



**Testimony of Commissioner Zach Iscol**  
**New York City Department of Emergency Management**  
**Contracting the Migrant Crisis: Asylum Seekers in New York City**  
**March 3, 2023**

Good morning Chairpersons Won and Brannan and members of the Committees on Finance and Contracts. I am Zach Iscol, Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management. I am joined today by my colleagues from multiple city agencies.

The influx of asylum seekers seeking refuge in New York City continues to be a challenging task and a great example of collaboration among city agencies. To date, over 48,000 asylum seekers have come into the system since this emergency began. Of those, over 30,000 are currently in the City's care and of that number, over 8,000 are in HERRCs with nearly 22,000 in DSS shelters. There have been eight HERRCs in total, with seven currently in operation as the one on Randall's Island has closed. DSS has opened 92 shelters.

As we face this humanitarian crisis, we have not wavered in our commitment to help and support. It was quickly clear to us that one agency alone could not tackle this unprecedented emergency and that is why this has been, from day one, a whole of government approach from the Adams' administration. We are many agencies, but we are one team. We are all in this together and that is why you see us together time and again when we speak about the City's response to this emergency – at council hearings, at public-facing events, on weekly calls with elected officials; we work not as individual agencies but together, as one team using all of our resources, all of our expertise, all of our institutional knowledge, all of our technical and contracting and costing capabilities – to get the job done. And we do it with pride and honor and we will continue doing it as long as is necessary.

To date, Emergency Management continues to coordinate between incoming buses of asylum seekers and provide logistical support to the operations of the Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center. The Center serves as a central place for newly arrived asylum seekers to receive free and confidential help accessing important services and resources that will help them integrate and thrive in New York City. Emergency Management is also coordinating with City agency partners at the Welcome Center located at the Port Authority, which has a National Guard contingent deployed for additional support. Those arriving can receive light medical care, water, and information regarding sleeping accommodations in the event they do not have friends, family, or a sponsor to lean on.

New York City continues to welcome arriving asylum seekers with compassion and care and using Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers – known as HERRCs – to provide both sleeping accommodations and a range of services to those seeking assistance. Emergency Management holds one 12-month contract registered at up to \$135 million with SLS Co, that provides support and site management at selected HERRCs. This contract includes wrap-around services such as staffing, transportation, clothing vouchers, water, and other logistical support as needed, such as reconnection specialists, bus dispatchers, interpreters, legal assistance, and security. Additional wrap-around services include translation, logistics coordination, and security



at some sites. Health & Hospitals and other agencies maintain additional contracts being used to assist asylum seeker operations.

New York City is a cultural mecca enriched by its diverse population, and a second home to those who make the difficult decision to leave their home country in search of opportunities. It is not only our responsibility as a city to help them adjust and regain their livelihoods, but it is an important investment in the future of New York.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The panel will now take your questions.



## TESTIMONY

### New York City Council Committee on Contracts, Jointly with the Committee on Finance

#### [“Contracting for the Migrant Crisis: Asylum Seekers in New York City.”](#)

March 3, 2023

Submitted by: Human Services Council of New York (HSC)

#### INTRODUCTION

**HSC urges the City of New York to invest in long-term and community-driven care coordination, housing, legal services, mental health services, employment support, and other care for people seeking asylum and other refuge.**

This requires a shift from reactive, short-term actions towards direct, multi-year investments in an exhausted human services infrastructure. HSC has witnessed the impacts on that infrastructure as a membership organization representing 170 nonprofit human services providers in NYC.

People seeking sanctuary in NYC should receive compassionate, dignified, and continuous services while fighting to recover from the shocks and traumas of unfathomable journeys to the U.S. and forced migration within the country. Many face long roads ahead in aspiring for a new home. The City should codify genuine partnerships with migrating communities and their advocates into procurement to sustain sanctuary long term. Contracting directly with community organizations to expand services not only helps our newest neighbors: it strengthens support systems that New Yorkers already need. NYC Council’s announcement of a \$2.2 million [“Welcome NYC”](#) campaign is a helpful start. We need more city, state, and federal support to expand these efforts to meet new and long-term needs, and to build a smarter human services strategy. And, as NYC Council noted in a [December report](#), sustaining sanctuary long-term may also require legislation.

#### FINDINGS

**HSC has engaged over 80 human services providers and 200 workers from community-based, citywide, and national organizations through convenings, interviews, and surveys.** In a January [report](#) released by HSC, providers expressed commitment to serving people seeking asylum as a natural extension of their mission and services. They offered critical services to communities that were: 86% non-English/ESL speakers; 75% low-income; 68% under/unemployed; 58% unstably housed/un-housed; >50% older adults, youth, or parents with infants; and 47% seeking mental health support.

**Survey results found that most human services organizations offered services to people seeking asylum and other refuge on their own initiative, using their own funds, and coordinating through their own networks:**

- 96% provided services entirely or partially out of pocket, extending existing resources without known reimbursement.
- 40% were asked by government to provide services, but <13% were offered complete funding for these partnerships.
- 82% found a way to serve without resources set aside to expand operations, with 17% reporting that barriers to scale up were due to pre-existing unpaid contract work with government.
- 82% ensured accessibility through language translation/interpretation, though only 13% affirmed accessibility for people with disabilities; <20% had received funding to ensure accessibility.
- 29% worked with governmental service hubs, but most mentioned hubs intentionally/organically formed around local nonprofits, congregations, businesses, or mutual aid groups.

The City that prides itself on being a sanctuary also struggles to equitably share resources with community leaders and providers who make that sanctuary possible. Many organizations are concerned that they will be unable to sustain services in the under-resourced landscape navigated to-date, especially with continued COVID-19 recovery and economic worries. Findings reflect a wider trend in a sector facing forced cuts and [closures](#) of critical human services programs after long-term systemic inequities in resource distribution in NYC—such as [government-sanctioned poverty wages](#) and delayed payment.

NYC Council has shared concerns about temporary mass emergency shelters, which are sometimes geographically and logistically isolated from social services, jobs, and community support. Simultaneously, we’ve seen underinvestment in direct funds to affordable housing, legal representation, and more. This can contribute to longer stays in shelters without expedited access to legal determinations, employment, and other critical steps.

## ADVOCACY

### **Ensure all City, State, and Federal funds designated for people seeking asylum contain direct, expedited funding for comprehensive human services developed by and for community organizations.<sup>i</sup>**

- Leverage emergency procurement models for community partners from past crises (e.g., COVID-19), ensuring that the first round of funding is accompanied by a multi-year plan for fund renewals accessible to CBOs.<sup>ii</sup>
- Pay the full cost of services to organizations (not only salaries), prioritize just pay, and allow for flexible deliverables and upfront payment to encourage innovation and efficiency in services.
- Designate additional resources for hiring interpreter/translation services for non-English speakers and people with disabilities, in all needed languages and at equitable pay rates.
- Disclose all contracting and spending in the City's response to date, including to and from: City departments; Mayoral offices, City corporations like [H+H](#) and [EDC](#), and nonprofits.

### **Reform existing budget plans to expand resources for care coordination, legal services, transitional and long term housing, employment support, health and mental health services, and other human services.**

- Care Coordination
  - Extend navigation services into sustained care management; resource comprehensive training across navigators; expand [satellite sites](#) with community providers to host and/or locate additional sites.
  - Fund people-centered data management infrastructure to be unified across programs, prioritizing strong protections for clients who fear enforcement (review models from [other jurisdictions](#)).
  - Work with NYS to fund a sustained food assistance program, as in other jurisdictions.
- Legal Services
  - Work with legal services providers to accurately identify full funding for emergency, triaged legal needs and additional multi-year legal representation.
  - Cover legal fees, trainings, and legal packets for clients and advocates on rights, processes, benefits, etc.
- Mental Health Services
  - Fund an expansive, community-based network of mental health providers offering trauma-informed, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, acute and long-term counseling and other care.
- Housing
  - Expand funds for community organizations, congregations, and networks offering housing, investing in long-term housing solutions that support migrating families (e.g., stabilization beds).
  - Lift reimbursement caps for sheltering adults in NYC and work with NYS to authorize/fund the HAVP.
- Employment
  - Expand funding for sustained, accessible workforce development trainings, and other support such as donated technology and transportation that lift barriers to employment.
  - Fund access to, and outreach for, childcare via community/faith-based organizations.
  - Create pathways for new communities to start their own businesses and access contracting with the City and State, including by ensuring access to NYS Licensing Act regardless of immigration status.

### **Fund a public education campaign for New Yorkers to better understand the situation faced by their newest neighbors, mitigate stigma/discrimination, and galvanize resources for families.**

- Partner with community organizations to compassionately and respectfully humanize this effort.

## CONCLUSION

NYC has long expressed pride in its identity as a sanctuary city—a refuge for all migrants. The city has the infrastructure within the human services sector to fully address the needs of its residents. This can only happen when human services organizations and community networks are seen as equal partners, and funded as ones by City, State, and Federal governments. As City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams affirmed, the City must cease using migrants as “collateral damage” and being “indifferent to partnership” with community leaders. We must meaningfully invest in human services and community infrastructure in NYC for a compassionate and comprehensive welcome to our newest neighbors.



**Contact**

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<sup>i</sup> The City should use collaboration development models with partners, as it [has previously shared](#).

<sup>ii</sup> NYC made an emergency procurement declaration in July 2022, requested by DHS pursuant to Section 315 of the NYC Charter and Section 3-06 of the Procurement Policy Board Rules. An Emergency Executive Order was announced in October 2022.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

3/3/23

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charles Diamond

Address: 10014

I represent: Mayor's Office of Contract Services

Address: 255 Greenwich Street

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Zach Iscol

Address: 165 Cadman Plaza E, Brooklyn NY

I represent: NYC Emergency Management

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Name: Tom Tortorici

Address: ED of Legal + Support Initiatives

I represent: NYC Immigrant Affairs

Address:



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I represent: DCAS

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Name: Theodore Long

Address: 50 Water St

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: 3/3/23

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Name: Molly Park, First Deputy Comm.

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I represent: DSS/HRA/DAS

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