13 signed up to testify. If we have inadvertently missed  
14 anyone who would like to testify in person, please  
15 visit the Sergeant's table and complete a witness  
16 slip now. If we have inadvertently missed anyone who  
17 would like to testify virtually, please use the raise  
18 hand function in Zoom, and a Member of our Staff will  
19 call on you in the order of hands raised.

20 I will now read the names of those who  
21 have registered to testify but who have not yet  
22 filled out a witness slip or appeared on Zoom. Lurkey  
23 Ho (phonetic) and William Betancourt (phonetic).

24 Seeing no one else, I would like to note,  
25 again, that written testimony will be reviewed in

1  
2 full by the Committee Staff, may be submitted to the  
3 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing  
4 by emailing it to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

5 And with that, this hearing has come to a  
6 close. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 12, 2025