

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

----- X

February 15, 2018  
Start: 11:00 a.m.  
Recess: 12:08 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: CARLOS MENCHACA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Daniel Dromm  
Mathieu Eugene  
Mark Gjonaj  
Robert F. Holden  
I. Daneek Miller  
Kalman Yeger

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

2 [sound check, pause] [pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, good morning  
4 everyone. Buenos Dias. My name is Carlos Menchaca  
5 and I'm the Chair of the New York City Council's  
6 Committee on Immigration. Before going any further,  
7 I want to introduce the other members of this  
8 incredible new committee. This is the first—the  
9 first time we assembled as a committee, and we're  
10 looking forward to working with everyone of you.  
11 This is the beginning of a new session, but this is  
12 also an opportunity for us to kind of not only work  
13 together, but make sure that we're having good  
14 conversations as we moved forward, and really kind of  
15 think about—about your needs at the district level,  
16 but also for the city at large. From—from Queens we  
17 have here Council Member Danny Dromm. From Brooklyn  
18 we have Council Member Yeger, and from Bronx we have  
19 Council Member Gjonaj, and from Queens we have  
20 Council Member Holden, and we'll introduce other  
21 members as they come later. Today, the Immigration  
22 Committee will hear and vote on Resolution 182, which  
23 calls upon Congress to pass legislation introduced by  
24 the U.S. Representative Nydia Valazquez, which would  
25 permit Ravi Ragbir to pursue immigration relief so

2 that he may stay in the country lawfully. Ravi is  
3 one of New York's most passionate immigrant rights  
4 leaders not just here in the city, but nationally.  
5 Despite his own immigration status being in jeopardy,  
6 he has always found way to stand up for others, and  
7 now we are proud to stand up with him. As-as ICE  
8 engages in its unbridled immigration raids, a new and  
9 troubling trend has emerged. It seems as though ICE  
10 is targeting Immigrant rights activists for  
11 deportation. That has not just happened here in the  
12 city, but across the country. This behavior is not  
13 only unacceptable, it's un-American. It is un-  
14 American because it is intended to intimidate those  
15 who are right now bravely speaking out against-  
16 against-against injustice and we should all be  
17 concerned about the any attack on our Constitutional  
18 protections. Despite the uncertainty surrounding  
19 immigration policies nationwide, one thing is  
20 certain, New York City will not be shaken. We will  
21 tirelessly defend our immigrant communities to the  
22 full extent of the law supported by the Constitution.  
23 So, we will stand up to hate, and we will prevail  
24 every single time. So now, I want to offer any  
25 opportunities for--[background comment]. Yeah, so

2 before we go, do we have the resolution? [background  
3 comments, pause] I also want to read the-the  
4 Resolution for anyone at home that's listening. So,  
5 this is Resolution 182. The text here shows  
6 Resolution calling upon the United States Congress to  
7 pass and the president to sign H.R. 4937, which would  
8 provide immigration relief for Ravi Ragbir and  
9 denouncing the unlawful targeting of immigrant rights  
10 activists for deportation by the U.S. Customs, the  
11 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE, and  
12 first up to speak is Council Member Danny Dromm from  
13 Queens.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very  
15 much Chair Menchaca for this opportunity to address  
16 this really important resolution, which the Council  
17 is going to pass today. I have know Ravi Ragbir for  
18 about eight years since I first got elected to the  
19 City Council, and I can attest to what a wonderful  
20 good human being Ravi is, and to the work that he has  
21 done. I worked with him very early on in my tenure  
22 on a forum on immigration at the Ethical Humanist  
23 Society where I attended that forum along with the  
24 former Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito before she was  
25 the Speaker, but I've also worked with him on a

2 number of immigration issues going back to when I was  
3 chair of this very committee. He is dedicated and  
4 committed to the immigrant community. Ravi did have  
5 some difficulties in his life early on, but he has  
6 certainly reformed his life and turned his life  
7 around, and has led an exemplary life ever since  
8 like over 20 years ago. You know, I myself have  
9 three arrests. I was arrested three times, and was  
10 able to turn my life around. I'm 27 years clean and  
11 sober, had I not been given that opportunity by my  
12 constituents to serve despite the fact that I had  
13 that in my past, I would not be sitting here today.  
14 So, I'm a deep believer in people getting a second  
15 chance, and a fair chance, even a fourth chance.  
16 Whatever it takes, but when people like Ravi stand up  
17 and support the rights of those who have rights like  
18 our immigrant communities, I feel it's really  
19 important that we step up to the plate and support  
20 him and, of course, this is a bigger issue than just  
21 Ravi. This is an issue about immigrant leaders being  
22 targeted by an administration, which attempts to  
23 silence those immigrant leaders, and—and their  
24 positions on—on what's happening with the Trump  
25 Administration in Washington, D.C. So, I'm very,

2 very glad that we're hearing this resolution. I'd  
3 like to ask that my name also be added to it, and I  
4 was also, you know, really trying to make sure that  
5 this happened in time. Unfortunately, Ravi got an  
6 extension of his deportation orders over the weekend,  
7 and so I look forward to continuing to support Ravi,  
8 and to continue to work on issues that this  
9 resolution addresses. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Council  
11 Member Dromm. Are there any other speakers on the  
12 docket? Okay, let's go with Queens. Council Member  
13 Holden.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And—and I respect  
15 Council—Councilwoman Valazquez a lot, and the only  
16 thing I'm a little concerned here that I don't  
17 believe Ravi has been targeted. First, he committed  
18 a serious crime, a felony while he was guest of the  
19 United States to come here and work. Now, yes, he  
20 may have turned his life around. He may be a good—a  
21 good person right now, however, there's—there's  
22 victims here that need—and I—and I agree with Errol  
23 Louis, by the way, and it—it kind of opened my eyes  
24 because I didn't know much about this case until I  
25 started reading the dockets. He had I think two

2 appeals in the second and third courts, the Appellate  
3 and lost both, and—and completely— Well, 21 he—21  
4 different times he tried to get fraudulent mortgages  
5 or actually succeeded. Now, if we're going to reward  
6 that and say, we want to keep people like this in the  
7 United States without restitution, I don't—the courts  
8 have demanded restitution. Does somebody know if  
9 there is anything else like he was supposed to pay  
10 money back? Did he do that? I don't know that. If  
11 this committee can tell me he did, I might have a  
12 different opinion. However, if we're going to start  
13 using Ravi as our—our poster child for immigration  
14 reform, I think that's a mistake, and I agree with  
15 Errol Louis. I never met the man. I'd—I'd like to.  
16 I asked the Chair and said if he can arrange that,  
17 but I think it's little premature for me to act and  
18 to be in favor of a resolution, and I think it's not  
19 well thought out yet. I think we have to vet this,  
20 and I think we have to—the committee should do some  
21 research, and there's-- Listen, teaching in the—in  
22 the school system for 40 years in the college, and  
23 working with undocumented immigrants it—it was an  
24 experience, and I feel for their plight, and—and I  
25 helped a lot of immigrants. I—I worked with students



2 who were very, very good students who had to only go  
3 home and sleep. They couldn't do work at home, and  
4 they had the deck stacked against them, and they—they  
5 are the ones that we should be protecting. If  
6 somebody has committed a serious felony, \$1.5 million  
7 worth of mortgages that he knew, Ravi knew quite well  
8 that this was wrong multiple times. Yes, he turns  
9 his life around, but I don't think he's unfairly  
10 targeted. This has been going on since the early  
11 2000s. He had case after case, and I think to call  
12 committee meetings at the spur of the moment to work  
13 with legal teams, I—I think we need a little bit more  
14 vetting and a little bit more discussion. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Council  
16 Member Holden. Any others? Both. Okay, Council  
17 Member Gjonaj from the Bronx.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you,  
19 Chairman. I have a statement that I want to read.  
20 As a son of immigrants and representative of the most  
21 diverse neighborhoods in New York City, I am  
22 sympathetic to the plight of those who come to this  
23 great country seeking a better life. I will fight  
24 for those facing wrongful deportation, and work to  
25 ensure that New York City remains a fair city and

2 supports the rights of DREAMers to stay in the  
3 Country that they call home. Chairman, for our  
4 members, the reality—the reality is that Ravi Ragbir  
5 is not a DREEMer. He is a criminal that defrauded  
6 innocent hardworking New Yorkers. For those that  
7 will challenge me about paying their dues and second  
8 chances, for Ravi Ragbir coming to this country was  
9 his second chance. This is not a vote against  
10 undocumented immigrants. This is a vote for the  
11 victims of Ragbir's crimes. We need to do everything  
12 we can to ensure that New York remains the world's  
13 safest big city.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Council  
15 Member Gjonaj. Council Member Yeger from Brooklyn.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you, Mr.  
17 Chairman, and congratulations on our first committee.  
18 In addition to sharing this seat at this table with  
19 you, we share a large border of the district that we  
20 represent together and I'm looking forward to doing  
21 great things with you, and I think we will. I—I—you  
22 know, this is—this is an interesting place that I  
23 find myself because like many in the Council and like  
24 many in New York City I'm the son of an immigrant.  
25 My father came here on a boat with his parents and

2 his older brother with the permission of our  
3 government, a nation that welcomed my family with  
4 open arms. My mother's father came to this country  
5 after escaping Europe during World War II with  
6 members of his school where they went to China, and  
7 lived for several years in Shanghai until they were  
8 able to come to the United States. Again, our nation  
9 opening its arms to welcome an immigrant family that  
10 was willing to come here, promised to work hard, do  
11 right, and be a part of the American fabric. My  
12 father, the immigrant, has four children. Three of  
13 us are attorneys. He is an attorney. His older  
14 brother has a son who's an attorney. We've committed  
15 ourselves and our lives to supporting the  
16 Constitution of the State of New York. It's an oath  
17 I took long before I was a member of this Council and  
18 took an oath to support the Constitution. I took an  
19 oath to support the Constitution as an officer of the  
20 court, as an officer of the State of New York. So,  
21 today we're here to talk about an individual. We're  
22 not here to talk about our DACA DREAMers. We're not  
23 here to talk about the wrongful—in my view—policies  
24 of the Trump Administration on DACA. I believe  
25 firmly, and I've said this publicly that this is not

2 a country that throws preservers to DREAMers only to  
3 yank it back as they're about to reach it. Our  
4 nation created a policy, whether we agree how it was  
5 created or not, to support the DERAMers, and created  
6 DACA, and the President has tried to cut that down.  
7 I do not agree with that. I agree that those who  
8 came to this country as children brought here by  
9 their parents who have lived their lives lawfully,  
10 and have supported our country and in many cases have  
11 even served in our military should receive the  
12 welcoming arms of the United States Government and  
13 all of its people, and should be welcomed to the  
14 fabric of the United States. But today we're here to  
15 talk about one individual, Mr. Ragbir. Mr. Ragbir is  
16 not a DREAMer. Mr. Ragbir perhaps would like to be a  
17 DREAMer, but that's not what DREAMers are. DREAMers  
18 come here and they do not break laws. That's the  
19 concept and that's the definition of a DREAMer. A  
20 DREAMer is somebody who lived his life lawfully in  
21 the Untied States, did not break laws, abided by our  
22 rules and regulations under the laws of our nation,  
23 and now submits him or herself to our nation and  
24 says, I'm here. Can you help me stay and be a part  
25 of America? Mr. Ragbir is not that. Mr. Ragbir is

2 somebody who committed crimes by his own admission.  
3 Not somebody who but for the role of the dice was  
4 convicted by a jury, but agreed that he committed a  
5 series of crimes, and I wasn't there in the  
6 courtroom. All I know is what everybody else knows,  
7 what we've read, but the—you know, as Mr. Loui and  
8 Mr. Louis is getting an enormous amount of press  
9 here, and—and mention at the Council the last day or  
10 two. But Error Lewis who I think we all look as the  
11 voice of moral reason and moral conscience in the  
12 fabric of our city, stated this as eloquently as  
13 possible: He's not the guy, Mr. Ragbir, that we  
14 should be putting our efforts into helping beat  
15 unlawful and improper Constitution—immigration  
16 policies in the United States. He's not that guy,  
17 and as my colleague from Queens, Mr. Holden said,  
18 he's not the poster child. He just isn't. Are there  
19 better poster children? Yes, but what I think that  
20 this does, this shines a spotlight on somebody who is  
21 a criminal. Now, he may be a reformed criminal. He  
22 may no longer have—be committing felonies on a  
23 regular basis, and I surely believe that he has  
24 reformed his life, but what we're doing here is we're  
25 playing into the hands of President Trump who has

2 made it very clear in his view anybody who comes to  
3 the United States is a criminal. That's not my view  
4 at all. I believe almost everybody who comes to the  
5 United States wishes to serve our country lawfully  
6 and properly, but Mr. Ragbir did not. And so, I'm  
7 not comfortable doing a one-man resolution, a one-  
8 person benefit to ask the Congress to itself do a  
9 one-person benefit to support a person who in my view  
10 is not deserving of the assistance of this Council.  
11 Is not deserving of the assistance of the Congress as  
12 the court has said, and he's been litigating this  
13 since I believe 2005 or 6 almost 12, 13, 14 years.  
14 He has exhausted his legal options, and a court very  
15 recently said that he has some sort of Constitutional  
16 right to say good-bye. It's not my reading of the  
17 Constitution, but I support and honor the members of  
18 the judiciary who find that interesting reading of  
19 the First Amendment, and now he has the right to say  
20 good-bye and he should that, and he should support  
21 those who will come after him to carry on his mantle,  
22 but not him, not me. I will not vote for this  
23 resolution. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much  
25 to the members of the committee, and I want to open

2 it up for a vote so we can move—move through the next  
3 piece or the next part of his hearing. I will say a  
4 couple of things that's important. One is I welcome  
5 all of these ideas. So, I—I want to make sure to say  
6 thank you for—for bringing not just the discussion to  
7 this committee, but the context of which you're  
8 presenting these ideas, and so I welcome that, and we  
9 need to do more of that, and we're going to I think  
10 see a lot more of this as we move forward. These  
11 issues on immigration are not only incredibly  
12 nuanced, there's a lot of information that we have to  
13 kind of look at together. And so, I rally hope and  
14 know that we're going to—we're going to commit to  
15 that conversation as we move forward on other issues.  
16 I do want to say thank you. Every one of you brought  
17 your value of protecting immigrants in your  
18 districts, and I want to say thank you for that.  
19 That's—that's something that no only is I think  
20 American but it's a New York value, and we want to  
21 make sure that we continue to do that not just as a  
22 committee but as a Council. We have a lot of power  
23 here, but we don't have federal power to make some of  
24 these changes at the federal level, but we do have  
25 the opportunities to make sure that we get resource

2 to our neighborhoods. And so, I want to continue to—  
3 to—to focus on that. On the topic of—of Ravi  
4 himself, and—and this resolution, again I—I  
5 understand your—your opposition and discomfort and —  
6 and—and the arguments. There is something to be said  
7 about Ravi's case who I've also like Council Member  
8 Dromm have followed over the last few years not just  
9 in the work in our neighborhoods to create an  
10 incredible fabric of sanctuary within our—within our  
11 faith leaders and from multiple faiths to create a  
12 real sanctuary in churches for people to walk into to  
13 get services. Ravi has been leading that. Yes, he  
14 has committed crimes, and so that's not something  
15 that is being shied away from or we're not removing  
16 that from the conversation. This is all part of the  
17 conversation and why we are here, why he's—why he's  
18 in deportation proceedings possibly. The due process  
19 is where I'm going to just make sure to focus on.  
20 There—there are courts here that—that handle and that  
21 will continue to handle this case. Ravi has gone to  
22 all his check-ins. He's checked in with ICE every  
23 time. He has gone—going through his court mechanisms  
24 to make sure he clears his name because he has that  
25 Constitutional right, and we're going to let him do



2 that. And part of what this opportunity is going to  
3 be is for him to be able to do that before  
4 deportation. And so that I think is why I'm  
5 supporting this resolution to ensure that the legal  
6 courts allow them to do their work under—under the—  
7 the promise of the Constitution and due process. So,  
8 with that, I want to—I want to ask the Clerk to do  
9 the roll call for a vote, and—and I want to say thank  
10 you gain for your conversation and discussion today,  
11 and I'm going to keep the vote open for two members  
12 that are on their way. I just want to let everybody  
13 know that, too.

14 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk,  
15 roll call vote Committee on Immigration, Resolution  
16 118, Chair Menchaca.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I vote aye.

18 CLERK: Dromm.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Permission to  
20 explain my vote?

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes, and you'll  
22 have—can we put two minutes on the clock for that. I  
23 want to make sure that—that we-- Okay, go ahead  
24 then.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Okay. So, thank  
3 you very much, Chair. Just to reiterate my position.  
4 I do believe that Ravi should be given a second  
5 chance. I do believe that he has proven himself over  
6 the years. I do believe that any attempts to deport  
7 Ravi also will divide his family. He's married to an  
8 American woman, and his deportation would have  
9 serious detrimental effects to that family. So, with  
10 that, I vote aye in favor of the resolution.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Council  
12 Member Dromm.

13 CLERK: Gjonaj.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: To explain my  
15 vote a little further, Chairman?

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: I am proud of my  
18 ethnicity and the immigrant family that legally  
19 emigrated to this country through Catholic Charities  
20 and spent nearly a year in Italy before arriving  
21 here. I'm very fortunate to have been born in this  
22 great country, and I take none of that for granted,  
23 and the responsibilities that I have to this country,  
24 which has given so much back to me and my family.

2 With that being said, I have to vote no on this  
3 resolution .

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

5 CLERK: Holden.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Permission to  
7 explain my vote.

8 CLERK: Yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: My wife is a  
10 Japanese-American immigrant. Came to this country  
11 post-World War II. Not a day didn't go by that she  
12 didn't' experience prejudice in-in our neighborhoods.  
13 She lived in Japan, lived in Germany. Only when she  
14 came to the United States and Queens did she  
15 experience the prejudice, overt prejudice almost on a  
16 daily basis. Many of my family members are  
17 immigrants. So, it's not-it's not against  
18 immigration. It's not against an individual. This  
19 is a clear-cut case where we need to look at the  
20 person. Did Ravi-he might have done great work and I  
21 want to hear more of it. I don't know enough about  
22 him, and like I said before, I never met him. Maybe  
23 if I did, I'd change my mind, but at this juncture,  
24 knowing what I know, what I read, our court system he  
25 was given ample opportunities, and he exhausted them.

2 Now, he—he wants the City Council or the—the  
3 Congressman wants the City Council to vote and we  
4 have to give him special treatment? I think if he  
5 made restitution, if he paid back the money, if he  
6 attempted to or he did great work in the community,  
7 which he might have done. I don't see it yet. For  
8 that reason I'm voting no.

9 CLERK: Yeger.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you. Mr.  
11 Chairman, may I have permission to explain my vote,  
12 sir?

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER YEGER: Thank you. For  
15 the reasons I explained earlier during my remarks,  
16 and as the son of an immigrant, as the grandson of an  
17 immigrant, and as somebody whose had—whose been given  
18 the privilege of walking these halls and every day  
19 it's an incredible privilege. For those who have  
20 only been here for the 50 or so days and for those  
21 who have been here several years before, not a day  
22 goes by that I don't walk into this building and feel  
23 inspired, in awe of the opportunity that I've been  
24 given. I've been given the opportunity take an oath  
25 and raise my right hand and affirm my allegiance to

2 the Constitution of the United States as an officer  
3 of the court, as an officer of the state, and earlier  
4 this year as an officer of this city. As a member of  
5 this body, and that's an incredible privilege and  
6 it's an incredible honor, and in honor of that  
7 privilege and in honor of every single person who is  
8 present in this great country who asks our government  
9 for permission to stay here and permission—and for  
10 permission to be here and receives that permission,  
11 and in honor of all those who didn't have the  
12 opportunity to ask for that permission, but are here  
13 now and are asking the government to set the record  
14 straight and to let them remain here because they  
15 came here as children and have abided their lives  
16 accordingly as good people as good potential citizens  
17 of the United States. In honor of them, I cast my  
18 vote in opposition, and I do that with great respect  
19 for those who have different opinions.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much,  
21 Council Member Yeger, and we're going to leave the  
22 vote open for the next 15 minutes for-- [pause]  
23 We're going to leave the vote open until the end of  
24 the hour at noon, and thank you so much. [pause,  
25 background comments, pause]

2 CLERK: Continuation roll call, the  
3 Committee on Immigration, Resolution 182. Council  
4 Member Eugene.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: I vote aye.  
6 [pause, background comments, pause]

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay.

8 CLERK: Continuation roll call the  
9 Committee on Immigration, Resolution 182. Council  
10 Member Miller.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: I vote aye.

12 CLERK: By a vote of 4 in the  
13 affirmative, 3 in the negative and no abstentions,  
14 the resolution has been adopted by the committee.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much,  
16 and Council Member, I don't know if you wanted to say  
17 any words in support, but we are—the next step is for  
18 this resolution to appear at the Stated Meeting, and  
19 I'm just really thankful again for all the members of  
20 the Committee who have come out today in support of  
21 this resolution, and for those that were not in  
22 support, that they voiced not only their commitment  
23 to immigrants in their district, but immigration  
24 reform in general and are looking to work with me as  
25 the Chair to continue to champion for our New York

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

23

2 immigrants. Really excited. Thank you so much, and

3 we will now adjourn the meeting. [gavel]

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

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 February 17, 2018