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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION
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December 14, 2021
Start: 10:11 a.m.
Recess: 1:20 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING - VIRTUAL ROOM 1

B E F O R E: Carlos Menchaca,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
- Margaret S. Chin
- Daniel Dromm
- Mathieu Eugene
- Oswald Feliz
- Francisco P. Moya

A P P E A R A N C E S

Jesus Benavidez
Immigrant worker

Sonia Perez
Immigrant worker

Francisco (Juan Mendoza)
Immigrant worker

Raquel Batista
Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
Affairs

Sara Martin
Policy Advisor at Mayor's Office of Immigrant
Affairs

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

Antonio Solis
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Manuel Castro
Executive Director of New Immigrant Community
Empowerment

Yesenia Mata
Executive Director of La Colmena

Ligia Gualpa
Executive Director of the Workers Justice Project
and Workers Rights Organization

Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez
Deputy Director at the Street Vendor Project

Mario Russell
Director of Refugee and Immigrant Services

Callen Lowell
Equal Justice Works Fellow in the Employment
Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services

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

Sarah Leberstein
Employment Attorney with Make the Road New York

Carlyn Cowen
Civil Service

Debipriya Chatter Jee
Senior Economist for the Community Service
Society of New York

Merble Reagon
Executive Director of the Women's Center for
Education and Career Advancement

Tito Sinha
Workers' Rights Practice at TakeRoot Justice

Victoria Roseman
Staff Attorney with the Unemployed Workers
Project at Volunteers of Legal Services, VOLS

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SERGEANT KOTOWSKI: Computer recording started.

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SERGEANT HOPE: Cloud recording rolling.

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SERGEANT KOTOWSKI: Sergeant Hope, with the opening.

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SERGEANT HOPE: Thank you. Good morning and welcome to today's New York City Remote Council Hearing on Immigration. At this time, would all panelists please turn on your videos. Thank you.

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To minimize disruption, please place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. I repeat, testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair Menchaca, we are ready to begin.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and bueonos diaz everyone. My name is Carlos Menchaca and I am the Chair of the Committee on Immigration. We are really – we are filled with a lot of emotion here in the City Council with this Committee. This is our last hearing and we've been joined by Council Member Chin and I will call on others as they come and participate in this last Immigration Hearing.

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25

Today's Committee will be conducting oversight on Supporting Low-Wage Immigrant Workers in a COVID-19

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2 Recovery. And as I mentioned, it's bittersweet
3 because we have had the honor and privilege of really
4 supporting some of our most vulnerable and most
5 dynamic New Yorkers in our city.

6 Over the last eight years, it has been an honor
7 to serve as the Chair of this Committee. We have
8 discussed critical issues and passed important
9 legislation. And have had incredible budget
10 victories that impact over three million New Yorkers
11 who migrated here and who call this great city their
12 home.

13 This is a city of immigrants but their struggles
14 and their voices are often ignored by our government.
15 They are villainized and scapegoated at worst and at
16 best, they are misunderstood or just simply
17 invisible. My goal as Chair was to create a space
18 for all of these voices. To empower them no matter
19 what language that they spoke at home, so they could
20 reshape government with their own vision. The three
21 million New Yorkers who are our neighbors, small
22 business owners, teachers, taxi drivers, healthcare
23 workers, street vendors, the deliverista's, nannies,
24 delivery workers, all government workers that are
25 immigrants in our city right now. Day laborers,

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2 organizers, our friends and our families. These are
3 the folks who got us through one of our most toughest
4 times in the city.

5 They were in fact essential in the survival of
6 our great city. Over the years, this Committee has
7 discussed disparities, faced by immigrant New Yorkers
8 including poverty. Disparity in accessing healthcare
9 and insurance, lack of adequate mental health,
10 overcrowded living arrangements and more. These were
11 the disparities that caused COVID-19 pandemic to
12 wreak havoc in disproportionate ways on immigrants.

13 Meanwhile, New Yorkers relied disproportionately
14 on immigrants to get them through COVID-19. As
15 immigrants were overrepresented in the industries
16 that employed essential workers. In fact, nationwide
17 immigrant workers were overrepresented in some of the
18 industries that were vital to COVID-19 pandemic
19 response. Working at high rates in occupations
20 within healthcare, manufacturing, and agricultural
21 fields. And keeping essential businesses like
22 groceries, the last mile delivery the deliverista's,
23 and pharmacies open amidst the crisis.

24 Immigrants were also overrepresented in some of
25 the industries that saw huge declines in demand due

1
2 to efforts to slow the spread of the pandemic. For
3 example, many industries hard hit by social
4 distancing requirements, such as accommodation and
5 food services, construction work, and domestic work
6 rely very heavily on immigrant workers, including
7 undocumented immigrants.

8 Since the height of the pandemic, low-wage
9 immigrant workers have suffered significant losses of
10 employment income further pushing them into poverty.
11 Threatening their foundation of family economic
12 insecurity and placing them at risk for loss of
13 housing and increase in toxic stress. This impact
14 was felt most acutely by our undocumented workers who
15 have always been denied access to the enhanced
16 federal social safety net that has kept hundreds of
17 thousands of other New Yorkers from experiencing
18 poverty during the pandemic. And for the resources
19 that they were eligible for. Many immigrants
20 disenrolled for fear of public charge.

21 Ultimately, COVID-19 crisis confirmed that
22 immigrants are truly the backbone of our city. It is
23 also revealed that we are not doing enough to support
24 our immigrant workers. And as we close this session
25 in the City Council, I thought it was apt to look

1
2 forward into the future, to discuss how the city
3 envisions a recovery in which we uplift our low-wage
4 immigrant workers and share lessons learned and ideas
5 for the new City Council.

6 As New York City transitions out of the pandemic,
7 there are many urgent items, so that we can restore
8 employment and continue to strengthen the social
9 bonds and supports that our low-income workers are
10 immigrant low-wage workers can ultimately thrive.
11 And we've done that to protect many immigrants by
12 ensuring that they have everything that they need as
13 they battle federal government that has yet to reform
14 the immigration system.

15 We have built an incredible safety net through
16 NYIFUP, the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project,
17 which has created the first public defender program
18 of its kind, ensuring everyone has a lawyer if they
19 are in a deportation proceeding.

20 Adult literacy, to ensure that we have baselined
21 it at the level that we have is an incredible victory
22 to ensure that people have language access to learn
23 English in their communities. Unaccompanied Minors,
24 a program that ensure that every minor had a lawyer.
25 Immigrant Bail Fund, the Worker Cooperative

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2 Initiative, the Day Laborer Initiative, Immigrant
3 Health Initiative, Key to the City. And we've
4 changed it this year to ensure that we are focusing
5 on newly arrived immigrants, especially those that
6 are speaking indigenous languages. These are just
7 some of the things that this City Council pushed,
8 fought for and have won to ensure that our families
9 are secure and safe in this sanctuary city.

10 Now, when you testify today, I hope that I can
11 also hear some ideas that we can leave to the City
12 Council to ensure that our next City Council is
13 fighting for you. I want to thank the Mayor's Office
14 of Immigrant Affairs for joining us today and I look
15 forward to hearing from the Administration about what
16 they are doing. How they are thinking about COVID-19
17 as it pertains to low wage immigrant workers.

18 I want to thank our staff, our incredible staff.
19 Our Committee Counsel, Harbani Ahuja, as well as my
20 Chief of Staff Lorena Lucero, and Deputy Chief of
21 Staff Cesar Vargas.

22 Thank you so much and I'll hand it over to cur
23 Counsel. Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Uhm, before
25 we begin, I just want to acknowledge that we've all

1
2 been joined by Council Members Brooks-Powers and
3 Council Member Eugene.

4 Thank you. My name is Harbani Ahuja and I'm
5 Counsel to the Committee on Immigration at the New
6 York City Council. Before we begin, I want to remind
7 everyone that you will be on mute until you are
8 called on to testify, when you will unmuted by the
9 host. I will be calling on panelists to testify.
10 Please listen for your name to be called and I will
11 be periodically announcing who the next panelist will
12 be.

13 For everyone testifying today, please note that
14 there may be a few seconds of delay before you are
15 unmuted and we thank you in advance for your
16 patience. All hearing participants should submit
17 written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

18 At today's hearing, the first panel will consist
19 of members of the public followed by representatives
20 from the administration, followed by Council Member
21 questions and then additional members of the public
22 will testify. I'd like to remind everyone that
23 unlike our typical Council hearings, we will be
24 calling on individuals one by one to testify and each
25 panelist will be given three minutes to speak.

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2 For panelists, once your name is called, a member
3 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms
4 will give you the go ahead to begin upon setting the
5 timer. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that
6 you may begin before delivering your testimony.

7 Council Members who have questions for a particular
8 panelist should use the Zoom raise hand function and
9 I will call on you after that panel has completed
10 their testimony.

11 Today, we have Spanish and Mandarin
12 interpretation available at today's hearing for
13 anyone who would like to testify in Spanish or
14 Mandarin and we thank our Interpreters Guillermo and
15 Roddy for their interpretation today.

16 We will begin now and hear testimony from our
17 first panel. I'd like to welcome Jesus Benavidez to
18 testify. After Jesus, I will be calling on Sonia
19 Perez and then Francisco to testify. I'd like to now
20 welcome Jesus Benavidez to testify. Guillermo will
21 be providing Spanish interpretation. Jesus, you may
22 begin your testimony when you are ready.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:11].
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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, you are coming in loud
3 and clear.

4 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:16-
5 10:20].

6 INTERPRETER: Hi everyone.

7 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:22-
8 10:24].

9 INTERPRETER: My name is Jesus Benavidez.

10 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:27].

11 INTERPRETER: I form part of this group.

12 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:34-
13 10:38].

14 INTERPRETER: Today is a very important day for
15 us.

16 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:42-
17 10:45].

18 INTERPRETER: From Staten Island because today is
19 the last audience.

20 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 10:51-
21 10:55].

22 INTERPRETER: Here with the Council for the
23 workers this year.

24 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 11:02-
25 11:07].

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INTERPRETER: This has been a very unsecure year.

JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 11:11-11:16].

INTERPRETER: We think that all the people that were called heroes -

JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 11:21-11:26].

INTERPRETER: Now, they have forgotten all the work that we did during the pandemic.

JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 11:31-11:37].

INTERPRETER: Thanks to organizations like La Colmena are here in Staten Island.

JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 11:45-11:50].

INTERPRETER: Known as the forgotten county.

JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 11:54-12:00].

INTERPRETER: La Colmena helped us to continue going forward.

JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 12:05-12:10].

INTERPRETER: With the training they gave like assistance.

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2 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 12:16-
3 12:20].

4 INTERPRETER: With food and at the same time -

5 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 12:24-
6 12:28].

7 INTERPRETER: They showed us how to continue with
8 our rights.

9 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 12:35-
10 12:39].

11 INTERPRETER: And that's why it's very important
12 that this year -

13 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 12:43-
14 12:47].

15 INTERPRETER: This year, that comes, we continue
16 with the same support.

17 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 12:56-
18 13:07].

19 INTERPRETER: Only by doing this will we be able
20 to get our community going forward.

21 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 13:16-
22 13:22].

23 INTERPRETER: After we finish, I will leave you
24 with this form that I wrote.

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2 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 13:29-
3 13:33].

4 INTERPRETER: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 13:34].

5 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 13:40-
6 13:44].

7 INTERPRETER: We met each other the day I was in
8 line at Costco.

9 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 13:50-
10 13:52].

11 INTERPRETER: And I had just left work.

12 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 13:56-
13 13:58].

14 INTERPRETER: And I was wearing my work clothes.

15 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:02-
16 14:04].

17 INTERPRETER: And the person behind me -

18 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:08-
19 14:10].

20 INTERPRETER: Kept pushing me with his cart.

21 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:15-
22 14:18].

23 INTERPRETER: And here we are when I was going to
24 work -

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2 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:23-
3 14:26].

4 INTERPRETER: And the employer only screams at me

5 -

6 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:32-
7 14:34].

8 INTERPRETER: And not so White Americans.

9 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:37-
10 14:41].

11 INTERPRETER: You are called discrimination.

12 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:44-
13 14:48].

14 INTERPRETER: Because of you, I've been screamed
15 at. I've been scolded.

16 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 14:55-
17 14:58].

18 INTERPRETER: Only because of my appearance and
19 the reason that I speak - and for speaking Spanish.

20 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:04-
21 15:07].

22 INTERPRETER: I know you very well.

23 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:10-12].

24 INTERPRETER: Because I know what you are.

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2 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:17-
3 15:19].

4 INTERPRETER: Because of the training that I have
5 received.

6 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:25-
7 15:29].

8 INTERPRETER: To fight this hate and
9 discrimination -

10 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:34-
11 15:37]

12 INTERPRETER: Because of this, even if you try -

13 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:42-
14 15:46]

15 INTERPRETER: You can because I know how to
16 battle you.

17 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:51-
18 15:53]

19 INTERPRETER: And fight for my rights -

20 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:58-
21 16:00]

22 INTERPRETER: That's why they know me Chewy.

23 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 16:05-
24 16:09]

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2 INTERPRETER: Troy the DJ because I bring music
3 to every [inaudible 16:14]. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
5 16:19-16:21].

6 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 16:21].

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
8 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Sonia Perez to
9 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 16:46-16:57].

12 INTERPRETER: I belong to the people [SPEAKING IN
13 SPANISH 17:00-17:07. My name is Sonia and I belong
14 to the people that sell in the streets.

15 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:13-17:17].

16 INTERPRETER: And now that I'm here, the most
17 important -

18 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:21-17:27.

19 INTERPRETER: So that everyone integrates us to
20 the support.

21 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:32-17:35].

22 INTERPRETER: For the law of the senate -

23 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:38-17:40].

24 INTERPRETER: 1175 -

25 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:43-17:51]

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2 INTERPRETER: This will discriminate for all the
3 workers, street vendors.

4 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:01-18:04].

5 INTERPRETER: We are immigrants, minorities.

6 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:08]

7 INTERPRETER: Like women,

8 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:12-18:13]

9 INTERPRETER: Single mothers

10 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:15-18:18]

11 INTERPRETER: From the Black race or Brown race.

12 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:24-18:26]

13 INTERPRETER: We are interpreters

14 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:32-18:34]

15 INTERPRETER: Of our own businesses.

16 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:36]

17 INTERPRETER: The small businesses

18 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:41-18:45]

19 INTERPRETER: And they deny to recognize us as
20 such.

21 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:50-18:56]

22 INTERPRETER: We have been always part of the
23 economy of the great city.

24 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:04-19:06].

25 INTERPRETER: This means that we pay taxes.

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SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:11-19:14]

INTERPRETER: Last year

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:17-19:19]

INTERPRETER: The restaurants open up the street
for their businesses.

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:24-19:29]

INTERPRETER: This law has affected all of us
street vendors.

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:37-19:42]

INTERPRETER: We were excluded from the public
spaces and the plants

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:50-19:52]

INTERPRETER: And rehumanizing the same.

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:03-20:08]

INTERPRETER: We have been left out of all
economic aid.

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:14]

INTERPRETER: We are immigrants

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:18-20:19]

INTERPRETER: And we need to be included.

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:23-20:26]

INTERPRETER: In the rebirth of our city.

SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:31-20:38].

1
2 INTERPRETER: And that all street vendors are
3 protected by the city

4 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:42-20:47]

5 INTERPRETER: So we are not the target of uh, of
6 being uhm accosted by the authorities.

7 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:55-20:57]

8 INTERPRETER: Specifically by the police.

9 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:00-21:05]

10 INTERPRETER: I'm only giving you a little bit of
11 everything that we have gone through as street
12 vendors.

13 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:11-21:16]

14 INTERPRETER: And I wish that this support would
15 be stronger for us as immigrants.

16 SONIA PEREZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:24-21:26]

17 INTERPRETER: Thank you for listening to my
18 story.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
20 21:29].

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Sonia for your
22 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Francisco to
23 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

25 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:47-21:50]

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INTERPRETER: Good morning, my name Juan Mendoza.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:53-21:57]

INTERPRETER: I'm an immigrant worker.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:00-22:03]

INTERPRETER: I've been working in construction
for ten years.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:08-22:13]

INTERPRETER: My experience as a construction
worker has been very hard.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:20-22:26]

INTERPRETER: As I am not part of a syndicate. I
have less protection and less work.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:34-22:36]

INTERPRETER: For a few years, I've been
suffering from salary stealing.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:43-22:46]

INTERPRETER: I work for a construction company

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:53-22:55]

INTERPRETER: In the beginning, they would pay us
normally.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:59-23:03]

INTERPRETER: Then, they would tell us to wait
till next week.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:09-23:12]

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2 INTERPRETER: And the following week, they would
3 only give us less than half of the earned wages.

4 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:28-23:30]

5 INTERPRETER: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:35-23:37]

6 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:38-43]

7 INTERPRETER: This was an ongoing situation.
8 They stole over \$800 from me.

9 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:52-23:56]

10 INTERPRETER: This was happening to a lot of
11 people.

12 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:00-24:05]

13 INTERPRETER: This made me feel defenseless in
14 this situation that I had no papers.

15 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:15-24:18]

16 INTERPRETER: I didn't have a syndicate that
17 would defend me against these abuses.

18 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:23-24:27]

19 INTERPRETER: This wage stealing affected my life
20 because I couldn't pay my rent.

21 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:35-24:38]

22 INTERPRETER: I couldn't buy food. I couldn't
23 buy medicine.

24 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:43-24:47].
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2 INTERPRETER: This wage stealing has not only
3 happened just to me

4 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:53-24:58]

5 INTERPRETER: It has happened to a lot of my
6 coworkers who are also construction workers.

7 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:12-25:15]

8 INTERPRETER: Also, we see a lot of violations of
9 security at our jobs.

10 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:22-25:30]

11 INTERPRETER: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:31-25:34]

12 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:36-25:40]

13 INTERPRETER: Oh, for example, there's uhm, tools
14 that are damaged and they force us to use them.

15 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:48-25:53]

16 INTERPRETER: And a lot of the places, we have to
17 work without proper tools.

18 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:59-26:26:05]

19 INTERPRETER: And to get the job completed, you
20 have to improvise to get the job done.

21 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 26:12-26:16]

22 INTERPRETER: My coworker fractured his -
23 suffered a head injury and he couldn't work for two
24 months.

25 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 26:25-26:30]

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2 INTERPRETER: The worker, the employer took him
3 to the hospital and because the worker didn't speak
4 English -

5 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 26:38-26:42]

6 INTERPRETER: The employer told the hospital that
7 the worker had hurt himself playing basketball.

8 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 26:48-26:53]

9 INTERPRETER: We see every day that the workers
10 without a syndicate who work construction

11 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:01-27:04]

12 INTERPRETER: Are the ones that suffer the most
13 accidents at work.

14 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:09-27:13]

15 INTERPRETER: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:16- 27:17]
16 You're breaking up.

17 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:19-27:24]

18 INTERPRETER: Thanks to NICE, I have my OSHA but
19 there's a lot of workers who don't have it.

20 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:30-27:35]

21 INTERPRETER: Or they have falsified papers
22 because a school or an employer lied to them.

23 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:47-27:50-]

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

25 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:50-27:52]

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2 INTERPRETER: During the pandemic, the wage
3 stealing has risen.

4 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:14-28:23]

5 INTERPRETER: A lot of people had the necessity
6 to go back to work

7 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:28-28:30]

8 INTERPRETER: Because they lost their job during
9 the pandemic.

10 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:36-28:41]

11 INTERPRETER: The employers took advantage of
12 this necessity and they stopped paying salaries.

13 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:54-28:58]

14 INTERPRETER: They stopped worrying about the
15 conditions, safety conditions at work.

16 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:03-29:07]

17 INTERPRETER: That's why we need organizations
18 like NICE.

19 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:12-29:15]

20 INTERPRETER: To help us and continue

21 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:19-29:30]

22 INTERPRETER: During the whole pandemic time, we
23 have been experiencing wage stealing

24 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:41-29:48]

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2 INTERPRETER: Every day we're getting new cases
3 and we don't have the capacity to resolve them.

4 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:55-30:00]

5 INTERPRETER: That's why we need to expand the
6 resources of salaries.

7 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:10-30:17]

8 INTERPRETER: We have been training a lot of
9 people in OSHA SST and more.

10 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:26-30:30]

11 INTERPRETER: But the demand is much higher.

12 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:36-30:40]

13 INTERPRETER: And we have a waiting list that's
14 over 1,000 people.

15 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:56-31:01]

16 INTERPRETER: We need resources.

17 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:11-31:16]

18 INTERPRETER: Our center at NICE has been open
19 during the whole pandemic.

20 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:22-31:26]

21 INTERPRETER: Providing a safe haven for all the
22 workers and immigrants.

23 FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:35-31:45]

24 INTERPRETER: We have also provided food and
25 groceries for the people that need them.

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FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:53-31:59]

INTERPRETER: I've been part of the volunteers of
this group NICE.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:05-32:15]

INTERPRETER: My apology, he's breaking up.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:24-32:29]

INTERPRETER: They have access to services in
their own languages.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:36-32:40]

INTERPRETER: It is very important that the
centers, the work centers continue working

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:47-32:50]

INTERPRETER: During this time where workers like
me

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:55-32:58]

INTERPRETER: Are trying to recuperate from this
pandemic.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:03-33:19]

INTERPRETER: Working in risk conditions and
insecure.

FRANCISCO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:26]

INTERPRETER: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
testimony. I would like to now turn it to Council

1
2 Member, excuse me. I'd like to turn it back to Chair
3 Menchaca for any questions or comments.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. We've been
5 joined by Council Member Moya and I [SPEAKING IN
6 SPANISH 33:50-34:30]. I just want to say thank you
7 to those who testified. It's important that we hear
8 directly from them in their language, in their voice
9 what has been happening. And so, I want to thank you
10 to the interpreter and everybody who testified this
11 morning.

12 We're going to move over to the Administration
13 and before that, I just want to say that it has been
14 the tradition of this Committee that we hear directly
15 from people impacted by the conversation that we're
16 having and that's just been a thing that I have
17 fought for every single time. And almost hearing we
18 have had people from the community come and speak in
19 their language and our system is getting better and I
20 hope we can continue to evolve especially in this
21 technology moment that we're in to ensure that the
22 voices really begin this conversation.

23 And as I hand it over to our Commissioner Raquel
24 Batista, I want to make sure our, our let's see - is
25 there any other Council Members that have joined us?

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No, not at this time.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, great. I want to hand it over to Commissioner Batista. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I am now going to be calling member of the Administration to testify. Testimony will be provided by MOIA Commissioner Raquel Batista. Additionally, the following representatives will be available for answering questions; Sara Martin Policy Advisor at MOIA and Nick Gulotta Director of Outreach and Organizing at MOIA.

As a reminder, during the hearing, if Council Members would like to ask a question of the Administration or of a specific panelist, please use the Zoom raise hand function and I will call on you in the order in which you have raised your hands.

Before we begin, I will be administering the oath. Commissioner Batista, Sara Martin, Nick Gulotta, I will call on you each individually for response. Please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner Batista?

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RAQUEL BATISTA: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Sara Martin?

SARA MARTIN: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And Nick Gulotta?

NICK GULOTTA: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Commissioner, you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Commissioner, if I could, I'm sorry, I'm breaking protocol here but uhm, I was looking for someone a little bit earlier, Antonio Solis and I didn't see him. There you are, okay, I didn't see him on the list or on the — and he's a delivery worker who wants to tell a story. Is it okay if I interrupt you in this minute to give the delivery worker an opportunity to give his testimony?

RAQUEL BATISTA: It is fine.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, I apologize for that.

RAQUEL BATISTA: No worries.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Antonio? Antonio?

[SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:44].

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:00-38:05]

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:10-38:12].

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2 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:13-
3 38:18].

4 INTERPRETER: Good morning. It's a pleasure to
5 be here with you guys.

6 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:22-
7 38:25].

8 INTERPRETER: My name is Antonio Martinez Solis.

9 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:30-
10 38:35].

11 INTERPRETER: I come from Veracruz Mexico and I
12 currently live in Queens New York.

13 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:41-38:46]

14 INTERPRETER: I'm here representing all my
15 coworkers that we deliver food.

16 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:53-39:00]

17 INTERPRETER: I'm part of the organization and I
18 didn't get the name. [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:06-
19 39:08]

20 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:09-
21 39:11].

22 INTERPRETER: Project of Labor of Justice.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Worker Justice Project in
24 English.

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2 INTERPRETER: Thank you. Thank you very much
3 sir.

4 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:21-
5 39:23].

6 INTERPRETER: This is the organization which I am
7 a member of.

8 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:28-
9 39:33].

10 INTERPRETER: During the pandemic, me and one
11 thousand of our coworkers, we transformed

12 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:41-39:46]

13 INTERPRETER: And essential workers where
14 bicycles and motorized bicycles,

15 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:53-39:56]

16 INTERPRETER: We took the streets to deliver
17 food.

18 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:02-
19 40:05].

20 INTERPRETER: Medicines and other essential
21 products.

22 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:10-40:15]

23 INTERPRETER: We are over 65,000 delivery workers
24 who began delivering—

25 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:22-40:25]

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INTERPRETER: Delivering food and applications.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:29-40:31]

INTERPRETER: Because we lost our work, our jobs
at restaurants.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:37-40:39]

INTERPRETER: Because of lack of work.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:42-40:46]

INTERPRETER: We opted to start to begin working
with the apps -

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:51-40:55]

INTERPRETER: In an industry that every day grows
riskier and riskier -

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 41:01-41:03]

INTERPRETER: Without protections

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 41:06-41:12]

INTERPRETER: Over 19 coworkers have lost their
lives during working hours.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 41:20-41:30]

INTERPRETER: Unfortunately, one of our coworkers
died this morning.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 41:38-41:42]

INTERPRETER: We risk our lives doing deliveries
out in the streets.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 41:47-41:54]

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2 INTERPRETER: Facing being held up, being ran
3 over by vehicles, and other injustices.

4 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 42:04-42:11]

5 INTERPRETER: Being tired of not being protected,
6 we organize for the protection.

7 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 42:23-42:27]

8 INTERPRETER: So that this city will listen to us
9 and give us the protections, the essential
10 protections that we need.

11 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 42:36-42:39]

12 INTERPRETER: Over 4,000 delivery workers took
13 the streets

14 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 42:45-42:50]

15 INTERPRETER: To gain access to a better pay

16 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 42:57-43:01]

17 INTERPRETER: More transparency in the tips and
18 the access to more control.

19 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 43:08-43:11]

20 INTERPRETER: Over our working conditions.

21 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 43:14-43:17]

22 INTERPRETER: We got organized -

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 INTERPRETER: And we gain

25 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 43:23-43:28]

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INTERPRETER: We are very grateful Carlos -

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 43:38]

INTERPRETER: For giving us support during all
this time.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 43:43-43:46]

INTERPRETER: We are very grateful to this
project.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 43:51-43:55]

INTERPRETER: Gain a lot of things for us,
delivery workers

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 44:04-44:08]

INTERPRETER: We are hoping to continue getting
you support to implement this law.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 44:14-44:18]

INTERPRETER: To better our conditions during
working hours.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 44:23-44:27]

INTERPRETER: This is a great gain for all of us.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 44:31-44:35]

INTERPRETER: And all of us putting our foot
forward to gain more.

ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 44:41-44:47]

INTERPRETER: All of us delivery workers know
that united, we make the difference.

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2 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 44:57-45:03]

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3 INTERPRETER: We are asking the Council Members
4 to join our cause.

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5 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 45:10-45:15]

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6 INTERPRETER: We are a movement that doesn't care
7 about the color, nationality or race -

7

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8 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 45:23-45:27]

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9 INTERPRETER: We all come together because at the
10 end of the day, we are all the same out in the
11 streets.

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12 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 45:34-45:36]

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13 INTERPRETER: And united we have the power.

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14 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 45:40-45:44]

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15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
16 45:45-45:54]

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17 ANTONIO SOLIS: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 45:55]

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18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
19 45:46].

19

20

20 I want to hand it over to Commissioner Batista.

21

21 Commissioner at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant

22

22 Affairs and I want to say thank you for coming to my

23

23 district and bringing IDNYC to the deliverista's who

24

24 you just heard from. You got meet them and be a part

25

25 of that energy and I saw some of those pictures and

1
2 I'm sure that we're all going to be dedicated to
3 their future in this city as they continue to grow
4 and mobilize across the entire city. Commissioner.

5 RAQUEL BATISTA: Thank you so much Chair Menchaca
6 and uhm, just briefly in Spanish [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
7 46:37-46:51].

8 Thank you so much Chair Menchaca for uhm, this
9 opportunity and the members of the Committee on
10 Immigration for calling this important hearing. I'd
11 also like to recognize all of the hard work of this
12 Committee and especially you Chair Menchaca for the
13 work you've done over the last eight years. Now,
14 outgoing Council Member, just wanted to congratulate
15 you on all of the work and wishing you all the best
16 in the future.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

18 RAQUEL BATISTA: Uhm, my name is Raquel Batista
19 and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of
20 Immigrant Affairs. I am joined by two members of my
21 staff, Sara Martin and Nick Gulotta who will be
22 available for question and answer.

23 We have been living with COVID-19 now for almost
24 two years. During this time, we have seen both
25 disheartening and encouraging changes in the

1
2 landscape. One thing I do want to highlight at the
3 beginning of this hearing, is how the availability of
4 vaccines has been crucial in helping combat this
5 virus.

6 MOIA has been working with our colleagues across
7 the city to encourage uptick of vaccines, including
8 the booster. As an important step in bringing the
9 pandemic under control, especially as we monitor the
10 emergence of new variants of COVID-19. This includes
11 targeted outreach to low-income immigrant workers and
12 other vulnerable populations. In addition, MOIA
13 continues to work with our partners within and
14 outside of government to ensure that recovery is
15 equitable and not limited to a privileged few.

16 In today's testimony, I will briefly speak about
17 the challenges that low-wage immigrant workers face
18 because of COVID-19 and touch on the steps that MOIA
19 has taken to address these needs.

20 Low-wage immigrant workers are particularly
21 vulnerable. COVID-19 has not affected all members of
22 New York City in the same way. To be blunt, the
23 pandemic has ravaged populations that have
24 historically been overlooked by all levels of
25 government. In the case of immigrant workers, many

1
2 of whom serve as essential workers, when the rest of
3 us were working from home. This disparity is
4 outlined in data.

5 Our internal analysis has found that higher
6 populations of immigrants or noncitizens in the zip
7 code are linked to higher COVID-19 cases and death
8 rates in that area. Immigrant workers in the city
9 and undocumented workers in particular. Excuse me.

10 Immigrant workers in the city, excuse me one
11 second. Immigrant workers in the city and
12 undocumented workers in particular were
13 disproportionately affected by the economic harms of
14 the pandemic. MOIA estimates that 60 percent of
15 undocumented workers lost their jobs or were at risk
16 of losing their job during the pandemic, compared to
17 36 percent of all workers. Immigrant workers
18 especially undocumented workers face a wide variety
19 of barriers.

20 As our annual report highlights, about 60 percent
21 of undocumented immigrants have limited English
22 proficiency. Almost half are uninsured and almost 30
23 percent live in poverty. While things are better for
24 immigrant workers with some sort of status,
25 immigrants in general face higher rates of poverty

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2 than their US citizen counterparts. These
3 disparities were compounded by a federal failure to
4 include undocumented immigrants in programs
5 specifically aimed at reducing the harms of the
6 pandemic.

7 This is not a new issue but it was particularly
8 frustrating to see undocumented immigrants and mixed
9 status families be excluded from direct stimulus
10 payments, unemployment insurance programs and more
11 because of their status, despite all of the work
12 immigrant New Yorkers were doing to keep the city
13 running.

14 I want to reiterate here a point that MOIA and
15 the city have made over the past few years. The
16 current immigration system has failed immigrants and
17 their families across the nation. As a city, we are
18 doing what we can to help address the gaps but we
19 need federal reform that recognizes the contributions
20 of our immigrant communities. Reform that provides a
21 path to permanent legal status and citizenship.

22 MOIA and the city worked to address needs.
23 Moving back to the challenges that these communities
24 have faced; the city recognize that these gaps
25 required a multifaceted response. First, MOIA worked

1
2 to identify and implement innovative programming to
3 help address the gaps for undocumented workers who
4 are especially vulnerable. The areas of needs we saw
5 as urgent needs included direct cash relief, housing
6 help, and burial assistance. We were able to work
7 with our partners to secure funding for the immigrant
8 emergency relief program, which helped more than
9 76,000 immigrant workers, the vast majority of whom
10 had savings of less than \$400.

11 We also secured funding to provide one time
12 relief grants to low-income New Yorkers responsible
13 for funeral, burial, cremation, and expatriation
14 costs of a loved one who passed away due to COVID-19.

15 Finally, MOIA has been working with NYC HRA's
16 Homebased Program and Enterprise Community Partners
17 on FASTEN, Funds and Services for Tenants
18 Experiencing Needs, to provide rental assistance to
19 support undocumented immigrants in rental arrears who
20 are not eligible for the home based program and the
21 one-shot deal.

22 Through this programming, we have been able to
23 help alleviate the harms that came with the exclusion
24 of these New Yorkers from federal benefits.

1
2 Second, MOIA has engaged in specific outreach to
3 immigrant workers on a variety of issues. We
4 collaborated with community-based organizations that
5 work with immigrant workers to share information
6 about available services and to deliver urgently
7 needed help. As just one example, we recently
8 partnered with Workers Justice to bring the IDNYC
9 Mobile Comp Center to Sunset Park, as the Chair just
10 mentioned and make appointments with workers.

11 As another example, MOIA collaborated with the
12 Vaccine Command Center on their mobile vaccine bus
13 program with the specific focus on reaching delivery
14 workers, domestic workers, day laborers, restaurant
15 workers, Boveda workers among others. This is in
16 addition to recent investment of \$2 million we help
17 secure for vaccine outreach by organizations who
18 serve low-wage undocumented immigrants and other
19 vulnerable populations.

20 Third, MOIA advocated on behalf of immigrant
21 workers at every level of government and worked with
22 our governmental partners to help address the needs
23 of these workers. As just one example, MOIA worked
24 closely with the New York State on the implementation
25 of the Excluded Worker Fund. After the launch of the

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2 fund, MOIA connected with the New York State
3 Department of Labor to discuss document acceptance
4 and challenges based on our learnings from IDNYC and
5 other programs. This included us providing guidance
6 on the use of employer and laborer organization
7 letters for proof of employment.

8 We also worked with the Department of Labor to
9 accept IDNYC as a form of identification and
10 ultimately all IDNYC cards that expired in '20 and
11 2021 were considered valid for the purpose of the
12 excluded worker application through the end of this
13 month December 2021.

14 This is in addition to the federal advocacy we
15 have conducted to support long-term solutions for
16 immigrant workers and their families. As we continue
17 to grapple with the ongoing pandemic and it's effects
18 on our communities, we welcome this chance with the
19 Committee about what remains to be done. Low-wage
20 immigrant workers have done too much for the city to
21 be forgotten at a time when they need support more
22 than ever.

23 MOIA is excited to be able to work with the
24 Council on this issue and I look forward to answering
25 any questions you may have. Thank you.

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Commissioner so
3 much for your testimony. I'm now going to turn it
4 over to questions from Chair Menchaca. Panelists
5 from the Administration, if you can please stay
6 unmuted during this question and answer period, that
7 would be appreciated. Thank you. Chair Menchaca,
8 you may begin.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, thank you. Thank
10 you Commissioner for your work and most recently for
11 making that stop in Sunset Park. It was a really
12 important moment for many workers who were - and
13 we'll come back to questions around the Excluded
14 Worker Fund, but I just want to say that it was a
15 very meaningful moment. The city coming together to
16 ensure that people have their identification.

17 I want to start with a question about language
18 access. And I'm going to ask one question, then hand
19 it over to members of the Committee. I mean, there
20 are a lot of votes that are happening today, so I
21 want to make sure that members ask their questions as
22 they go and vote on bills that we're going to vote on
23 in the last stated tomorrow.

24 This is the question. Language access has been a
25 perennial issue in the city with residents that speak

1
2 over 200 languages. And language access was
3 especially critical when COVID-19 pandemic hit this
4 city and as New Yorkers needed access to critical and
5 timely information in their own languages, and mind
6 you some of these languages are indigenous languages.
7 We have discussed in previous hearings, many hearings
8 actually, how MOIA worked to adapt to ensure more
9 timely access for New Yorkers since March of 2020.
10 Can you share more on lessons that you've learned
11 during COVID-19 and that the Mayor's Office has
12 learned? So that we can understand what the issue
13 are and how we can ensure timely access to
14 information as it changes. COVID-19 continues to
15 give us new information. There is a new variant
16 omicron. How are these messages getting put out into
17 our communities and is the city getting better from
18 your perspective? And I'd love to kind of hear a
19 little bit about that.

20 RAQUEL BATISTA: Alright, thank you very much for
21 those questions and I just want to briefly uhm, Nick,
22 from my office is trying to unmute himself, if you
23 all can help him with that. Thank you very much.

24 So, to answer the first question on language
25 access. MOIA has made a concerted effort in

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2 collaboration with city agencies to improve language
3 access, especially after the passage of Local Law 30.
4 By working with the city to build city language
5 access infrastructure and expand the availability of
6 language access services.

7 Throughout the pandemic, as in other emergencies
8 that we've had in the city, MOIA's worked in tandem
9 with emergency management to activate the language
10 access taskforce to identify language access
11 challenges arising from the pandemic and to
12 coordinate resources.

13 Through this taskforce, which also includes the
14 Department of Health, we ensured that there were
15 ample language services resources. Expanded the
16 number of language in which critical materials would
17 be translated in up to 25 languages and coordinated
18 pro bono translation services.

19 MOIA has also developed a comprehensive COVID-19
20 immigrant resources guide that was updated throughout
21 the toughest months of the pandemic with information
22 and resources available to New Yorkers.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and I know Nick
24 is going to speak but it would be great for in your
25 testimony as organizations, I want to be able to kind

1
2 of see how you've all caught that on the community
3 ground side to see if there has been a better and
4 more efficient language access plan that MOIA just
5 presented. Nick

6 NICK GULOTTA: Yeah, sure, thank you so much
7 Chair Menchaca and before I say anything, I also just
8 want to additionally thank Sonia, Chewy, Francisco
9 and Antonio for their testimony earlier as well. You
10 know I think the best practice is to be directly
11 responsive to your question. You know really for us
12 advocating for the inclusion of additional languages
13 with Department of Health, we, you know the
14 Commissioner mentioned 26 languages. Obviously, in a
15 city of 200 languages, we could always do more.
16 That's why beyond Local Law 30, beyond the ten
17 languages in which a lot of these documents are
18 required to be translated into - we actually
19 throughout the pandemic have fielded translation
20 requests in up to 53 languages. And so, you know we
21 understand the importance of getting this information
22 out into our partners that we contract with. Also,
23 throughout our outreach.

24 So, for example, we'll send out social media in
25 many of those languages that we translate content

1
2 into and I encourage agencies to create graphics and
3 other sort of resources that can be our partners on
4 the ground. We'll make sure that they have the tools
5 and toolkits so that then they can get the essential
6 information out to community members who need them
7 the most. That also, you know it stems to a lot of
8 our sort of capacity building efforts with agencies
9 and encouraging them to create content for the
10 languages of the communities that need the
11 information that they are often doing outreach in.

12 So, we've been very sort of inlock step with the
13 Vaccine Command Center and a lot of our outreach
14 especially on the ground, making sure we have
15 interpreters where we don't have inhouse capacity.
16 Making sure for example, in the vaccine bus program.
17 We are frequently, whatever community we go into,
18 MOIA is informing what languages are spoken in that
19 community, ensuring that we have outreach in those
20 languages and ensuring that the interpreters are
21 there as well.

22 So, wherever gaps are flagged, we do our best to
23 be responsive to them but we also want to make sure
24 we're hearing any needs from our partners and trying
25 to meet those needs.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Nick and I just
3 want to say thank you for your work on the ground. I
4 know you've been on the ground doing, just not only
5 COVID work but ICE wash work and I just want to say
6 thank you for that service. I have a follow-up
7 before I hand it over to Council Member that really
8 kind of speaks to two things.

9 One, is how are you measuring everything that you
10 just kind of laid out in terms of social media
11 languages that have been kind of spoken – or
12 languages that have been increased in terms of
13 Department of Health translations. Are you, are you
14 in some ways measuring how many more people you're
15 hitting? How many people are consuming the social
16 media? Are there ways that you're getting feedback
17 from all of these messages? Are people hearing them?
18 Are people retweeting them? Like, is there a way of
19 measuring it or actually question, how are you
20 measuring that?

21 NICK GULOTTA: It's a great question. Thank you
22 and also thank you for recognizing our work. Uhm,
23 it's been a pleasure to partner with you and your
24 team over the years and I know collectively we've
25

1
2 done some incredible work on the ground and I just, I
3 value that partnership truly.

4 So, I think in terms of measuring impact, one
5 thing that we always have to and we've definitely
6 shared with our colleagues at the Department of
7 Health, is we really need to create an expectation
8 that this information will be provided in language.
9 So, you know translating for example documents into
10 indigenous languages into sort of languages with
11 fewer speakers than the top ten in New York City,
12 doesn't automatically lead to a number of clicks on a
13 website or retweets.

14 But by continually doing it, we create the
15 expectation that we will as a city, we'll provide
16 critical information in those languages. So, for us,
17 it's not just about the numbers truly. Uhm, I think
18 wherever we hear of gaps, that's sort of the true,
19 sort of indicator of whether we're meeting our mark.

20 So, if an organization says you know there isn't
21 any gap, there isn't any content in this language or
22 not. We will definitely advocate for its inclusion.
23 One of the things that we really focused on during
24 the pandemic is and working closely with the Health
25 Department to ensure for example, indigenous

1
2 languages and I would say Dr. Olusimbo Ige's team at
3 DOHMH has been incredible in working with Endangered
4 Language Alliance. With [INAUDIBLE 1:05:23] - with
5 other organizations to include presentations on COVID
6 and other sort of critical information in languages
7 like Garifuna in Quechua in Mixteco and African
8 languages as well.

9 So, I think it's really important that we
10 continue these collaborations with our sister
11 agencies where we partner to get the word out as soon
12 as possible. We've definitely also heard a lot of
13 feedback from our consulates and from the Mexican
14 consulate in particular in particular in terms of the
15 importance of lifting up indigenous languages. And
16 so, we partnered at various points over the past
17 several years and particularly in getting the word
18 out during the pandemic to include information in
19 these languages.

20 I think we have definitely more to go. You know
21 there's definitely always more work to be done but I
22 think those learnings are really going to inform that
23 moving forward.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, and the second part
25 of that question was really looking forward. What

1
2 systems have you built as the mayor's office to set
3 in place and ensure that better language access
4 happens immediately after a crisis hits. And I'm
5 being very specific about immediately because we do
6 not see an immediate reaction of translations when
7 this first - the first moment of pandemic. This is
8 something that we fought for very hard and there's a
9 big lag time. Have you done anything to really
10 install a system so that immediately people get
11 information?

12 RAQUEL BATISTA: So, yes, we have been working
13 with our Language Access Taskforce to ensure that we
14 do respond immediately in languages. I'll give you
15 the example right uhm, most recently with Hurricane
16 Ida and our response to Hurricane Ida. Our Language
17 Taskforce was immediately on the ground providing
18 translation services in language such as Mandarin,
19 Belize and Spanish. So, it is something that is a
20 priority for us at MOIA to ensure that access is
21 available.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And uh, I'm just trying to
23 think of, there was an incident with a text message
24 system that was built by the city and if you
25 remember, there was a - I think there was a mistake

1
2 that happened in one of the translations. How did
3 that happen and have you corrected that?

4 Can you unmute Nick, he got muted again.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, you got it.

6 NICK GULOTTA: Thank you so much. So, I believe
7 the incident that you are referring to Chair Menchaca
8 was with the – actually it was with the human
9 translation of the Department of Health Website.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Oh, yup.

11 NICK GULOTTA: So, there was you know during the
12 pandemic when different sort of worker groups were
13 being made eligible for the vaccine, there was a
14 translation and NICE had flagged this for us
15 immediately, sort of saying it was building service
16 workers were being included but the way it had been
17 translated and mind you, this was in a professional
18 translation. It wasn't sort of a Google translate,
19 which is another way we sort of built capacity in
20 terms of advising our sister agencies and sort of
21 advocating for best practices internally. You know
22 beyond the requirements of Local Law 30; we've really
23 tried to make the point that you know human
24 translations are best. Our MOIA website is human
25 translated in I believe 13 languages right now. The

1
2 Department of Health had their sort of key
3 information on their homepage about COVID. Also, in
4 human translations throughout the pandemic and that's
5 you know that's a collaboration that I think really
6 speaks to building infrastructure for the future as
7 well.

8 So, it was a mistranslation and it had been
9 reported that day laborers potentially could be able
10 to get vaccinated.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yup.

12 NICK GULOTTA: And so, as soon as this was
13 flagged truly within a matter of minutes, Sara Martin
14 and myself you know working with Manny Castro, we're
15 able to flag this for the Health Department to change
16 that right away. So, that's one of the ways, just
17 sort of constantly being in touch with our community
18 members. It was a very technical sort of, you know,
19 when those rules were coming down each day from the
20 state with very little sort of need time, in terms of
21 eligibility. And so, it was one of things where we
22 reacted immediately and were able to clear it up.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And last follow up and I'm
24 going to hand it over to Council Member Chin is the
25 number of languages that are in that text chain for

1
2 example, is it only in English and Spanish or are
3 there multiple, - are there other languages that are
4 connected to that emergency information?

5 NICK GULOTTA: I'll start and if any one of my
6 colleagues want to add in. So, initially with the
7 text information that the Office of Emergency
8 Management was sort of promoting to New Yorkers,
9 there was English and Spanish only. We sort of
10 transitioned and worked with them along the way and
11 sort of informed using and promoting the Notify NYC
12 app instead.

13 And the Notify NYC app is in many more languages.
14 It can be downloaded in those languages. I believe
15 it's the top ten languages right now. But you know,
16 you can receive those alerts, whether it's about
17 flooding, whether it's about sort of vaccine
18 eligibility and boosters, all in the language that
19 you speak. So, it's been increased and the strategy
20 has been really adjusted to sort of meet additional
21 images beyond where we started with just with English
22 and Spanish.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Great, it would be great
24 if you can confirm what languages are currently in
25 the system. If we can get that information before we

1
2 head out. This will be great for a final report that
3 we want to give out and I just want to say that we
4 100 percent in human interpretation and that's
5 something that my office has been really dedicated to
6 in three languages. We always put everything out at
7 the same time in Chinese written, the Spanish and
8 English languages as well. And that takes a lot of
9 time and that's - it's a very high intense staff uhm,
10 lift and so we get it. We feel it and so this is
11 part of this larger conversation about what agencies
12 are doing and if they don't have a person they just
13 keep going. And it becomes a thing that no one comes
14 back to and this is why immigrants feel invisible,
15 forgotten, misunderstood.

16 And so, the thing that we have been fighting for
17 are things like the Language Bank and that has yet to
18 be something that this administration has taken on in
19 a real way and we have not been able to fund it
20 through our budget negotiations. And so, that
21 creates a human level embedded in our communities
22 infrastructure, worker cooperative style thing where
23 humans are, humans from the neighborhood are
24 translating for us and getting paid for it. And so,
25 I just wanted to note that. I'm done with this

1
2 current question and I'm going to pause my questions
3 and head it over to the members at this point.

4 Unless there's any other comments that people want to
5 make on the MOIA side. And if not, we can hand it
6 over to Council Member Chin.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you Chair. Thank you
9 Commissioner. I'm just going to follow-up on the
10 language access question. I just you know been
11 working on trying to figure out a way to you know
12 provide more resources to MOIA and also to get the
13 agency to really look at language access as being
14 important. I mean one of the frustration is that
15 often times when agencies put out important
16 information, it's only in English. And then the
17 translation comes later. And the frustration was,
18 like during COVID, like Department of Business, you
19 know the grant program, the first thing that came out
20 was English. Where's the other languages? Oh, we're
21 working on it.

22 Excuse me, if you're working on the English one,
23 it should be at the same time. And like, I know that
24 it's difficult for MOIA, so recently we finally
25 worked out - I introduced legislation. Hopefully in

1
2 the next session it will get done for MOIA to have a
3 separate department of translation and interpretation
4 and that means giving you more resources. Because
5 like, every agency, they just either they don't have
6 the capacity or they just don't think it's important.

7 And I agree with uh, our Chair, it's got to be
8 human translation. Forget about Google translation,
9 it's not the same. And it's like, translation I
10 mean, it's like, they got to do it together. It
11 cannot be an afterthought. And that's why that is
12 really important I think that to give MOIA resources
13 and also the authority to sort of oversee these
14 agencies. That they are supposed to be doing their
15 job.

16 So, that's really important and the other thing
17 that is the really utilize the resources in the
18 community. Whether it's like the free you know
19 newspaper, the language ethnic media, to use those to
20 get the word out. And I know that in the Chinese
21 community, in terms of social media, you know this
22 whole thing about retrack. So, how do government can
23 get into those. I mean, like we have to set up - my
24 office has to set up an account so that we can get
25 the correct information out there and resources out

1
2 there. Because otherwise, a lot of misinformation
3 uhm, you know get included and people don't even know
4 where to turn.

5 So, hopefully in the next administration, that
6 language access will take a more prominent role and
7 hopefully the Council will continue to push on that.

8 RAQUEL BATISTA: Thank you so much for that
9 Council Member Chin. Uhm, we absolutely agree that
10 the goal should be for agencies to do this work and
11 to carry forward this work and looking at ways on how
12 we can deepen the work of MOIA around language access
13 issues.

14 Also, on the ethnic and community round tables,
15 during COVID, MOIA actually held 25 roundtables from
16 January 1st up until the end of November. So, we are
17 continuing to hold those ethnic and community media
18 roundtables. We're actually having one later this
19 week. Uhm, specifically on participatory budgeting
20 and to continuing working with our ethnic and
21 community media.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I know that the mayor with
23 his executive order has you know asked agencies to
24 designate a certain percentage for ethnic and
25 community media. And we just want to make sure that

1
2 the ethnic media are supported. So, once I mean, the
3 city should you know spend money to buy ads or so
4 that we can support these local ethnic media, which
5 is doing a lot of work for the city to get the
6 information out. So, that's something that I hope
7 MOIA will continue to advocate and make sure that
8 they are taken care of.

9 RAQUEL BATISTA: Yes, the city is committed to
10 ensuring that information and resources are robustly
11 shared to immigrant communities through various forms
12 including our partnership and dissemination with
13 community and the ethnic media. MOIA's also working
14 with agencies to stand up the regular community
15 ethnic and media roundtables to share resources and
16 information. And also the Mayor's Office of
17 Community and Ethnic Media together with the Mayor's
18 Office of Operations, have developed a comprehensive
19 and diverse list of print and digital media outlets
20 that is publicly available to all agencies.

21 So, working with our sister agencies, being sure
22 that their resources are leveraged for the maximum
23 reach. So, thank you very much for that question.
24
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you and thank you
3 Chair for your leadership on this Committee. I have
4 to hop off for a vote.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, I know we have like
6 seven votes today.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you to all the
8 advocates and Committee Counsel. We have done a lot
9 of work for our immigrant community that I'm truly
10 proud of and hopefully that we will – the Council
11 will continue to do that since the Chair and I, we're
12 term limited. But as private citizens, we will
13 continue the advocacy. Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes, thank you Council
15 Member Chin for your leadership on this Committee.
16 There's no way that we could have done that without
17 each other. Adult literacy, thinking about seniors,
18 all of these pieces that have come together and I
19 want to say thank you for being on this Committee
20 with all your heart.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yup, I just want to put a
23 finer point on Council Member Chin's – and not just
24 today, but Council Member Chin has been kind of a big
25 champion about how we immediately return information

1
2 to public at the same time. And I think that what I
3 want to say is that we're not there yet and I think
4 these crisis moments present these gaps and we're
5 just not there yet. Where immigrant communities can
6 feel, not just respected but feel part of the
7 conversation that's happening citywide. And I think
8 that that's something that I maybe want to ask you
9 next is – and really with a focus on low-wage workers
10 because all of this is part of the system of support
11 for low-wage workers. Essential workers who are
12 needing to go out there but need the information to
13 protect themselves and that's why we're focusing on
14 language access in this hearing.

15 And is there something that you've set up for
16 low-wage workers as MOIA, which has connections to
17 every agency? Is there something that you can point
18 to that focuses on low-wage workers during the – that
19 focused on low-wage workers during the pandemic? Is
20 there something you can lift up right now that's new,
21 that is MOIA directed through the City of New York?

22 RAQUEL BATISTA: Uh, sure, so you know on our
23 know your rights and our outreach work, we've been
24 doing a lot of work. One, when it comes to like the
25 vaccines becoming available, MOIA's outreach team

1
2 filled the gap by holding 13 in language large scale
3 virtual townhalls in over ten languages that include
4 Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, English, Haitian Creole,
5 Mandarin, Nepali, Russian and Spanish. Uhm, we
6 worked very closely with our community-based
7 organization such as the Workers Justice Project,
8 NICE, La Colmena, Adhikar and others. And we also
9 hosted a vaccine townhall in French for African
10 communities to address vaccine hesitancy.

11 So, those are few of the things that we've done,
12 directed to low-wage immigrant workers to ensure that
13 they were getting access to the vaccine and I know
14 Nick may want to add a few other things that we've
15 been doing here at MOIA.

16 NICK GULOTTA: Absolutely and let me just say
17 also Chair Menchaca, so I want to get back to you
18 right immediately about your question about the
19 number of languages for Notify NYC.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Please, thank you.

21 NICK GULOTTA: So, the app is available currently
22 in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole,
23 Italian, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Yiddish
24 and Urdu.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

1
2 NICK GULOTTA: And so, those are the languages
3 that it's available for and the city pushes out sort
4 of key emergency notifications to. And through our
5 Know Your Rights program as well as this sort of I
6 think begins to speak to your questions. Well
7 through our Know Your Rights as well as our outreach
8 internally. We get that message out directly to low-
9 wage workers.

10 One example of a program that we stood up, that
11 we worked really you know in lock step with the
12 Vaccine Command Center just to stand up as you, is
13 the Vaccine Mobile Bus Program. And so, from the
14 launch to picking locations to thinking about where
15 it would be located, we really had low-wage workers
16 and immigrant workers in mind. We set up day laborer
17 stops throughout the city. We partnered with
18 organizations like NICE with food pantries like Good
19 Shepard or La Huella. Pots in the Bronx was one of
20 our first initial ones. We had sort of, you know and
21 we have to remember with the pandemic, the scarcity
22 of course of the vaccine appointments.

23 So, we really tried to make sure that you know
24 our workers organizations, migrant workers, DRUM, the
25 Street Vendor Project etc., would have access to

1
2 these appointments and make sure that they were able
3 to uh, to have their members ands folks in the
4 community that they work with be able to uhm, get
5 vaccinated.

6 So, that's an example of a program where we
7 wanted to both through partnerships and just through
8 you know our intentional outreach, reach low-wage
9 immigrant workers. You know we did 136 days of
10 action on the ground around the vaccine and one of
11 the things, you know we brough a lot of the learnings
12 from those days of action -

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Nick, can I pause you
14 there?

15 NICK GULOTTA: Yeah.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: On those 136, were they -
17 how were they targeted and tell me a little bit about
18 how you connected with communities and was it because
19 there was a lot of vaccine work right? So, how were
20 you dedicated and kind of rooted in immigrant
21 communities and maybe even specifically low-wage
22 workers?

23 NICK GULOTTA: Absolutely. So, you know in
24 thinking, working with the Vaccine Command Center, we
25 really identified timing that would work for workers.

1
2 So, we you know would reach out to our - I'll give
3 you an example, in Jackson Heights, Diversity Plaza
4 was one of the first sort of locations that we
5 brought the bus to. Uhm, we worked with our partners
6 at the time it was done. It was DRUM, it was NICE
7 and others to think about what times would work for
8 their members. Okay, so, on timing and
9 interpretation as well. We set aside appointments
10 for those organizations to be able to make sure that
11 their members had access to them but there wasn't
12 just sort of everyone who was present.

13 We made sure that the outreach was done ahead of
14 time at the local day laborer stops in Woodside, very
15 close to Jackson Heights to Diversity Plaza. So,
16 just taking it through like you know, from start to
17 finish, we were really intentional and thoughtful
18 about making sure that our organizations who do this
19 work and have these relationships in communities are
20 sort of able to sort of lead and be sort of partners
21 in that effort.

22 Uhm, in the 136 days of action, we similar sort
23 of outreach plans at each one. We connect with local
24 organizations. We advised in what languages would be
25 needed on the ground. We tried to match our staffing

1
2 as well to the communities and to the workers that we
3 were working with to be able to get them vaccinated.

4 Uhm, I will say you know frequently choosing
5 locations where [INAUDIBLE 1:25:19] stand to pick up
6 work in the morning or come home at, uhm, you know
7 picking locations where there's many vendors for
8 example, like Corona Plaza. Picking locations where
9 we would be - ensure that we were really present and
10 visible and available for those organizations to be
11 able to take advantage of the vaccine. So, those are
12 a few examples of how we approach those challenges.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you for
14 that and I think what I want to do is maybe move over
15 to the DOHMH and H+H relationship and specifically
16 anything that was really targeted with that agency
17 and those agencies in mind around low-wage workers
18 and maybe even city workers. We really kind of want
19 to reveal how low-wage workers, the essential
20 workers, and you heard from them today. That they
21 felt invisible and disconnected. And is there
22 anything that you can kind of point out specifically
23 that's not like the mobile van piece but within the
24 Department of Health and H+H?

1
2 RAQUEL BATISTA: Yeah, so we worked on NYC Care
3 to make sure that we would increase the availability
4 of health insurance and health access for low-wage
5 workers. We actually worked together with
6 organizations such as NICE and reached almost 4,500
7 people and we uhm, connected over 364 people for
8 appointments from August through September to be able
9 to get the NYC Care. And currently, we are enrolled
10 at 90,000 people who actively are enrolled in the
11 program.

12 So, uh, you know, we have been doing a lot of
13 work on this and in particular with Health +
14 Hospitals to ensure that we are increasing access to
15 healthcare.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: How are you enrolling
17 folks in NYC Care? How is that happening and what
18 are the measurements and can we get numbers as to how
19 many, how many happened during the pandemic and as
20 we're kind of trying to get out of pandemic world,
21 how are you doing that? How many people have been
22 enrolled overall?

23 NICK GULOTTA: I can start, so as the
24 Commissioner mentioned, there are currently 90,000
25 people who are actively enrolled in NYC Care. Over

1
2 the past two calendar years, we've reached through -
3 contacted outreach with our partners 400, uhm, 400
4 and 3,000 people and connected 16,640 people to
5 appointments through direct outreach.

6 Uhm, I'll give you an example of one of our
7 really stellar partners. Uhm, as the Commissioner
8 mentioned NICE has reached 4,496 people, connecting
9 364 people to those appointments through August 2020
10 to September '21, as well as through our own outreach
11 work at MOIA and a separate budget from our - a
12 separate sort of bucket from our contacted outreach
13 with organizations at all of our sort of outreach
14 events where we're intentional about reaching
15 immigrant workers. We will, a table will bring
16 pamphlets and information and speak to community
17 members about NYC Care, roughly about 308 events
18 since the pandemic began. 129 of them in person in
19 2020 and 179 in 2021.

20 Uhm, and so, we're frequently promoting the
21 program on our end as well as working with our
22 contracted partners as well to do that outreach.

23 RAQUEL BATISTA: and also, uhm, I'd also like to
24 add that we had our Support for Immigrants Campaign
25 where we worked to support not fear marketing

1
2 campaign. Where the goal of the campaign was to
3 educate and assure New Yorkers about health and
4 social services that are available to them regardless
5 of immigration status or their ability to pay. And
6 to counter misinformation about the eligibility for
7 public benefits.

8 At placement focused on immigrant New Yorkers in
9 neighborhoods with the highest percentages of LEP, of
10 Limited English Proficient New Yorkers and immigrant
11 New Yorkers. Uhm, and also, neighborhoods that were
12 hardest hit by COVID-19 with the highest rates of
13 infection and mortality.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, thank you for that
15 and I remember that coming out and what it reminds me
16 of now are the small businesses. So, kind of moving
17 away from the health piece, we know that so many of
18 the impacted communities and sectors were small
19 business having to close down and not always
20 understanding how to connect to government. For the
21 small business immigrant owners, how did MOIA connect
22 with SBS to ensure that we had – they had everything
23 that we were able to give them? Is there anything in
24 specific that you can talk about that MOIA led in
25 that response?

1
2 RAQUEL BATISTA: Uhm, MOIA did do a lot of work
3 together with our sister agency SBS to ensure to get
4 information out to small business owners in their
5 languages on the availability of everything from
6 grants, loans, to you know other information that was
7 available. So, and we do still continue working
8 directly with SBS, also in participating in our
9 community and ethnic media roundtables to help inform
10 our small businesses about the services that are
11 available. So, we do continue to do that work.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: How many people did you
13 reach in that engagement on small businesses across
14 the city?

15 NICK GULOTTA: I'd have to Council Member - oh,
16 sorry Commissioner, please.

17 RAQUEL BATISTA: No, go ahead Nick, go ahead.

18 NICK GULOTTA: I would say we can definitely cut
19 the data for you to sort of meet the question after
20 the hearing. I'd say, as a distinct category, small
21 business from say you know domestic workers or day
22 laborers or other folks, we would have to really go
23 back to our data and comb through to sort of pick out
24 each event that was specifically just targeted to
25 small business owners.

1
2 I will say a lot of the – and so we can, you know
3 I can commit to getting you that data after this
4 hearing. On just specific to small business
5 outreach, one of the things that I would say is that
6 we partnered frequently on townhalls also with SBS.
7 And sort of plug in gaps where there was sort of
8 language gaps in the very beginning, the PPP loan for
9 example.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, right.

11 NICK GULOTTA: And so, we stood up multiple
12 virtual townhalls for small business owners in
13 Spanish and in Chinese and when other languages
14 became available, we assisted with translations as
15 well as helped with outreach in those languages.

16 So, there's definitely, there was a close
17 connection with SBS to make sure we were – you know
18 they launched just a ton of new programs at the
19 pandemic and every time they sort of needed our
20 assistance, we were more than happy to oblige. We've
21 partnered on many different townhalls for business
22 owners. And I'd also say working with our partners
23 at DCWP, we've engaged in a lot of small business
24 outreach with them and sort of partnered. It's
25 definitely in their wheelhouse but we'll certainly

1
2 lend a hand anytime we can and support with that
3 outreach.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I'm glad
5 you're doing data collection on small business,
6 locations, and geography but also language. It would
7 be great to kind of see what language was requested
8 for x, you know engagement. I think these are part
9 of the things that we want to understand where the
10 gaps are and I think what you're hearing from some
11 communities are that the city's only focusing on
12 Spanish. Or Spanish comes first and Urdu comes last.
13 And so, this is part of this question about gap and
14 getting information out, especially for our small
15 businesses that are really the backbones of so many
16 neighborhoods across the city.

17 So, it would be great if you can give us that
18 information and cut it in a way that we can see what
19 we want to see. Gaps and where you have focused in
20 the past.

21 Uhm, I'm going to move onto the next question. I
22 know we have three more panels coming from the
23 community organizations and members of the public and
24 I really want to move over to the relief that we did
25 not see from the federal government in any way but

1
2 the state and the city did step up. And there have
3 been in fact several relief programs to assist
4 individuals who lost their jobs or suffered from loss
5 of income as a result of the pandemic here in the
6 city. And how did MOIA assist low-wage workers,
7 immigrant workers, in applying for such programs?
8 And specifically, I'm looking in terms of how did
9 MOIA support immigrants in applying for these
10 programs and getting IDNYC, that would for some of
11 them be incredibly helpful in that application
12 process?

13 RAQUEL BATISTA: Thank you so much for that
14 question. So, there were several relief programs
15 that came out of both the city and the state. One
16 that MOIA led was the COVID-19 Immigrant Emergency
17 Relief Program where we got cash assistance to
18 immigrants in New York City particularly undocumented
19 immigrants. Anyone who was not eligible for any of
20 the federal or the state relief. We completed three
21 rounds of the Immigrant Emergency Relief Program to
22 provide cash assistance to immigrant New Yorkers. We
23 partnered with over 35 community-based organizations
24 who have the deep ties and strong relationship with
25 hard to reach immigrant communities to disperse the

1
2 emergency funding. And we also worked with 26
3 referral partners during the first round of that
4 funding.

5 In addition to the Immigrant Emergency Relief
6 Program, we also did work specifically on the
7 Excluded Worker Program where as you know in August
8 of 2021, the Department of Labor launched the New
9 York State Excluded Workers Fund.

10 MOIA worked very closely with the Department of
11 Labor in the lead up to the application launch to
12 discuss the document acceptance, the challenges based
13 on our learnings from IDNYC and the Emergency Relief
14 Program that we did and other programs. We provided
15 guidance on the use of employer and worker and labor
16 organization letters for proof of employment. We
17 also worked with the Department of Labor to accept
18 IDNYC as a form of identification to prove their
19 identity and residency utilizing the city's current
20 guidelines for expired cards. All IDNYC cards that
21 expired in 2020 and in 2021, were considered valid
22 for the purpose of the Excluded Worker Fund
23 Application through December 2021.

24

25

1
2 Uhm, so, I'll just also hand it over to Sara, who
3 can also give further details on both programs that
4 we worked on.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

6 SARA MARTIN: Sure, uhm, thank you Chair and
7 other Council Members. Also to the panelists, thank
8 you. It's really important for us to hear your
9 stories in your own words. So, it's an honor to be
10 here listening to you all.

11 I helped to manage our COVID Relief Fund and
12 worked on many other COVID relief programs. I want
13 to first emphasize the importance of our CBO network
14 of 60 providers, both funded providers and referral
15 partners who we started working with as early as
16 April 2020. Not only were these community partners
17 vital in getting over \$20 million out into the
18 community to folks who weren't at the time receiving
19 any support, any assistance. But the network also
20 proved really important both in our advocacy with the
21 state and other city programs in creating additional
22 resources for this community.

23 And then also, plugged into many of these
24 resources. So, even before we started the Relief
25 Fund, they were acting as hubs providing various

1
2 services for community members but that work only
3 continued to expand and continues to this day.

4 Uhm, so we are able to plug this network and show
5 the success of our work and also, working on other
6 programs such as housing programs, like the Fasten
7 Program through HRA and Enterprise and home-based
8 providers to help folks in rental arrears and with
9 other housing needs who don't typically qualify for
10 homebased services because of their status.

11 Or the states ERAP Program, which also helped
12 provide rental assistance to folks who were behind on
13 their rent. So, and then of course, the Excluded
14 Workers Fund. In each of these programs, we were
15 able to plug in the network of vital, supper
16 important providers, some of whom are here right now.

17 And also, we did our advocacy you know on
18 Excluded Workers Fund with the state. We really
19 emphasize the importance of working with trusted
20 community providers. The importance of that
21 partnership between government and CBO's who have
22 relationships with the exact folks that we're looking
23 to help. And so, and so yeah, I - sort of all of our
24 work on these various programs happen very naturally
25 because of our success early on in the pandemic.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it, thank you and
3 before I move over to a kind of finer point on this,
4 how many New Yorkers did MOIA help sign up for the
5 Excluded Worker Fund?

6 SARA MARTIN: Uhm, so, in total the Excluded
7 Worker Fund enrolled over 350,000 people. MOIA was
8 very vital as I mentioned in working with the state
9 in connecting many of our partners to the state and
10 they ended up being in many cases funded providers to
11 help connect folks and essential in helping with the
12 application process.

13 As you touched on, we also helped connect folks
14 to IDNYC. So, we connected hundreds of folks to
15 IDNYC so that they were able to obtain an ID and
16 apply for Excluded Workers Fund. We opened certain
17 sites -

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Sara, let me pause there
19 really quick. I just want to get some numbers and
20 then we can move onto the next question.

21 SARA MARTIN: Sure.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: But uhm, I'm just
23 realizing that you probably, MOIA didn't actually do
24 any application processing with members of the
25 community, is that right?

1
2 SARA MARTIN: Correct, yeah, yeah, we worked -
3 like supported -

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And the second question
5 is, really kind of looking at uh and this is partly
6 because our office kind of transformed into an
7 application processing center and we had hundreds of
8 people come through the office to apply, so we moved
9 people through like many of the nonprofits. The
10 money from the state came in so late and there was a
11 lag time there.

12 And so, we took that on with many of the Assembly
13 Members especially Marcela Mitaynes Assembly Member
14 in Sunset Park. And we both kind of became spaces
15 for that and my staff around the clock did that work.
16 What we saw were a need of IDNYC for many members who
17 came through that did not have them. How many IDNYC
18 cards did you kind of process through the time of
19 Excluded Worker Fund? I'd love to know that number.
20 So, essentially fall to now, how many cards did you -
21 how many applications did you have completed for low-
22 wage workers?

23 RAQUEL BATISTA: Sure, so I can answer that
24 question. We didn't collect that specific
25 information but you know we're happy to see how we

1
2 can get back to you on the number of folks but we did

3 —

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Commissioner, oh, go
5 ahead.

6 RAQUEL BATISTA: But we did work really closely
7 with the funded organizations who did a great job in
8 doing the outreach and doing the applications for the
9 Excluded Worker Fund. So, I'll give you one example.
10 Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation was one of
11 the funded organizations and we actually worked with
12 them to put in IDNYC staff there, so that folks from
13 the Bronx and from Washington Heights and other
14 places could go there specifically to both get their
15 IDNYC and do their application for Excluded Worker.

16 And at that center, while we were there; it
17 wasn't for a very, very long time because of space
18 issues at the organization but we got 200 people at
19 that specific site for Excluded — for applying for
20 Excluded Fund and applied for the IDNYC. So, that's
21 one example of the work that we did.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Great, that's really,
23 really great and I — is there a number that you can
24 give me of how many cards did you process in the

25

1
2 fall? From the fall till now? Is that number
3 something you have?

4 RAQUEL BATISTA: Uhm, I think that we will need
5 to get back to you on that one.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay.

7 RAQUEL BATISTA: We could fax you with that
8 information.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That would be wonderful to
10 know because I think what my next question is, I sent
11 a letter on the 22nd of November asking IDNY to
12 conduct an extensive review of new documents that
13 could be used for proving identity. This is
14 something that has been an evolving conversation and
15 we still haven't received an official response. So,
16 I'm asking you if you can kind of talk about that
17 today? I still want this on paper in response to
18 that letter, but it would be good to talk about it
19 here. Many member of the community organizations are
20 kind of pushing us on this. And so, moving forward,
21 how is MOIA thinking about expanding the types of
22 identification accepted, so that they can meet the
23 point threshold in applying for IDNYC?

24 RAQUEL BATISTA: Yes, thank you for that
25 question. We are still reviewing that letter. We

1
2 are going through each and every one of the ID's that
3 you and the Committee has identified and making sure
4 that we're vetting each one to see which ones we can
5 use. I can say that we are accepting NYC Care as a
6 point for IDNYC and that actually started recently.
7 Like in the last two or three months, we started
8 accepting NYC Care. So, that is happening but we
9 will get back to you soon uhm, on that letter. It
10 will be very soon.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Great, I will be looking
12 forward to that.

13 RAQUEL BATISTA: I don't know if Nick wanted to
14 add anything to that or Sara.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Sure.

16 NICK GULOTTA: No, I think you covered it
17 Commissioner. I'd just say, you know we definitely
18 you know I think you had some - and the Committee had
19 some great ideas there and we're definitely working
20 to review them and you know there are real challenges
21 and that's why we're working to vet each document to
22 really ensure access.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, well, again, I just
24 want to make sure that - and I know one of you will
25 stay for the testimony but I think that this is

1
2 another tension point with IDNYC that has kind of
3 been lingering for awhile and the accessibility to
4 IDNYC has diminished drastically because of COVID.
5 And so many workers that we saw who didn't have
6 IDNYC, we weren't able to get IDNYC to our district
7 until just now. And so, we want to say thank you for
8 that but there are hundreds of and potentially
9 thousands of people in Sunset Park that still have
10 yet to get their IDNYC and with a pending uh,
11 refunding of Excluded Worker Fund, we have so much to
12 do to ensure that people have what they need to
13 qualify and that's on us. It's not on the state.
14 The state created their thing. That's on us as a
15 city.

16 And so, I hope you take that to heart and really,
17 really move those things that are causing that. I
18 hope that organizations really are clear about that
19 because I can't be the only one speaking to that.
20 You all need to speak to that as well and that's
21 important.

22 Shifting over to the state in general and
23 specifically the governor's office, can you talk to
24 us a little bit about the coordination with the
25 governor's office? We have a new governor and I

1
2 don't know if that's changed ways of communication
3 with MOIA specifically and specifically focused on
4 low-wage workers. Is there anything kind of coming
5 up on that?

6 RAQUEL BATISTA: So, with our communications with
7 the state, the Administration is in continuous
8 conversation with the state and with the new
9 governor. You know, for example, right, I'll bring
10 up again on Hurricane Ida and the relief. There was
11 a lot of coordination happening between the city and
12 the state in responding to get undocumented
13 immigrants access to assistance. They were not
14 eligible for FEMA and that is one example where the
15 city put in \$7 million towards the \$27 million fund
16 to assist undocumented immigrants through that
17 particular situation. And we do continue working on
18 a variety of issues with the state.

19 Uhm, most recently, we've been talking to
20 Department of State around legal services. You know
21 in this particular case; they just announced the
22 Afghan Refugee Resettlement Funding. They put \$2
23 million towards that and we had a conversation with
24 them around coordination and you know monitoring the
25

1
2 situation in that particular community. So, we do
3 continue doing that work.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: You know, on the legal
5 service piece, the federal government has yet to give
6 us something that we can be proud of. Very
7 disappointed with our federal government right now.
8 But it is still possible with the current makeup. Is
9 MOIA looking to really ramp up legal services?

10 In so many ways, the Council has been leading in
11 thinking through very specific bodies of work.
12 Unaccompanied minors, the Bail Fund, NYFUP, these are
13 all big conversations that we've had in the Council
14 and the Mayor kind of lags. Is there a leap in any
15 kind of way that you're seeing where MOIA's really
16 thinking through the ramping up of providing legal
17 services to our communities and is that something
18 that's on the docket? How are you thinking about
19 this, especially as you prepare the new Mayor coming
20 in?

21 RAQUEL BATISTA: Uhm, it absolutely is. For
22 MOIA, this is definitely a priority area. We
23 continue to monitor the situation with the federal
24 policy and build back better in the immigration
25 provisions. And how they will impact New York City

1
2 and our ability to respond and to work and coordinate
3 with our community-based organizations with our
4 partners, including the private bar. So, you know we
5 are thinking about these issues. Looking at right,
6 how can we help to reduce issues around like fraud
7 and all of those other things that come up whenever
8 there is a new immigration law that passes. And so,
9 MOIA is having conversations internally around how do
10 we prepare to respond.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. I think that that
12 is important to hear so we have it on the record.
13 That's something that we just - this is a big fight I
14 think with the Mayor's Office and I hope that that
15 doesn't stay a fight with this new mayor. Because
16 legal services are sometimes the most critical
17 because they impact one of the most impactful moments
18 in a family's interaction with the immigration
19 system. Either through deportation or through
20 citizenship.

21 So, uhm, I want to ask this next and big question
22 about the executive budget, which added an additional
23 funding of \$2.6 million in Fiscal Year 2022 for
24 immigration related initiatives administered by MOIA.
25 Including Know Your Rights, New York City

1
2 Citizenship, We Speak New York City NYC and Rapid
3 Response. Funding is slightly higher in '22 due to
4 start up costs for We Speak in the first year. So,
5 how has MOIA been using this money and can you walk
6 us through what you've been doing in spending down
7 that money? And have you included any material
8 related to COVID-19 vaccine mandate in the We Speak
9 NYC program?

10 RAQUEL BATISTA: Sure, so MOIA oversees a number
11 of programs and initiatives to ensure that immigrant
12 New Yorkers are informed and can access the supports
13 they need including immigration services. The \$2.6
14 million has been used to fund a variety of
15 initiatives including the Rapid Response Legal
16 Collaborative, Know Your Rights, We Speak NY and Our
17 New York City Citizenship to address some of the
18 needs that immigrant New Yorkers face.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, I guess what I want to
20 get a sense of is uhm, can you go deeper into
21 anything that We Speak New York is doing to be
22 responsive and specific, not just to COVID-19 but to
23 crisis moments that happen in our city and how
24 dynamic and responsive can that program be?
25

1
2 RAQUEL BATISTA: So, We Speak NYC regarding the
3 COVID-19 vaccine specific information, we have added
4 information shared from our Vaccine Command Center
5 and we do share information to We Speak, We Speak
6 organizations and partners uhm, on you know issues
7 related to COVID-19. Uhm, we have not yet produced a
8 video right now on COVID-19 information. Uhm, but We
9 Speak does include in all of their communication with
10 our partners, information highlighting our services.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, Nick, I don't know
12 if I saw you -

13 NICK GULOTTA: Sure, yeah, sorry. I think the
14 Commissioner, just to add to what she said. So, we
15 send out daily sort of digests to all the We Speak
16 instructors as well. In there will include a lot of
17 the sort of key updates from the city both as the
18 Commissioner mentioned from the Vaccine Command
19 Center as well as sort of policy updates from across
20 the city. So, through that communication directly
21 with instructors, we definitely are able to keep them
22 informed.

23 I'll also say and you know again, I want to thank
24 you for your partnership with We Speak over the years
25 and funding and uh, one of the new episodes,

1
2 Childrens Voice, does include some messaging around
3 the vaccine and sort of immigration status not being
4 a factor. So, it's definitely as you mentioned, it's
5 one of the most, I would say it's one of the most
6 dynamic programs in city government. It certainly
7 adapted to sort of meet a lot of the sort of
8 challenges that we faced over COVID. You know from
9 moving to virtual and exploring different
10 partnerships with technology, that program is really
11 doing a lot of outreach to community members and is
12 really doing a lot of outreach to community members
13 and is able to include some new information as well
14 to through the Channels that I mentioned.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can you uh, hold on. I
16 vote yes. I'm actually voting on the other Committee
17 as well. Uhm, okay, back to this idea that it's
18 dynamic. I just want to really give you the
19 opportunity to talk about how dynamic it is and what
20 you have included if you can and in We Speak. I
21 think part of what the one intention I had with We
22 Speak is that it's not an adult literacy you know
23 program. It's an engagement program that can help
24 people in a different way but it's not a kind of
25 classified academic rigor. And this is part of the

1
2 NYCCAL conversation, the New York Coalition for Adult
3 Literacy but it does present this amazing opportunity
4 to create new ways for New Yorkers to engage in some
5 of the more pressing and new dynamic issues that are
6 hitting the City of New York.

7 Especially like a pandemic or any kind of climate
8 change related issues, basements, you know there's so
9 much information that can come out there. So, if
10 there's a way you can give us a taste of what that
11 is, I would appreciate that.

12 RAQUEL BATISTA: Sure, I mean -

13 NICK GULOTTA: I can start. Oh, sorry
14 Commissioner.

15 RAQUEL BATISTA: No, go ahead. No, go Nick. Go
16 Nick.

17 NICK GULOTTA: Uhm, I would just start by saying
18 you know we've faced a number of you know as you
19 mentioned sort of both civic changes to New York City
20 over the past several years. Rank choice voting for
21 example, other sort of topics where we've included
22 them in episodes mentioned. Sort of in Children's
23 Voice, the latest sort of release from We Speak, uhm,
24 we included information about both ranked choice
25 voting, vaccines, sort of hate and other topics that

1
2 you know gain responsive to the time we're in. We
3 obviously produced and I know you've been a great
4 partner in this around census as well and just making
5 sure we're including those things.

6 So, I would say if there's any sort of topics
7 that you know you would like us to explore moving
8 forward and thinking about new episodes or new
9 topics, we definitely welcome that from the Committee
10 and certainly if there's any examples of collateral
11 or anything that you'd like to see, we can get that
12 to you after the hearing. But you know we try
13 certainly in the communication with instructors to
14 you know keep them up to date about the latest sort
15 of news and rules from the city around the pandemic
16 to bring that English language needers, learners as
17 well. So, that's sort of the mechanism in a nut
18 shell but certainly, we're open to exploring you know
19 any recommendations you have.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Beautiful, thank you.
21 Thank you for that and for folks that are listening
22 right now, how can people get connected to We Speak
23 New York? Is there a plug in that you can give. If
24 someone is listening right now and they want to refer
25

1
2 it to somebody or join in themselves, how do they do
3 that?

4 NICK GULOTTA: Yeah, I would say our website is a
5 work of art and is one that we're really proud of.
6 So, you can go to nyc.gov/currentenglish or you can
7 go to just on google, We Speak NYC or by calling 311.
8 We can connect you to available classes. Uhm, I
9 think the website is an amazing tool. And all the
10 videos there in the content, the instructor guides
11 and other things are also available and you know I
12 think that team is really, you know if you were to
13 compare it to other city government websites, it's
14 really work to fine tune an engagement you know for
15 folks who are limited English proficient and English
16 learners to be able to engage with that content. So,
17 I'm really proud of that work.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Beautiful and we'll Tweet
19 that out, so that people can engage. Well, that's it
20 for my prepared questions and I think what I want to
21 do is really now give space to the organizations that
22 have been holding a lot of what you've been speaking
23 to. Who is going to stay here? And it would be
24 great if you can stay on camera so we can keep
25 engaging you throughout the rest of the hearing to

1
2 not just listen to the organizations but also to kind
3 of hear some – what I’m going to be trying to pull
4 out is some feedback to the Administration. We want
5 to be better and think feedback is the best way to do
6 that, especially if it can help make all our systems
7 better to engage our immigrant low-wage workers.

8 Commissioner, who is staying on your team to
9 listen to the rest of the panel.

10 RAQUEL BATISTA: Uhm, well, Sara, Nick, Martin
11 and Ilene are on and they will be staying on. And
12 so, Chair Menchaca again, I just wanted to thank you.
13 Thank you for your years of service. For doing all
14 of this work on the Immigration Committee. Thank you
15 to all the Immigration Committee members for all of
16 the work that all of you have done. I look forward
17 to continue speaking to you from now through the end
18 of the year and hopefully in the new year. I just
19 want to wish you a happy holiday and thank you
20 everyone.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much
22 Commissioner for you and your work. COVID was not
23 easy on public service and you, you stepped up and
24 you made things happen and on behalf of my district,
25 I want to say thank you for everything you’ve done

1
2 for District 38 and immigrants across the city.

3 Thank you so much.

4 RAQUEL BATISTA: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I'll hand it
6 back to our Committee Counsel Harbani Ahuja.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. At this
8 time, we've concluded testimony from the
9 Administration and I'd like to thank everyone for
10 their testimony. We'd like to now turn to public
11 testimony.

12 I'd like to remind everyone that we will be
13 calling on individuals one by one to testify and each
14 panelist will be given three minutes to speak. For
15 panelists, after I call your name, a member of our
16 staff will unmute you and there may be a few seconds
17 of delay before you are unmuted. So, we thank you in
18 advance for your patience.

19 Please wait a brief moment for the Sergeant at
20 Arms to announce that you may begin before starting
21 your testimony. Council Members who have questions
22 for a particular panelist should use the Zoom raise
23 hand function and I will call on you after that panel
24 has completed their testimony in the order in which
25 you have raised your hands.

1
2 We'd like to now welcome our first public panel.
3 First, I'd like to welcome Manuel Castro to testify.
4 After Manuel, I will be calling on Yesenia Mata,
5 followed by Ligia Guallpa followed by Carina Kaufman-
6 Gutierrez followed by Mario Russell. Manuel Castro,
7 you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 MANUEL CASTRO: Thank you and good morning
10 everyone. My name is Manuel Castro and I'm the
11 Executive Director of New Immigrant Community
12 Empowerment. I first would like to thank Council
13 Member Carlos Menchaca for all your years as
14 Chairperson and member of this Committee.

15 Carlos, I think you know, your friendship has
16 meant a lot to the immigrant community. To myself,
17 our team, and you know it's sad to see you go but I
18 know you will continue to be a champion. And I also
19 want to thank Lorena Lucero and Cesar Vargas from
20 your team. I think you know I don't know how we
21 would have done without their support these many
22 years, especially through COVID. And frankly, your
23 leadership has done a tremendous amount in uplifting
24 issues that impact undocumented workers and families.
25 And that is just tremendously meaningful. That's not

1
2 always the case and we always fight to center
3 undocumented workers in the work that we do. And so,
4 we thank you for the support.

5 Uhm, you know I appreciate the time but I think
6 our member Juan earlier today and the workers that
7 testified did a great job in really speaking to the
8 needs that they are experiencing at the moment as we
9 try and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic. And
10 also, continue to address the issues that keep coming
11 up.

12 So, I'll just say and I want to drive this point,
13 that in the transitions that we're about to go
14 through and aren't undergoing, it's really important
15 to protect our institutions. And certainly, it's
16 important to continue to support and strengthen the
17 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. But I would
18 also like to say that we need to include the
19 nonprofit organizations that the Council has
20 supported over the many years to really strengthen
21 and build up to be able to address the many issues
22 that we've been confronted with especially, you know
23 uh, during the pandemic.

24 So, I want to speak to that because it's been so
25 important to have the city's support and it would be

1
2 a shame to lose that. And to lose the kind of
3 infrastructure that we able to sustain because of the
4 Council's support.

5 So, as you know, not just New York City but the
6 state government and also foundations have relied
7 very heavily on centers like ours to achieve the many
8 things. And you heard from the Mayor's Office of
9 Immigrant Affairs, that we have been able to achieve
10 as a city to mitigate the issues and address the
11 issues that our communities have been dealing with
12 during the pandemic.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 MANUEL CASTRO: And it's also important to say
15 that these organizations and these centers are made
16 up of people like myself and my colleagues here
17 today, that have put themselves at great risk and
18 remain at the frontlines of the pandemic.

19 So, I just want to reemphasize that it's going to
20 be really important for the new Council and the new
21 Administration to listen to us, to listen to our
22 experiences and continue to support us as the city
23 has. It's unpredictable; none of us knew two years
24 ago what would you know what would come and we all
25 you know decided to you know uhm address the issues

1
2 that COVID-19 brought up or our particular
3 communities and we don't know what's coming in the
4 future.

5 So, thank you so much for the opportunity and I
6 hope to continue to work with Council Member Menchaca
7 and your team in whatever you decide to do next and
8 with the rest of the Council Members here today.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
11 2:06:47].

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
13 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Yesenia Mata to
14 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 YESENIA MATA: Good morning Chair Menchaca and
17 Council Members of the Committee. My name is Yesenia
18 Mata, I am the Executive Director of La Colmena. A
19 day laborer and immigrant rights organization on
20 Staten Island. I'm going to be speaking on the
21 issues that Staten Island immigrant workers face and
22 why it's important to continue funding La Colmena and
23 day laborers, the Daily Work Coalition.

24 Staten Island immigrant workers and communities
25 have been weathering the impacts of the COVID-19

1
2 public health and economic crisis. A range of
3 structural socioeconomic factors contribute to the
4 inequities behind the disproportionate negative
5 impacts of the pandemic on people of color and
6 immigrants in Staten Island.

7 For working class immigrants, a key factor is a
8 concentration MOH sectors of the economy. And under
9 non-standing work arrangements that largely exclude
10 them from the legal protections that regular
11 employees enjoy. These workers are also exposed to
12 safety hazards in industries with high injury rates,
13 such as construction and lack adequate access to
14 healthcare.

15 The lack of former employment contracts and job
16 security due to their immigration status, left
17 workers more vulnerable to job losses at the onset of
18 the pandemic. But despite their economic and social
19 vulnerabilities, they played a crucial role in
20 sustaining the economy of Staten Island as the COVID-
21 19 developed. They spend more than 91 percent of
22 their income on housing and basic consumer goods
23 serving an essential source of revenue for local
24 businesses. But let's be clear, 98 percent of
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1
2 workers did not qualify for any form of pandemic
3 relief or unemployment benefits.

4 The Excluded Workers Fund and the Mayor's
5 Emergency Relief Fund provided some benefits but more
6 needs to be done and more funding is needed. During
7 the pandemic, La Colmena remained open to address all
8 of the survival needs of the families and shifted on
9 becoming an emergency response center. These issues
10 highlight the need for increased funding for worker
11 centers, such as La Colmena.

12 I want to thank Chairman Menchaca and his office,
13 Lorena and Cesar for always being champion of
14 immigrants. Your commitment to immigrant workers
15 will not be forgotten. Thank you for making plenty
16 of trips to Staten Island. As you close your time as
17 Council Member, I hope and I know they will, the new
18 incoming class will continue your committed advocacy
19 on behalf of our immigrant workers. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Yesenia. Thank
21 you so much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
23 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Ligia Gualpa to
24 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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2 LIGIA GUALLPA: Thank you so much for the
3 opportunity Council Member Menchaca and the entire
4 Committee on Immigration. [LOST AUDIO 2:10:02].

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ligia, I'm sorry, we're
6 having an issue with your audio.

7 LIGIA GUALLPA: I'm really sorry, technical
8 issues. So, my name is Ligia Guallpa, I am the
9 Executive Director of the Workers Justice Project and
10 Workers Rights Organization that represents day
11 laborers, house cleaners, domestic workers, mostly
12 essential workers who are playing a vital and
13 irreplaceable role in our city's recovery.

14 COVID-19 and its economic impact has been
15 devastating to low-wage workers, immigrant New
16 Yorkers. Uhm, WJP members and millions of other
17 immigrant New Yorkers were uninsured, as you heard
18 it, unemployed and excluded from all social safety
19 net programs for more than a year.

20 In partnership and with the support of the
21 Council Members and many of the people who have been
22 in leadership and I'm extremely thankful to you
23 Carlos and all City Council Members who really have
24 partnered with us through the Day Laborer Workforce
25 Initiative. Allowing us to really step it up as

1
2 emergency relief centers in the middle of the worst
3 crisis of our time. And together, we've been able to
4 step it up where our federal government failed,
5 providing millions of dollars in aid in cash
6 benefits, food distribution, been able to be uhm, the
7 main source of support and the only safety net that
8 immigrants have been relying on in order to survive
9 the current crisis that we're living.

10 We have come a very long way. Uhm, we have built
11 powerful infrastructures for immigrant essential
12 workers through the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative.
13 WJP, as you heard it through other incredible sister
14 organizations that are part of the Day Laborer
15 Coalition, have been able to step it up as emergency
16 relief centers.

17 Uhm, before COVID-19 and we're hoping to continue
18 to get the support from the new incoming class of
19 Council Members, who will be able to sustain this
20 infrastructure. And really partnering with us to
21 continue to build a safety net but also, a community
22 and grow the power that all essential workers have in
23 New York City.

24 So, uhm, thank you so much to you Carlos. We
25 hope that we can continue to partner with you and the

1
2 new incoming class and really to continue building
3 this infrastructure, so we can continuously provide
4 essential services, just like the way we're doing
5 right now. We have like actually uhm here, we're in
6 the middle of a massive network support system that
7 we're building for deliveristas and for other
8 essential workers.

9 So, thank you, thank you to you. Thank you to
10 every City Council Member that has really been with
11 us, the Day Laborer Coalition for just being with us.

12 [LOST 2:13:04]—

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Ligia, I think we lost
14 you. Yeah, we lost your audio but [SPEAKING IN
15 SPANISH 2:13:21] and thank you for tuning in and
16 speaking your truth to power directly from WJP.
17 [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 2:13:29].

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
19 I'd like to now welcome Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez to
20 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 CARINA KAUFMAN-GUTIERREZ: Good afternoon
23 everybody. My name is Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez, I am
24 the Deputy Director at the Street Vendor Project and
25 I first really want to thank you Council Member

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2 Menchaca and also to Lorena and Cesar behind the
3 scenes. Always you know ride or die for street
4 vendors, for immigrant workers. Always out in the
5 streets with us and really, really appreciate the way
6 that you have championed street vendors throughout
7 your time in Council.

8 Uhm, SVP is a membership-based organization that
9 advocates for street vendor rights and fights to
10 improve their working conditions, which have been in
11 crisis since long before COVID-19 right? As an
12 organization, we have the privilege to serve and
13 build the street vendor community. Folks who come to
14 SVP as a one stop shop for all issues that they are
15 facing, from housing to food insecurity, to
16 immigration support, to demystifying the street
17 vending system.

18 Approximately 90 percent of street vendors are
19 immigrants who have limited access to other forms of
20 employment opportunities and for whom street vending
21 offers them a flexible schedule and also, ownership
22 as the owner of their small businesses, right?

23 Our membership is incredibly diverse and our
24 members are speaking a wide variety of languages
25 including Arabic, Bangla, Spanish, Mandarin, Tibetan

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and Wolof. And so, when you spoke earlier about the rapid translation and the staff power and the time, that has been one of our main efforts throughout the COVID pandemic, is to make sure that all information is rapidly translated. So, with a staff of nine, that becomes one of our most time consuming efforts beyond all of our day to day work and also, you know ensuring that folks are having access to legal services, providing those consultations, and also providing food.

The vending community combines two of the hardest hit populations during the pandemic, immigrants and small businesses. Vendors serve all New Yorkers across the city and contribute to our local economy and culture, paying taxes, just like any small business as our member Sonia shared earlier. But they are excluded from almost all existing government relief programs. And folks today, even today are reporting up to 90 percent losses in income from what they were making prior to the pandemic.

Within our membership, 52 percent of street vendors are reporting that they've reduced their food consumption over the last 12 months. 46 percent said

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2 that they and other household members had skipped a
3 meal in the last month alone, right?

4 Our members are facing crippling depression,
5 anxiety and fears related to COVID-19 and their
6 losses. Their ability to just put food on the table
7 at the end of the day. And this has only continued
8 to get worse because vendors aren't experiencing
9 fines, confiscations and harassment from city
10 officials for just trying to do their jobs. So,
11 imagine this right. This is our reality, is that
12 after two years of a pandemic of street vendors being
13 treated as being called essential workers, now when
14 they go out to work -

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 CARINA KAUFMAN-GUTIERREZ: They are at risk of
17 confiscation. They are unable to get the permits and
18 licenses that they need to stabilize their businesses
19 and are being treated frankly as subhuman, as less
20 than other New Yorkers.

21 I just wanted to thank as well Council Member
22 Menchaca and your amazing team because this year, we
23 did PATH, Intro. 1116, right? That was a feat to
24 reform the street vending industry from the inside
25 out and so, I wanted to thank you for your work on

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2 that. And also, just to share you know, for the
3 income Council, there are many ways we continue to
4 build off of the work of Council Member Menchaca and
5 folks for Intro. 1116.

6 So, completely formalizing the street vending
7 industry, so that street vendors can receive all the
8 necessary business licensing that they need. Truly
9 removing the NYPD from all vending enforcement in
10 line with what has been the city policy since January
11 2021. But unfortunately it continues to be the case
12 that NYPD is continuing to go after street vendors.
13 Reducing the barriers to successful application for
14 grants and loans to street vendors. Ensuring the
15 timely implementation of Intro. 1116 including
16 distribution of new permits by July 2021. And
17 continuing to create new commissary spaces through
18 incentive, tax breaks and streamlining of the
19 permitting process.

20 So thank you very much for your time, appreciate
21 it.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Carina and on
23 behalf of Council Member Chin and I who are the
24 coprime sponsors of this incredible legislation for
25 street vendors, we say thank you for pushing us and

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2 for really informing the bill on how it needed to
3 kind of roll out. And I know that I think it was
4 Sonia, who mentioned the state legislative process
5 that would really kind of take care of the other
6 piece which is the limit that can really help our
7 street vendors on the ground. So, thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
9 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Mario Russell to
10 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 MARIO RUSSELL: Thank you Committee Council and
13 thank you Councilman Menchaca and the thank you is
14 with a capital T and a capital Y across the present
15 moment and many years of just real extraordinary
16 leadership and really deep thoughtfulness on your
17 part.

18 Uhm, and I'll say this, passion. So, I hope and
19 I know that these are the gifts that you will
20 continue to bring wherever you are. So, this is not
21 a loss, the gains continue. So, thank you really for
22 that and thank you for the opportunity just to speak
23 briefly today.

24 Uhm, you know the impact of COVID-19 on
25 communities that we serve and those immigrants and

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2 refugees and really ultimately communities of color
3 has been and really continues to be harsh and
4 disproportionate and lasting. Charities in
5 connection to immigrants and refugees has a long
6 history and what we have continued to do over the
7 past six years that I've served in capacity as
8 Director of Refugee and Immigrant Services is to
9 broaden our support and our connection and our
10 connectivity with legal, with settlement, the
11 tension, integration, day laborer ESL, clinical,
12 family reunification, children and court defense
13 services. Our feeling and our theory is the person
14 walks in usually with one request that many needs and
15 therefore also building up our information referral
16 services with the Action NYC hotline and the State
17 hotline, International hotline.

18 Uhm but needing of course over the past 24 months
19 are really adjust and readjust and focus and refocus
20 our response. The pandemic made that incredibly
21 difficult and it's clearly a job that's not finished
22 as we've really heard today. Just 24 months you know
23 in the time roughly that we're rounding out two
24 years, we distributed over \$6 million of financial
25 assistance and over one million meals.

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And really, we had to retool and reengineer our legal services to be almost like a refugee camp at downtown AD Maiden Lane. You know people came for food and for financial assistance. Uhm, so you know at the broadest level, I'd say this is where we land our call for support and our call to continuing action. Uhm, there's sort of specific ways that I'd like to mention today but very briefly. You know, the first really is continuing the commitment and expanding training and gathering space opportunities for day laborers.

There is no discernable end to the pandemic in a sense and its affects are still real and ongoing. So, developing this in particular -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MARIO RUSSELL: Spaces, which are work centers. They're like schools, they're like community centers, they're distribution centers, they are communication and information centers. These are hubs that have proven to be profoundly important and necessary to not only day laborers but I would then toggle to the second point, to asylees and refugees, immigrants across the board. And I want to sort of identify the workforce needs of this population of undocumented

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2 people asylees and refugees that really are similar to
3 and mirror those of the undocumented day laborer
4 workers. Maybe they're here for less time but
5 likewise are in that deep zone of uncertainty, that
6 deep zone of undocumented status and sort of the
7 Afghan experience that we have been having recently
8 right? Knowing that we're going to resettle 1,000 in
9 New York. Catholic Charity is already working with
10 over 100 families in New York City and what we see is
11 the deep vulnerabilities of them, of the folks who
12 have been transferred from the border. Of the
13 Haitian communities that are being transferred from
14 the border. All of them without work permit, without
15 work status. So, what do we need?

16 At the broadest level, the second point is
17 actually mental health and social support services.
18 The day will come and I fantasize that we will have a
19 pro bono mental health network just like we do with
20 legal services.

21 Two, thinking through how to coordinate
22 affordable and accessible housing. Three, how to
23 navigate, negotiate with the feds around work permit
24 delays for those who are eligible for work permits,
25 because two years is a long time. And last, legal

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2 consultations and legal support. And you mentioned
3 this earlier Council Chair and I think you've always
4 been so aware of the symbiotic synergistic
5 relationship between legal services and everything
6 else. A healthy legal case helps a healthy family.

7 So, with that, you know it's a - we would land
8 our call, our support, our need for attention really
9 in these many, many complicated zones and you know
10 remain always grateful and hopeful that we'll work
11 together on this. Uhm, in your private capacity or
12 with the Council as the years go by. Thank you very
13 much.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Uh, amen to all of that
15 brother. Thank you so much Mario for your work and
16 uh, I can't begin to say thank you enough for what
17 you've been holding on the ground and I'll add some
18 more things in my final remarks but I want to say
19 thank you for that support and for being on the
20 ground with our immigrant community. Thank you so
21 much.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Mario for your
23 testimony. Uhm, we've concluded the testimony for
24 this panel, so I'd like to just turn it to Chair
25

1
2 Menchaca for any comments and questions before we
3 move onto our next panel.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah absolutely. I have
5 one question and I'm really thankful again that MOIA
6 is here present, really kind of taking in all of this
7 because I think we've seen some really good
8 direction. The concept of NYFUP for mental health,
9 that is beautiful. I think we've been trying to do
10 that with our mental health initiative, our Immigrant
11 Mental Health Initiative but something that can be
12 more robust. These are really great ideas.

13 If anybody that just spoke and I'm thinking about
14 La Colmena or NICE, all of you, Street Vendors, WJP,
15 is there one thing and not with any kind of
16 explanation but just say one thing that the city did
17 incredibly well for you during COVID and low-wage
18 workers and one thing that was just, didn't make the
19 mark. And if you can just kind of, if you can do
20 popcorn quick to respond to that. I want to get a
21 sense about where we are doing well as a city and
22 where we are challenged. And if you can, I'd love to
23 kind of hear from you all on that and Mario, maybe we
24 can go, we can start with you? One thing that the
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2 city just did an A+ and one thing that the city just
3 was too challenged to make it to a thank you.

4 MARIO RUSSELL: Well, you know we worked closely
5 together and with Sara and her team you know on some
6 really, quick, efficient and effective rollout of
7 financial assistance that was very prosaic.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right.

9 MARIO RUSSELL: Uhm, it's not exciting
10 programmatically and is very much responsive in the
11 moment. It's you know, it is what it is but that was
12 critical.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Beautiful.

14 MARIO RUSSELL: You know I'm not going to blame
15 anybody on the Council or in MOIA or anywhere else
16 but I would say contracting.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. We need to
18 hear that. We need to hear that and contracting
19 reimbursement and building the contracts in the first
20 place and all that.

21 MARIO RUSSELL: Yeah, that's got to improve.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yesenia?

23 YESENIA MATA: Well, La Colmena remained open
24 throughout the entire pandemic and I was specifically
25 on the ground on the get go with my staff and the

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2 members to ensure that we could build that
3 infrastructure to ensure that La Colmena can remain
4 open. And it was defiantly very difficult to do that
5 and obviously, we were definitely afraid of our
6 health, that we would get sick or we would get our
7 loved ones sick. So, that was very traumatizing at
8 the time but we still kept going.

9 So, we were able to see like the pros and cons
10 and we understand that the pandemic was very
11 unexpected. We understand that the city, the
12 organizations, even businesses, all of us were trying
13 to figure out, what are we going to do? So, I would
14 like to say that at the beginning, it was very
15 difficult when it came to contracting. And I
16 understand like even now, it is very difficult and I
17 think with small organizations, specific like La
18 Colmena, we are trying to get funding but yet, if
19 there's issues with the contracts, if there's issues
20 to getting the money, to getting the contracts, it
21 makes our job a lot harder because at the same time,
22 we are trying to serve our community.

23 And it's either/or it's either I focus on this or
24 I focus on my community. Obviously, I'm going to be
25 focusing on my community and then I'm left with the

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2 administrative side of it that I cannot get that
3 money to continue running the organization that
4 provides vital services, right? And that's one and I
5 understand in the beginning, we were all trying to
6 figure out, trying to get the COVID vaccines to
7 organizations. We're all trying to figure this out.

8 I would like to say that working with MOIA, it
9 was great to have contact directly, such as with Nick
10 and Sara. That's how we were able to get that
11 funding in the sense of come to La Colmena because
12 they understood the need of La Colmena. So, that was
13 very helpful. We are forever grateful for that and I
14 know we continue that partnership and I do hope that
15 whoever comes in or whatnot, that we continue that
16 partnership because it was very vital to La Colmena
17 but I would emphasize contracting is very supported
18 also ensuring on language access is very important.
19 Uhm, because we're left to doing the translation as
20 well but we are here to work with the Council Members
21 and incoming Council Members and teams to make sure
22 that we can continue providing better services to the
23 immigrant community.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Sara and Nick
3 for that human touch and that clearly makes the
4 difference. Thank you Yesenia. Carina.

5 CARINA KAUFMAN-GUTIERREZ: Thank you. Thank you
6 for the opportunity to share a bit more about this.
7 I would say, I wanted to echo Yesenia in shouting out
8 MOIA and specifically Nick. Because especially, like
9 Nick knows that we only communicate on What's App
10 with our members, so Nick would text us directly
11 critical information that was already translated, so
12 we can just press the forward button and share it
13 out. And that kind of knowledge of understanding how
14 we communicate made it that much simpler and easier
15 for us to ensure that this critical information,
16 vaccine registrations, where vaccines are going to be
17 held, right? Pop up sites, uhm, when there was the
18 shutdown uhm, I forget what it was but the shutdown
19 where it was nobody could go out to work for a number
20 of days. Making sure that information was translated
21 and getting out exactly. That was very important.

22 And then in terms of the difficulties, uhm, you
23 know Street Vendors being the smallest businesses,
24 have had an incredibly difficult time getting any
25 contracting with the city as small business owners.

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And so, we have tried for example to apply for funding to hire street vendors to make meals for distribution, noting that vendors would be making culturally sensitive meals, but that was never approved. And also making sure that small business grants are available to street vendors as well.

Noting that with issues of permitting, right, vendors have a very difficult time showing that they are the owners of their small businesses. Which doubly makes it even harder for vendors to apply for grants or loans, even when it's translated. Even when it's different forms of applications are available, there's still no way for anyone to prove their ownership.

So, just ensuring that these types of opportunities that are available to small businesses are also keeping in mind street vendors, so that they can be working directly with the city.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Carina for that and these are really illuminating about what works and what needs to continue and I want to say thank you for being specific. And Manny?

MANUEL CASTRO: Great, thank you Council Member Menchaca for asking this question. Evidently there's

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2 a lot but I have to say you know everyone's right. I
3 think that the relationship that we have been working
4 on to uhm you know work at this level is a long time
5 coming with particular myself, Sara Martin. It's
6 important to highlight that because we need to build
7 on top of that, right? And with Nick and with the
8 team, and what I said earlier, we need to protect our
9 institutions right and when something's working, you
10 need to like cherish it and like really protect it,
11 right? And I think it's an important point to make
12 because that wasn't the case with other city
13 agencies, right?

14 You all know we worked, you know we've been
15 working to improve the Department of Buildings for
16 instance and others, right? Uhm, and they can learn
17 from Sara's work. Sara and Nicks work for sure. And
18 honestly, as soon as Mario said contracting, I was
19 like yeah, I change my mind, that is what needs to be
20 improved.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Noted.

22 MANUEL CASTRO: Uhm, frankly, we need to as a
23 city think about how to better support the agencies
24 on the ground and not just treat us like a side
25 project or an afterthought. And so, that needs a lot

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2 of improvement. Perhaps even it's own office, right?
3 That is dedicated just to supporting nonprofit
4 organizations working on the ground. I mean, we are
5 the largest city in the country. I think we deserve
6 it. Thanks.

7 CHAIRPERSON MANCHACA: Thank you Manny and it
8 sounds like we have a project for contracting and I
9 hope that MOIA can lend some time and effort for
10 that. And again, kudos to Nick and Sara for your
11 work.

12 Ligia, if you're still on. If you have anything
13 to add in terms of the best thing that you saw happen
14 during COVID and a challenge.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uh, she's not on anymore.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: She's not on, okay, great.
17 So, I think that rounds us out for this panel. Is
18 that right? And Council Member Dromm is also here, I
19 just want to note and thank you for joining us. I
20 know there's a day of voting right now, so uhm and a
21 huge thank you to him for his work as the previous
22 Chair of Immigration and a massive partner for all
23 things that we did on immigration here in the Council
24 together. A beautiful, amazing partner. Back to
25 you.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Uhm, I'd
3 like to thank this panel for their testimony and now
4 we'll be moving onto our next public panel. In
5 order, I will be calling on Callen Lowell followed by
6 Sarah Leberstein followed by Carlyn Cowen followed by
7 Debipriya Chatterjee followed by Merble Reagon
8 followed by Tito Sinha followed by Victoria Roseman.

9 Callen Lowell, you may begin your testimony when
10 you are ready.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 CALLEN LOWELL: Hi, my name is Callen Lowell, and
13 I am an Equal Justice Works Fellow in the Employment
14 Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services. BDS provides
15 multi-disciplinary and client-centered criminal,
16 family, and immigration defense, as well as civil
17 legal services, social work support and advocacy in
18 nearly 30,000 cases in Brooklyn every year. I
19 represent immigrant workers on their employment
20 matters, as well as their workplace exploitation
21 related immigration claims. Thank you so much to
22 Chair Menchaca for the opportunity to testify about
23 the challenges facing immigrant workers during COVID-
24 19.

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2 Immigrant workers in New York overwhelmingly lost
3 jobs and hours due to the pandemic. With many who
4 lost work, excluded from unemployment insurance due
5 to their immigration status. Those who kept their
6 jobs faced increasingly unsafe and illegal conditions
7 at work.

8 In our written testimony, we offer a number of
9 recommendations on how the city can support low-wage
10 immigrant workers. In my limited time, I'll
11 highlight just a few. First, the Council should
12 expand existing just cause firing protections from
13 fast food workers to all low-wage industries to
14 protect immigrant workers from retaliatory firings
15 when they challenges unsafe working conditions.

16 Without expanding these just cause protections to
17 cover all low-wage work, the threat of retaliation
18 has a chilling affect that prevents workers from
19 challenging illegal and unsafe workplace practices.
20 This is especially true for some immigrant workers
21 who would not be eligible for unemployment insurance
22 if they lost their job due to their immigration
23 status.

24 Next, existing fair scheduling protections for
25 fast food and retail workers. Enshrined in the Fair

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2 Work Week Legislation, should be expanded by the
3 Council to cover workers in all low-wage industries.
4 COVID-19 related childcare gaps, make reliable and
5 fair scheduling essential for immigrant parents to
6 keep their jobs.

7 Finally, the Council should help eligible workers
8 access immigration relief via increased city agency U
9 and T Visa's certifications. Just this past month,
10 our unit has worked with numerous undocumented
11 workers whose employers threaten to have them
12 deported when they asserted their workplace rights.

13 While undocumented workers may know this
14 retaliation is against the law, most do not realize
15 that surviving this conduct may make them eligible
16 for workplace related immigration relief. The
17 Council should implement proactive city agency
18 screening of the workplace safety and discrimination
19 complaints they receive from immigrant workers for
20 workplace exploitation based U and T Visa's
21 certification eligibility to help more workers access
22 immigration relief when they are entitled to it.

23 I encourage you to review my written testimony,
24 which includes a full list of recommendations to
25 improve -

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CALLEN LOWELL: COVID-19 recovery for low-wage workers. Thanks for the opportunity for testify and I welcome any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Callen. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Sarah Leberstein to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

SARAH LEBERSTEIN: Good afternoon and thank you so much to Chair Menchaca and to the members of the Immigration Committee for the chance to testify today on this really important subject.

My name is Sarah Leberstein and I am an Employment Attorney with Make the Road New York. A nonprofit community-based membership organization with over 25,000 members dedicated to building the power of immigrant and working-class communities to achieve justice and dignity.

At Make the Road we've seen first-hand the extent of the devastation the pandemic has brought on low-wage and immigrant workers and workers of color. Infections and deaths ravaged the communities like

1
2 the ones where our members live, often in overcrowded
3 multi-generational households with multiple family
4 members working in frontline jobs that put them at
5 really high risk of infection.

6 Even as our members have started to return to
7 work, we see the long lasting effects of the pandemic
8 in record rates of economic calamity, job loss and
9 financial insecurity and a massive housing crisis.

10 The exclusion of many immigrants from critical
11 worker protections as we've been talking about this
12 morning has further exacerbated already stark
13 disparities in our city. And even the unprecedented
14 \$2.1 billion Student Worker Fund, which Make the Road
15 fought really hard with many of our allies here at
16 the hearing today, just couldn't meet the
17 overwhelming demand from workers. Tens of thousands
18 of eligible applicants are waiting and won't get the
19 funds that they need in this round.

20 Make the Road's legal team has also faced
21 unprecedented challenges at helping workers remedy
22 workplace violations. We have dozens of clients
23 whose employers declare bankruptcy, shutting down
24 their businesses, owing weeks, sometimes months'
25 worth of wages. A lot of workers who suffered

1
2 violations before during the pandemic were too
3 hesitant to uhm ask for help or to fight back because
4 of their fear of not being called back to work, so
5 they are only calling us now and we've got backlogs.
6 And of course, enforcement efforts have been stymied
7 by court closing and huge backlogs at New York State
8 Department of Labor and other agencies.

9 So, in light of these challenges, we respectfully
10 request that the New York City Council prioritize the
11 following measures. First and foremost, especially
12 for my team is stabilizing increasing funding for
13 legal services for workers subject to wage theft and
14 other abuses in the workplace. Given the increase
15 vulnerability of immigrant workers now, the city must
16 increase funding for free legal services and in
17 particular, the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative,
18 the Low-Wage Worker Support Initiative and the
19 Community Services Block Grant Funding for legal
20 assistance for low-wage immigrant workers.

21 We also feel really strongly, it's so important
22 to maintain funding for the Department of Consumer
23 and Worker Protection and the City Commission on
24 Human Rights, two really critical agencies that
25 simply can't force the city's groundbreaking -

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

SARAH LEBERSTEIN: Municipal worker protections unless they have the funding. And they've already suffered a huge reduction in staff and resources.

I'll just echo Callen's call to implement legal protections against firing workers for just cause, which we feel is really so critical to protect especially immigrant workers, who may not be able to prove that they are firing was discriminatory before an agency but were definitely fired unfairly and really need and our economy frankly needs that to stabilize workers lives and also, you know to be able to support their communities.

And lastly, again, you know, city support for workers to access U and T Visas, which have been so underused but are just so critical, uhm is such an important priority for us.

We have a lot of other asks but these are key priorities that will go so far to not only protecting immigrant workers but really helping our city recover. And we thank you so much for your care and attention to these issues and for immigrant workers around the city. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Sarah to you and
3 Make the Road.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
5 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Carlyn Cowen to
6 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 CARLYN COWEN: Good afternoon everyone. I'm
9 sorry for being out and about but uh, part of Civil
10 Services has always been being in multiple places as
11 once even before the pandemic.

12 Thank you so much Chair Menchaca for the
13 opportunity to testify and thank you so much to you
14 and to Lorena and Cesar on your staff for your
15 service to the Asian American community and to
16 immigrant New Yorkers. We are so grateful.

17 This hearing is an incredibly important one
18 because as we begin to talk about recovery in the
19 pandemic, I worry that we are not talking about a
20 recovery for our immigrant New Yorkers. When I
21 testified before this Committee, this time last year,
22 I reported that 50 percent of our community members
23 have lost jobs or income during the pandemic. Our
24 Asian American immigrant and low-income community
25 members.

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2 This year, I come to you to say that 70 percent
3 of our community members have experienced job loss or
4 income loss during the pandemic and these are the
5 exact workers that we're talking about. It is maybe
6 all too easy or maybe a little too comfortable to say
7 that recovery from this pandemic looks like reopening
8 restaurants and indoor entertainment centers but that
9 is not a recovery for our immigrant New Yorkers and
10 for our lowest wage workers and any just recovery and
11 any recovery at all, actually has to center our
12 immigrant workers who have been essential throughout
13 this pandemic and will continue to be essential
14 throughout all of New York.

15 This means a lot of the protections that you've
16 already heard about like just cause employment, this
17 also means investing in workforce development and
18 supports for our immigrant New Yorkers. Our adult
19 literacy classes are a vital lifeline more now than
20 ever. Digital literacy programs, workforce
21 development programs that are geared towards our
22 immigrant community members and key legal services,
23 expanding legal services funding during this moment
24 is more critical than ever.

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But it also means continuing to shore up the supports for our immigrant community members like housing relief, like connection to public benefits, the things that keep our immigrant families whole. And when we talk about immigrant workers, we're not just talking about the community members that CPC serves. We're also talking about the staff in social services and community-based organizations that have been serving immigrant New Yorkers throughout this entire pandemic.

These are the staff that contracted human services workers that often qualify for the same benefits that they help enroll community members for. That often times are earning minimum wage themselves. An investment in this workforce is an investment in the immigrant workforce in New York. And so we urge the City Council to pass Just Pass and raise wages for human services workers across New York City. And to make sure that our contracts are fully funded so we can continue providing critical services for New Yorkers.

Lastly, while these are state measures, we would be remiss not to mention that the City Council could

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2 be critical in supporting expansion of the Excluded
3 Workers Fund and making that permanent.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 CARLYN COWEN: Passing the New York Health Act to
6 ensure that regardless of immigration or employment
7 status, everyone has health insurance and passing
8 Fair Pay for Homecare to raise wages for homecare
9 workers. Thank you so much again for your time and
10 for everything you do.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Carlyn, thank you so much
12 and for just bringing it real and we have been so
13 fortunate to work with you and the CPC team. Thank
14 you so much.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
16 I'd like to now welcome Debipriya Chatter Jee to
17 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 DEBIPRIYA CHATTER JEE: Thank you Chair Menchaca
20 and the Immigration Committee for the opportunity to
21 testify today. My name is Debipriya Chatter Jee and
22 I'm a Senior Economist for the Community Service
23 Society of New York. A nonprofit organization that
24 works to advance upward mobility for low-income New
25 Yorkers.

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2 We have supported low-wage workers, including
3 immigrant workers for 175 years. Most recently, we
4 worked to pass paid sick leave in statewide in New
5 York City, secured half-price transit fares for New
6 Yorkers in poverty and made rent-relief available
7 through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, or
8 ERAP. We also advocated, alongside our partners,
9 some of whom are here, for the creation of the \$2.1
10 billion Excluded Workers' Fund in Albany.

11 Today, my testimony will be focused on the nature
12 and extent of hardship in the low-wage immigrant
13 community and recommendations for policies aimed at
14 alleviating them.

15 I would like to begin by thanking the Mayor's
16 Office for Immigrant Affairs for sharing updates on
17 the important work they do and to my fellow advocates
18 without whose invaluable support, it would not have
19 been possible to secure a better New York for our
20 immigrants.

21 We have already heard about how immigrants are
22 the majority of essential workers and have
23 experienced COVID-19 infections and death rates at
24 higher rates than the citywide average. Beyond
25 essential services, a majority of the immigrant

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2 workforce is engaged either in low-wage industries or
3 occupations. These are also some of the jobs that
4 were hit the hardest by the pandemic and the
5 recession.

6 Among those surveyed by the CSS's 2021 Unheard
7 Third Survey, the longest running scientific survey
8 of low-income communities in the nation, and we
9 conducted annually one-in-four immigrants experienced
10 income losses. As business closed and conventional
11 jobs were lost by the thousands, many turned to non-
12 traditional work, or what has come to be known as the
13 gig economy. The Unheard Third survey shows that the
14 share of low-income immigrant workforce in gig work
15 increased from 16 percent in 2020 to 27 percent this
16 year.

17 Gig workers and independent contractors are often
18 deliberately misclassified by employers to prevent
19 them from accessing critical rights and workplace
20 benefits and protections. For example, minimum pay
21 standard, health and safety protections, paid time
22 off, employer provider health insurance and so on.
23 To its credit, the city established the Immigrant
24 Emergency Relief Fund to help workers who were hit
25 the hardest by the pandemic and were ineligible for

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2 federal relief or stimulus assistance. The landmark
3 \$2.1 billion Excluded Workers' Fund, which was
4 designed to offer assistance, is now depleted. It is
5 at this juncture that we urge the City Council to act
6 on the following recommendations in addition to the
7 brilliant measures that have already been proposed by
8 the rest of the panelists.

9 Pass Intro. 2325 and Intro. 2241 to ensure that
10 displaced workers are provided with a right to return
11 to their old jobs at their old positions to the
12 extent possible. If Intro. 2325 will target -

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 DEBIPRIYA CHATTER JEE: Workers from restaurant
15 and food service industry as well as airports to
16 return to their old jobs. In addition to those two,
17 we would recommend that the Council passes Intro.
18 1797, which require DCWP to produce posters for
19 voluntary you know display at pharmacies and
20 healthcare locations informing New Yorkers of their
21 right to paid sick leave.

22 And finally, uh, I would recommend a broader
23 actionable recommendation beyond these would be to
24 pass Resolution supporting the expansion of EITC to
25 ITIN filers at the state and city levels. These

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2 filers contribute exactly the same to the economy as
3 those with social security numbers and it is just
4 strange that they do not get to avail the tax
5 credits. There are hundred thousands of those in New
6 York City in New York State and I think a measure for
7 an equitable recovery would involve extending the tax
8 credit to them.

9 I'd just like all of you to leave with this note
10 that immigrants contribute 23 percent of the city's
11 GDP and so it is high time that we prioritize
12 policies to help low-income immigrant workers. Thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Debipriya.
15 Thank you so much.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
17 I'd like to now welcome Merble Reagon to testify.
18 You may begin when you are ready.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 MERBLE REAGON: Thank you very much. First, I
21 would like to thank Chair Menchaca and members of the
22 Committee on Immigration for this opportunity to
23 speak. My name is Merble Reagon, I am the Executive
24 Director of the Women's Center for Education and
25 Career Advancement. We have worked for 51 years to

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2 help more than 30,000 New York City working families
3 to achieve economic justice and career opportunities.

4 And our current report overlooked and
5 undercounted 2021 struggling to make ends meet in New
6 York City. We unveil our precarious lives of low-
7 wage immigrant workers world before the pandemic and
8 it indicates just how vulnerable they will continue
9 to be through the COVID-19 triggered economic crisis.

10 Our research shows that Latinx non-citizen
11 communities are the most significantly affected, with
12 62 percent unable to meet their basic needs. That
13 rate is 53 percent among Black non-citizens and 50
14 percent among Asian American Pacific Islander non-
15 citizens. Income inadequacy is substantially lower
16 among White non-citizens, at 27 percent.

17 It is time to employ a policy approach that will
18 best help immigrant working families move beyond the
19 pandemic and toward financial security. In order to
20 facilitate an economic recovery for immigrant
21 families, it is imperative to use a reality based
22 measure. The Self-Sufficiency Standard, is a
23 realistic, geographically-specific, and family
24 composition-specific measure that offers a clear
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1
2 picture of the exact incomes New York City working
3 families need to make ends meet.

4 Here is an example, in the Bronx, a working
5 father with a four-year-old son needs to earn \$32 an
6 hour and make an income of about \$68,000 to meet all
7 expenses according to the Standard. According to the
8 Poverty Measure, that same two-person family only
9 needs to earn \$10.40 an hour and make an income of
10 about \$17,000. The difference is \$51,000.

11 Our new report shows that inadequate wages, not
12 lack of work hours, is the main cause of income
13 inadequacy. The data highlights that workers in New
14 York City will not benefit from returning to jobs
15 that don't pay a family sustaining wage.

16 The post-pandemic labor market needs improved
17 opportunities across the city. We incurred greater
18 protections for undocumented immigrants who were
19 often exploited as we've heard by employers who
20 disregard their right to own the minimum wage. This
21 protection coupled with a new foundational safety net
22 that addresses the needs of diverse immigrant
23 communities is key -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.
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MERBLE REAGON: We invite you to look more closely at the self-sufficiency standard as the documents exactly what New York City working families in your districts need to make ends meet. We also recommend that all recovery policies be developed using an intersectional racial, gender and citizenship lens to assist with equitable recovery because women of color and noncitizens are the demographic groups most heavily impacted by insufficient wages.

So, we thank you for this opportunity and we look forward to continuing this work with the new City Council. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much for your testimony today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Tito Sinha to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

TITO SINHA: Good afternoon. My name is Tito Sinha, I'm with the Workers Rights Practice at TakeRoot Justice. We represent low-wage workers and claims of wage theft, discrimination retaliation, sick leave violations, among other workplace

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2 injustices. We thank the City Council Committee for
3 this opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf
4 of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment
5 Collaborative. We do so in support of increased,
6 robust, sustainable, and multi-year baseline funding
7 for the Low-Wage Worker Initiative.

8 Must of our work under the Low-Wage Worker
9 Initiative is geared towards recovering money that
10 were lawfully due to immigrant families from their
11 employers in the first place, and which has provided
12 these families and individuals with substantial
13 economic assistance, especially during the pandemic.
14 The Low-Wage Worker Initiative is the only dedicated
15 city funding that ensures that the city's low-wage
16 and immigrant workers have redress from wage theft,
17 discrimination, retaliation, and other workplace
18 injustices.

19 However, this crucial funding has often lagged
20 behind other priorities requiring last-minute saves
21 from workers' rights advocates including those within
22 the Administration, such as MOIA and the City Council
23 to work to renew the funding. Rather than engaging
24 in this yearly effort to renew this crucial funding,
25 we respectfully call upon the Administration and the

1
2 City Council to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to
3 the city's low-wage and immigrant workers by renewing
4 and expanding the baseline Low-Wage Workers
5 Initiative.

6 Since January 2020 to date, TakeRoot has obtained
7 approximately \$1.3 million in settlements from
8 employers, providing much needed recovery for low-
9 wage and immigrant workers who were owed such wages
10 and entitled to be free of retaliatory and
11 discriminatory practices from the outset. We've been
12 diligently collaborating with community partners and
13 providing Know Your Rights trainings, as well as
14 representing community members in court and before
15 administrative agencies.

16 So, failure to renew and expand this funding will
17 have a devastating impact on low-wage and immigrant
18 workers as you know our recoveries have shown that
19 this is real money going to immigrant families during
20 this time of need. So, now more than ever, we ask
21 the Administration and the City Council to prioritize
22 this funding and uhm, I thank the Council for its
23 work and its support of low-wage workers. Thank you
24 so much.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for your
3 testimony today.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
5 testimony. I'd like to now welcome Victoria Roseman
6 to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 VICTORIA ROSEMAN: Good afternoon. Thank you to
9 Committee Counsel, to Chair Menchaca and to the New
10 York City Council Committee on Immigration. My name
11 is Victoria Roseman and I'm a Staff Attorney with the
12 Unemployed Workers Project at Volunteers of Legal
13 Services or VOLS. VOLS was established in 1984 and
14 our purpose is to leverage private attorney's to
15 provide free legal services to low-income New Yorkers
16 to help fill the justice gap.

17 The VOLS Unemployed Workers Project hears from
18 dozens of New Yorkers every day asking for help with
19 access to unemployment related benefits. Many of
20 these claimants lost their jobs in the wake of the
21 pandemic, unsuccessfully applied for unemployment
22 insurance benefits, providing them with a lifeline.

23 Now, the New York City immigrant working
24 population is one of the most vulnerable and heavily
25 impacted by the pandemic and subsequent citywide

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2 shutdown. So many workers were able to utilize
3 unemployment insurance benefits during this uncertain
4 time. Noncitizen workers faced a variety of
5 difficulties in obtaining the benefits.

6 Now, the unemployment insurance system
7 prepandemic was not built to assist noncitizen
8 workers. State benefits have stringent requirements
9 in order to qualify. Applicants must provide the
10 Department of Labor with W2 working papers. Months
11 of demonstrable work history, must reach earning
12 thresholds, and perhaps the most daunting, the
13 Department of Labor will call the applicants employer
14 who must verify all of that information.

15 Without this documentation or acquiescence,
16 applicants can't collect benefits. Now, federal
17 benefits, facilitated access for many claimants who
18 couldn't previously collect, including independent
19 contractors or self-employed individuals. However,
20 complex reporting requirements still made this
21 process difficult for noncitizen claimants.
22 Applicants must provide proof of wages and
23 significantly employment authorization documents or
24 EAD's.

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2 So, while federal benefits open the door for some
3 immigrant workers, thanks to the help of community-
4 based organizations and legal services, hundreds of
5 thousands of vital undocumented New York City workers
6 were unable to collect the life changing family
7 supporting assistance.

8 Then of course, there is the occasional situation
9 that I'd like to raise in which a noncitizen worker
10 was able to collect benefits despite having this gap
11 in their work authorization. There are few reasons
12 why this may have happened. A lack of careful review
13 from the Department of Labor, a misstatement or
14 misunderstanding stemming from the confusing language
15 in that application, or perhaps a misunderstanding of
16 noncitizen claimants own work situation as furloughs,
17 reopening's and temporary layoffs plague businesses.
18 To further exacerbate that confusion, non-English
19 speaking claimants must overcome language access
20 issues.

21 Many important instructions and documents are not
22 translated and the documents that are translated are
23 limited to just a few languages. So, it's difficult
24 for non-English speaking claimants to receive
25 translation services over the phone. Non-citizen

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2 workers and to be fair, workers in general were often
3 encouraged to apply for these benefits by their
4 peers, their neighbors, their families. Noncitizen
5 workers may have been paid benefits briefly, only for
6 those benefits to be clawed back by the Department of
7 Labor later by confusing and aggressive –

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 VICTORIA ROSEMAN: Overpaid services. These over
10 payments can be in the thousands of dollars, some as
11 much as \$20,000 now owed to the Department of Labor.

12 The long and short here is that there's a
13 complete lack of ongoing state or federal assistance
14 for low-wage noncitizen workers, despite the fact
15 that immigrant workers make up such a large part of
16 the working population.

17 As the city moves towards post-pandemic planning,
18 the reopening of nonessential stores, resuming of
19 activities and New York City traditions, it is easy
20 to forget what those essential workers meant for a
21 population on lockdown.

22 Immigrant workers including undocumented workers
23 were those who continued to leave the house when
24 things were most uncertain and continue to serve
25 communities despite the clear danger. We're asking

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2 for better systems in place. A better unemployment
3 system, less stringent requirements, a myriad of
4 improvements that some of these other people have
5 already touched on.

6 To help these workers return to normal in a way
7 that so many of us are trying our best to do. Most
8 importantly, it's imperative to support legal service
9 organizations to help this population obtain
10 benefits, especially public benefits like
11 unemployment insurance. Organizations like VOLs help
12 those who are eligible to meaningfully move through
13 these confusing systems and to represent those who
14 need help in legal settings, including hearings.

15 Without Legal Services support, this population
16 will be unable to thrive post-pandemic whenever we
17 may get there. Thank you so much for your time.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Victoria.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
20 testimony. Uhm, that concludes this panel and
21 actually concludes our public testimony for today.

22 If we have inadvertently missed anyone that has
23 registered to testify today and has yet to be called,
24 you can please use the Zoom raise hand function now

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2 and you will be called on in the order in which
3 you've raised your hands.

4 In the meantime, I'm going to turn it to Chair
5 Menchaca for any questions or comments.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I just want to say thank
7 you to the panel for I think you really went in deep
8 with ideas to make this system better and have really
9 identified gaps that are going to be really important
10 for the next Council. And so, I want to say thank
11 you for that.

12 Uh, we are at the end of this last Committee
13 hearing and these last eight years now have been an
14 incredible honor to serve as the Chair. I came in
15 with some incredible team members and I just want to
16 say their name because they have really embedded
17 themselves in the history of this Committee. That
18 include Catalina Cruz, who you may know her now as
19 Assembly Member in Queens, was the Committee Counsel
20 on this Committee. Indiana Porta also Counsel to
21 this Committee and Harbani Ahuja.

22 We also have Muzna Ansari (SP?) a Policy Analyst,
23 Elizabeth Kronk who is also a Policy Analyst
24 including Jennifer Montalvo another Policy Analyst.
25 Stella Chan who represented the outreach team here in

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2 the City Council and has brought an incredible amount
3 of understanding on the ground through her work here
4 in the City Council.

5 In the Finance Committee and they have been
6 really embedded in how we think about this on the
7 policy side, transforming that into budget stuff,
8 Crillon Francisco and Florentine and Jinn Lee. They
9 have been a big part of history of this Council. And
10 I want to just thank my team Lorena Lucero my Chief
11 of Staff, Cesar Vargas Deputy Chief of Staff, Tony
12 Charito who was communications on this, so you may
13 have met along the way. There's no way that I could
14 do and be here present with all of you to think
15 through all of these things without all of them. I
16 want to say thank you to those individuals that have
17 served the city with incredible power and passion and
18 commitment to our most vulnerable community, most
19 dynamic community in New York City.

20 Now, as I end, I want to ensure that I give uhm a
21 kind of last thought. What I've learned in this
22 Committee is that when we focus on the most
23 vulnerable people in our city, what we're doing is
24 lifting that safety net up higher. It is not always
25 easy to focus on the most vulnerable, because

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2 sometimes they are a smaller population that feel
3 invisible, that are invisible, that are
4 misunderstood, that are scapegoated. And government
5 tends to do most for the many but it is the power of
6 this Committee that we have lifted up the voices.
7 Many times they have spoken themselves about the
8 things that we have just not been doing and beautiful
9 things happen. The immigrant community is the engine
10 of our economy here. They are the engine of civic
11 engagement.

12 I had the pleasure of leading my district,
13 District 38, where over 50 percent of the people who
14 live in my district are foreign borne. They speak a
15 different language at home. They are from China,
16 Latin America. They are from Africa. They are from
17 parts of the middle east. They are part of our
18 community and when participatory budgeting became
19 such a central part of my work in the district, they
20 came out and they spoke their truth to power. They
21 voted and have really been part of this longer
22 conversation about a bill that we just passed last
23 week that are granting legally permanent residents.
24 Green card holders, dreamers, TPS and Daca
25 recipients, the power to vote.

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2 That is the power of this Committee and the work
3 we've been doing. And so, when I hear ideas about
4 how we can solve those gaps, I'm committed. You have
5 seen MOIA dedicated and I'm so happy that the
6 humanity that's come out of this incredible agency
7 was at the top of peoples list about what made this
8 city so important in responding to this COVID crisis.
9 And when we think about workers, the street vendors,
10 we protested and got arrested for uh, not just street
11 vendors but taxi drivers and I'm thinking about the
12 airport workers. There are so many immigrants that
13 are embedded in all of these, workers that have
14 fought for justice and we were right there with them.
15 We are not out of the woods yet on COVID and so, I
16 hope that many of these ideas and I'll make sure that
17 that happens, get codified and ensure that they land
18 of the desks of the City Council members and all the
19 city agencies as we move forward. And I hope to
20 partner with MOIA in the future to ensure that that
21 happens.

22 Uhm, I want to leave you, I want to leave you
23 with this. My time in the Council really reminded me
24 of my time as a child. Growing up in a mixed status
25 family, ensuring that my mom got all the information

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by translating for her. I see myself and my family in the families that come and before this Committee. And so, I'm connected with you and as you are connected with us, and so, let us continue this vision of a better sanctuary city as we struggle towards sanctuary.

And I want to say thank you again for your service, all of you. And with that, we will now adjourn this meeting. Thank you. Happy Holidays.

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 January 26, 2022