

NYC Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs

May 28, 2026

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

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

As the daughter of immigrants from Azad Kashmir, Pakistan, I understand deeply the role local government must play in ensuring all communities are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Across the country, aggressive ICE enforcement operations have sown fear and uncertainty in immigrant communities. In this moment, New York City must be clear: we remain committed to protecting all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status. At a time when immigrant families are increasingly being met with disdain (or contempt) and hostility, local government must be a source of stability, clarity, and protection. That requires investment, operational capacity, and sustained support to meet our responsibility to immigrant New Yorkers.

Today, I will provide a brief update on MOIA and highlight six key areas of our work: Immigration Legal Services, the Immigration Legal Support Hotline, the Haitian Response Initiative, the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, Language Justice and English Language Learning, and Community Engagement Programs.

Agency Update

During a recent visit to 26 Federal Plaza, I watched immigrant New Yorkers arrive for routine immigration proceedings only to encounter an atmosphere of intimidation. Hallways were filled with families lawfully seeking status while enforcement agents moved through the building in masks. It was deeply unsettling—and a stark reminder of what is at stake for the communities we serve.

At MOIA's preliminary budget hearing, I outlined the challenges immigrant communities are facing under the federal administration's aggressive detention and deportation campaigns. ICE's recent presence at Wyckoff Medical Center in Brooklyn drew community protests and a highly visible NYPD response. Consistent with EO 13's directive to continuously review agency policies and protocols, NYPD, in partnership with the Interagency Response Committee, will assess whether there are any updates to policy or procedure to be made in light of the incident.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13, the agencies have completed their initial audit of policies and protocols, with support from the Interagency Response Committee, on interactions with non-local immigration enforcement and is updating its training guidelines and materials accordingly. MOIA remains an active participant in the ongoing work of the IRC and is firmly committed to upholding and complying with local laws.

This is a moment when immigrant New Yorkers need reassurance that their local government will stand with them and protect them. Mayor Mamdani was elected, in part, because New Yorkers recognized the growing instability and anxiety many immigrant families face about their place in our society. It is MOIA's responsibility to help restore trust, reinforce that commitment, and ensure continued access to schools, healthcare, housing, and city services for all New Yorkers.

As part of this work, and as MOIA now falls within the Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice's portfolio, we recently convened a roundtable with the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP), the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS), and the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), to ensure immigrant New Yorkers understand their rights as workers and consumers, regardless of immigration status. We have also begun conversations with the Office of Street Vendors to better support immigrant entrepreneurs, from brick-and-mortar shops to street vendors.

With a Fiscal Year 2027 budget of approximately **\$34.2 million**, MOIA maintains more than 70 contracts with nonprofit organizations serving immigrant communities across the five boroughs. We have already communicated funding levels to all contracted providers so they can plan accordingly for the next fiscal year.

Over the past few weeks, I have met directly with our providers to better understand how the City can be a stronger partner. They are meeting this moment with urgency, compassion, and deep community trust, doing critical work on the frontlines. Now more than ever, the City must provide stability in both funding and vision so providers can continue delivering urgently needed services to immigrant New Yorkers.

At the same time, MOIA is continuing to build a team capable of advancing Mayor Mamdani's bold agenda. Ten new positions at MOIA are currently open, and we expect to move forward with hiring in the coming weeks. I appreciate the Council's continued attention to MOIA's staffing levels and look forward to sharing additional updates soon.

Immigration Legal Services

Over the past year, MOIA has strengthened its legal services infrastructure during a period of dramatically increased need. MOIA's Immigration Legal Programs include Legal Support Centers (LSCs), the Immigration Legal Support Hotline, the Legal Technical Mentorship program (LTM), and the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC). Together, these initiatives expand access to trusted immigration legal support at a time when demand continues to grow.

Our immigration legal services network includes 29 providers serving communities across the five boroughs. Last summer, MOIA launched the Immigration Legal Support Centers, supported by more than \$18 million in investments over three years, to strengthen community-based organizations providing culturally and linguistically responsive immigration legal assistance. Since the program's launch in July 2025, the LSCs have conducted more than 12,000 comprehensive legal screenings, helping immigrants address a wide range of legal needs.

All Immigration Legal Support Centers provide free access to online trainings and nationwide legal technical assistance through Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC). The Legal Technical Mentorship program and the Immigrant Justice Corps also provide additional support to ensure providers can respond effectively to rapidly changing immigration policies and evolving legal needs.

These investments are critical not only to expand services, but also to strengthening the long-term capacity of the organizations immigrant New Yorkers rely on most.

Immigration Legal Support Hotline

Another critical resource for immigrant New Yorkers is the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline, operated by Catholic Charities Community Services, which helps New Yorkers connect to comprehensive immigration legal screenings and support. So far, this fiscal year, the Hotline has received more than 19,800 calls.

In Fiscal Year 2026, MOIA increased funding to expand the Hotline's accessibility and responsiveness as callers face increasingly urgent and complex immigration challenges. This April, we partnered with Catholic Charities to host a family preparedness phonebank responding to concerns from parents and caregivers about family separation. In collaboration with the New York State Office of New Americans, the Mexican Consulate, and New York Legal Assistance Group, 56 volunteers fielded 225 calls.

As part of this expansion, the Hotline increased staffing capacity, including the hiring of additional counselors and a staff member specifically designated to respond to time-sensitive Rapid Response needs. The hours of operation were also extended beyond the previous Monday–Friday, 9:00 AM–6:00 PM schedule so that callers have more opportunities to reach support outside of standard work hours. The Hotline also launched WhatsApp communications, expanded multilingual reporting from four to ten languages, and added three new Interactive Voice Response language prompts.

The Haitian Response Initiative

MOIA coordinates the Haitian Response Initiative (HRI), an innovative program designed to support both newly arrived and long-standing Haitian residents. The initiative funds seven Haitian-led community-based organizations to provide case management and social services, while Catholic Charities delivers immigration legal services and capacity-building trainings. Established in Fiscal Year 2022, HRI was baselined last year at nearly \$1.7 million.

Since the program's inception in December 2021, more than 5,000 recently arrived Haitians have met with HRI case managers to identify the resources needed to successfully integrate into life in New York City. HRI case managers have connected community members to critical support, including to HRA/DSS services and programs, food assistance, healthcare, maternal and infant health services, school enrollment, housing, mental health services, and immigration legal assistance.

HRI partners have also organized legal clinics across the city, helping hundreds of Haitian New Yorkers access legal assistance related to deportation protections, legal remedies, and work authorization. Catholic Charities regularly conducts "train-the-trainer" workshops to equip community organizations with real-time information needed to support residents navigating immigration-related issues independently.

This work remains especially urgent amid ongoing instability in Haiti and a pending Supreme Court decision that will determine the future of Temporary Protected Status (TPS). In Fiscal Year 2026 alone, HRI has completed six legal clinics, with an additional asylum application review clinic scheduled for May 28th, 2026, at the Brooklyn Borough President's office.

HRI reflects MOIA's broader approach to supporting immigrant communities: investing in immigrant-led organizations with deep community trust and cultural expertise. These partnerships not only expand access to services but also help identify barriers that prevent immigrant New Yorkers from accessing City information or resources, allowing MOIA and partner agencies to respond more effectively to community needs.

Rapid Response Legal Collaborative

MOIA has significantly expanded the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, or RRLC, which provides legal assistance to immigrant New Yorkers who are detained or at imminent risk of detention or deportation. To meet growing demand, MOIA increased our investment in rapid response legal efforts by \$3 million this fiscal year.

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

Language Justice and English Language Learning

I also want to provide an update on MOIA's language access work, an area that impacts nearly every aspect of City government. MOIA oversees, monitors, and provides technical assistance to more than 46 City agencies in implementing language access services. Language justice is not simply a compliance obligation—it is a core equity and public trust issue. New Yorkers cannot fully access critical services, exercise their rights, or meaningfully engage with City government if language remains a barrier to information, care, or participation. This work impacts approximately 1.8 million New Yorkers with limited English proficiency and is essential to ensuring equitable access to City services.

On April 17th, MOIA convened all City language access coordinators for a historic citywide meeting and launched working groups focused on:

1. Strengthening relationships with language service providers
2. Multilingual strategic communication and engagement
3. Human Capital: bilingual talent and language access training
4. Language access in data and evaluation

In addition, MOIA has built an in-house Language Services team that provides translation and interpretation support to mayoral offices and City Hall. Thus far in Fiscal Year 2026, the team has delivered translation and interpretation services to 37 mayoral offices and agencies. The LS team has also provided on-site language support at migrant centers and played a critical role in rapidly translating updated shelter protocols for recent arrivals.

Learning English remains a top priority for immigrant communities and an important workforce development strategy. To expand access to English language learning, MOIA operates English Learning and Support Centers in public libraries and community centers in immigrant-dense neighborhoods. So far, this fiscal year, the program has served nearly 4,000 learners and celebrated more than 1,300 graduates.

These centers use our award-winning “We Speak” curriculum to provide in-person English classes while helping participants build familiarity with City services and civic life. MOIA has also developed beginner-level materials that have been widely requested by communities and advocates.

Community Engagement Programs

Finally, MOIA's Community Engagement work helps immigrant New Yorkers access services, understand their rights, and stay connected to trusted information during a time of heightened fear and uncertainty.

Through our Immigrant Rights Workshops, MOIA staff deliver presentations that connect community organizations and their members to free, high-quality immigration legal services and Know Your Rights resources. In Fiscal Year 2026, the program delivered over 300 presentations reaching almost 7,000 people citywide, continuing our critical work reaching diverse immigrant communities where they are.

Additionally, in Fiscal Year 2026, our External Affairs team made nearly 39,000 direct touchpoints through resource fairs, Know Your Rights presentations, and canvassing. Over the past fiscal year, resources on MOIA's website were downloaded over 42,000 times by nearly 21,000 users.

MOIA also continues to strengthen relationships with trusted ethnic and community media outlets that serve immigrant New Yorkers in multiple languages. In the past year, MOIA led 10 community and ethnic media roundtables to share critical information through hyperlocal newspapers and television stations that immigrant communities rely on for timely and accurate news. During my tenure, MOIA has convened three such roundtables, with additional sessions this summer.

Conclusion

MOIA was created to ensure immigrant New Yorkers can fully participate in the civic, economic, and cultural life of this city, and that mission is especially critical during periods of rapid policy change and growing uncertainty for immigrant communities. Meeting this moment requires strong coordination across agencies, deep partnership with community-based organizations, and continued investment in the systems that help immigrant New Yorkers access services, understand their rights, and remain connected to their neighborhoods and opportunities. As the needs facing immigrant communities continue to evolve, MOIA will remain focused on building trust, strengthening coordination, and ensuring New York City remains a place where immigrant families can live with dignity, safety, and opportunity.

Finally, I want to thank the City's dedicated public servants and community partners who continue to respond every day to the needs of both recently arrived and long-standing immigrant New Yorkers. Immigrant New Yorkers are not separate from the story of this city. They are central to it. They are workers, parents, students, business owners, neighbors, and caregivers who sustain this city every day. I look forward to working with the Council to ensure our policies, investments, and institutions reflect that reality while continuing to strengthen the communities that are the backbone of our city.