

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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March 14, 2022

Start: 2:05 p.m.

Recess: 7:33 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING - VIRTUAL ROOM 3

B E F O R E: Shahana K. Hanif, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Rita C. Joseph
Shekar Krishnan
Francisco P. Moya
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Sandra Ung

A P P E A R A N C E S

Manuel Castro, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office
of Immigrant Affairs
Anne Montesano, Executive Director of Interagency
Initiatives and Language Access at the Mayor's
Office of Immigrant Affairs
Tom Tortorici, Director of Legal Initiatives at
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Adama Bah
Veronica Piedra Leon
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Nadia Marin-Molina

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

Gale Johnson
Estefania Galvis
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Magdalena Barbosa
Alba Lucera Villa
Zara Nasir
Dania Darwish
Dmitri Daniel Glinski
Alexi Shalom
Yasmin Hassan
Mon Yuck Yu

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2 SERGEANT LUGO: Okay, live stream is up.
3 PC recording done.

4 SERGEANT PEREZ: Cloud recording is
5 underway.

6 SERGEANT LUGO: Thank you. Good afternoon,
7 everyone. Welcome to today's remote New York City
8 Council Fiscal 2023 Preliminary Budget Hearing of the
9 Committee on Immigration.

10 At this time, would all panelists please
11 turn on your videos?

12 To minimize disruption, please place
13 electronic devices to vibrate or silent.

14 If you wisht to submit testimony, you may
15 send it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's
16 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

17 Thank you for your cooperation. Chair
18 Hanif, we are ready to begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. [GAVEL]
20 Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Council Member Shahana
21 Hanif, and I'm the Chair of the Committee on
22 Immigration. At my first hearing a couple weeks ago,
23 I had shared with you all that I just had a left hip
24 replacement done. I am recovering really well, and
25 I'm excited that I'll be fully on video at this

2 hearing, and thank you all for being super, super
3 graceful and gracious with me and sending prayers and
4 thoughts. I'm really excited to be the Chair of this
5 Committee and especially looking forward to today's
6 budget hearing.

7 Today, the Committee will conduct a
8 hearing on the fiscal 2023 preliminary budget and how
9 it addresses the needs of our immigrant New Yorkers
10 and how it prioritizes services for immigrants,
11 especially in this critical time of COVID recovery.
12 The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs fiscal 2023
13 budget totals 817,000 dollars and supports 7
14 positions. However, this budget doesn't provide a
15 full picture of MOIA's budget. In fact, the office
16 coordinates and collaborates with various city
17 agencies including the Department of Youth Services,
18 the Human Resources Administration, the Department of
19 Education, New York City Health and Hospitals, DOHMH
20 on managing MOIA programs that are found within these
21 agencies. This budget has substantially reduced
22 funding for the adult literacy programs. Literacy
23 programs are essential to navigating healthcare,
24 education, access to better jobs, and participating
25 in the city's recovery effort, and I'll also include,

2 as I've heard from adult literacy providers, these
3 have been spaces to articulate and support needs of
4 Asian immigrants in the wake of increased anti-Asian
5 violence so the cut is a massive disappointment and a
6 move toward a disinvestment that will absolutely harm
7 our immigrant communities.

8 This Committee is interested in hearing
9 how the Administration plans to prioritize critical
10 services for immigrant New Yorkers and their
11 families. The budget must adequately address these
12 concerns and take into account the needs of all
13 immigrants. The Committee is calling on the
14 Administration to restore funding for immigrant
15 services and to expand adult literacy initiatives.
16 Over the last 2 years, our city has seen a spike in
17 anti-Asian violence and hate crimes, and we all must
18 do our part to call it out and stop it. We want to
19 ensure that MOIA is utilizing all resources available
20 to inform Asian immigrants about mental health
21 services. This also includes community-centered
22 approaches to destigmatizing receiving mental health
23 services. I want to emphasize the need for adequate
24 funding levels for services because this is about the
25 sustainability of services for immigrant New Yorkers.

2 This is essentially for tackling inequality and
3 building stability and safety for immigrant families
4 that are facing uncertainties every single day. The
5 investments we put forth affirm that our city is a
6 sanctuary city. I'm looking forward to hearing from
7 the Administration on their strategy and budget plan
8 and how they'll be engaging with agencies to best
9 serve immigrants. After we hear from MOIA, the
10 Committee will hear testimonies from the public.

11 Lastly, I would like to thank the Speaker
12 and the Mayor in supporting the needs of our
13 immigrant community. I also want to make sure that we
14 thank our Committee staff for their hard work, Unit
15 Head Crilhien Francisco, Financial Assistant Analyst
16 Florentine Kabore, Committee Counsel Harbani Ahuja,
17 Data Analyst Ben Witt, and my Legislative and Budget
18 Director Alexander Liao.

19 Now, I would like to welcome the
20 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
21 Affairs, Manny Castro. I'd also like to recognize my
22 Colleagues who have joined me today. I see Council
23 Member Ung, Council Member Moya, and nobody else at
24 this time, but I'll continue to give shoutouts.

2 Before we hear from you, the Committee
3 Counsel will swear you in.

4 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
5 Chair. I'd like to just recognize that we've also
6 been joined by Council Member Sanchez and Council
7 Member Joseph.

8 My name is Harbani Ahuja, and I'll be
9 moderating today's hearing. Before we begin, I want
10 to just remind everyone that you will be on mute
11 until you are called on to speak at which time you
12 will be unmuted by the host.

13 If you mute yourself after you've been
14 unmuted, you will have to be unmuted again so just
15 please thank you in advance for your patience. There
16 may be a few minutes, a few seconds of delay in the
17 process of muting and unmuting.

18 The order of today's testimony will be as
19 follows. The first panel will be the Mayor's Office
20 of Immigrant Affairs followed by Council Member
21 questions and then members of the public will
22 testify. We do have several folks signed up today,
23 and we thank everyone for joining us and we will get
24 to everyone today so thank you in advance for your
25 patience.

2 During the hearing, if Council Members
3 would like to ask questions, please use the Zoom
4 raise hand function, and you will be called on in the
5 order in which you've raised your hands. We will be
6 limiting Council Member questions to 5 minutes
7 including responses.

8 I will now call on MOIA witnesses to
9 testify including those available for question and
10 answer. Testimony will be provided by Manuel Castro,
11 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
12 Affairs. Additionally, the following representatives
13 will be available for Q&A, Anne Montesano, Executive
14 Director of Interagency Initiatives and Language
15 Access at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs,
16 and Tom Tortorici, Director of Legal Initiatives at
17 the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

18 I administer the oath and call on each
19 panelist individually for a response. Please raise
20 your right hands.

21 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
22 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
23 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
24 questions? Commissioner Castro.

25 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes.

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2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you. Anne
3 Montesano.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: Yes.

5 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you. Tom
6 Tortorici.

7 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Yes.

8 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you.
9 Commissioner, you may begin your testimony when
10 you're ready.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you so much,
12 and thank you, Chair Hanif, and the Committee on
13 Immigration for holding this budget hearing. Of
14 course, thanks to all the City Council staff and all
15 the admin staff for your work in preparation for this
16 hearing and all the community organizations that are
17 going to be testifying today.

18 My name is Manuel Castro, and I am the
19 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
20 Affairs. I want to first start by highlighting some
21 of MOIA's mission as outlined in the Charter. I think
22 it's important to just review and then go into our
23 work and some of the challenges that our community
24 has been facing.

25

2 First, the Charter explicitly notes that
3 immigrant New Yorkers make up a large percentage of
4 the city's total population, that is about 3 million
5 New Yorkers, or almost 40 percent of the population
6 is immigrant, and 60 percent of all New Yorkers are
7 either immigrants or children of immigrants. Because
8 of this, the well-being of the city depends on the
9 willingness of immigrant New Yorkers to engage with
10 city government. Given this reality, MOIA is not and
11 cannot be the only office that seeks to serve our
12 immigrant communities. All agencies must think about
13 the needs of immigrants when engaging in their work,
14 and that is a critical role that all agencies must
15 play here in New York City. The Charter recognizes
16 that MOIA's unique expertise as the Mayor's Office
17 that focuses on immigrant-related issues and requires
18 our office to advise and assist the Mayor, Council,
19 and other agencies on developing and implementing of
20 policies related to immigrant and limited English
21 proficiency New Yorkers, track state and federal
22 policy and law, increase access to city programs,
23 benefits, and services through outreach, and help
24 advise on the legal services needs of immigrants.
25 MOIA is also required to consult with the community

2 and other stakeholders and coordinate an interagency
3 taskforce on immigrant affairs. In addition, MOIA
4 works with relevant city agencies to address the
5 needs of immigrant crime victims and witnesses
6 including by working with agencies on the issuance of
7 U VISA certifications and (INAUDIBLE) declarations,
8 and, finally, MOIA is also required to report
9 annually on its programming and on the demographics
10 and needs of immigrant New Yorkers, a report we will
11 be issuing this week. I am proud to say that MOIA
12 does this and much more than the Charter mandates,
13 and I am excited to speak of some of our work today.
14 This testimony will briefly outline the challenges
15 that immigrants face and highlight some of MOIA's
16 work in the past fiscal year.

17 First, challenges during the recovery,
18 that is the COVID-19 recovery. Over the past year, we
19 have seen hopeful changes in the landscape of the
20 global pandemic. Vaccination rates have increased,
21 positivity rates have gone down, and the city has
22 begun to reopen. As the city begins to shift towards
23 normalcy though, it is crucial that this recovery
24 process is equitable and that we do not leave our
25 vulnerable communities behind. MOIA's in-house

2 research department has previously published an
3 analysis on the disproportionate effect of the COVID-
4 19 crisis on immigrant communities. Immigrants have
5 been a key part of the story of the city's recovery
6 including by serving as essential workers, half of
7 the 1 million essential workers serving on the front
8 lines are immigrants, but despite this service
9 immigrant New Yorkers still face numerous barriers
10 that must be addressed. As just some examples and as
11 our previous annual report have consistently noted,
12 immigrant New Yorkers earn less, are more likely to
13 be uninsured, live in overcrowded households at
14 greater rates, and are more often rent burdened and
15 have higher rates of poverty than their native-born
16 counterparts. In addition, many federal and state
17 policies and programs fail to take needs of
18 immigrants into account. Over the past year, however,
19 we have seen heartening changes at the federal and
20 state level. The Biden administration continues to
21 emphasize the need for a path to citizenship for many
22 undocumented immigrants, and the state has
23 implemented key programs to help address fiscal and
24 other needs of immigrants. I look forward to
25 additional partnerships in the year to come,

2 especially with the federal government as they look
3 to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

4 Next, I'd like to provide an overview of
5 our FY 2020 activities. I want to emphasize, however,
6 that I am not covering all of MOIA's work in this
7 testimony. The annual report will include description
8 of ways that MOIA designs, proposes, and implements
9 and ultimately manages a portfolio of programs that
10 directly serve immigrants and are intentionally
11 responsive to their needs, and I urge the Committee
12 and others on this hearing to review that report when
13 it is released very, very soon. The following
14 overview touches on just a few relevant pieces of our
15 work which focuses on 2 main areas, responding to the
16 unique needs of our immigrant communities and closing
17 the access gap for immigrant New Yorkers.

18 First, responding to COVID-19. To address
19 the disparate impact of the pandemic on immigrant New
20 Yorkers, MOIA partnered with private funders, city
21 agencies, and community-based organizations to
22 implement emergency relief programs, including NYC
23 COVID-19 Immigrant Emergency Relief Fund and the
24 creation of the Mayor's Fund COVID-19 Immigrant
25 (INAUDIBLE) Assistance Program. MOIA also connected

2 immigrants in need to community-based organizations
3 who assisted individuals in applying for new state
4 programs like the Excluded Workers Fund, Emergency
5 Rental Assistance Program, and the New York State
6 Homeowners Assistance Program. MOIA also
7 independently screened constituents and connected
8 them to the housing resources available through
9 FASTEN, Funds and Services for Tenants Experiencing
10 Need.

11 Another piece of MOIA's role in
12 addressing the COVID-19 crisis is connecting New
13 Yorkers to vaccines. Many of MOIA's teams worked
14 closely with the vaccine command center on vaccine
15 outreach and distribution with a special focus on
16 reaching New York City's immigrant communities. Over
17 the past year, MOIA partnered with the VCC and NYC
18 Health and Hospitals to secure 2 million dollars in
19 funding for a vaccine outreach program targeting
20 undocumented New Yorkers, contracting with 15 trusted
21 community-based organizations to reach undocumented
22 communities and provide direct assistance in
23 accessing COVID-19 vaccines. In addition, our
24 language access team worked to ensure that language
25 access was not a barrier to information or services

2 by advising and providing technical assistance to
3 agencies and by delivering critical translation and
4 interpretation support where necessary. This included
5 the delivery of over 1,000 translations into 22
6 languages for the VCC to support community
7 vaccination efforts. Our team also conducted
8 extensive outreach, helped facilitate appointments
9 for vaccines, and held town halls and virtual events
10 on multiple platforms and in 13 languages. The
11 outreach and organizing team also supported the VCC
12 in launching the NYC Vaccine Mobile Clinic Program.
13 Additionally, MOIA shifted our programming as the
14 city's response to the pandemic entered a new phase.
15 The ID NYC Program, which was funded for over 50
16 million in FY 2020, closed its enrollment centers in
17 2020 while simultaneously ensuring that cardholders
18 and applicants could still access services and
19 benefits. In 2021, ID NYC reopened enrollment sites
20 in all 5 boroughs and responded to public demand by
21 increasing capacity overall throughout its enrollment
22 sites.

23 MOIA also continues to manage the
24 outreach for NYC Care, guarantees low and no cost
25 healthcare services to New Yorkers who do not qualify

2 for or cannot afford health insurance. In the first
3 year of the pandemic, the program worked to support
4 these communities by expediting the rollout of the
5 program to ensure all eligible New Yorkers had access
6 to the program. As the pandemic continued into 2021,
7 the program adjusted again to respond to the growing
8 CBO and community need for support by issuing a new
9 RFP that increased contract timelines to 1 year,
10 allocated additional funding to support direct
11 enrollment by CBOs and allocated additional funding
12 for casework. In Calendar 2021, NYC Care outreach CBO
13 reached approximately 285,000 New Yorkers who speak
14 more than 40 languages other than English across the
15 5 boroughs.

16 When it comes to legal services, New York
17 City has invested tens of millions of dollars into
18 immigration legal services, recognizing that
19 immigration legal services are a tool of empowerment
20 for immigrant New Yorkers and their families. Legal
21 services can help immigrant New Yorkers stabilize
22 their immigration status and access jobs, health
23 insurance, and education, ultimately benefitting New
24 York City as a whole. MOIA's legal services programs
25 exist in partnership with legal service providers,

2 community-based organizations, and city agencies and
3 include Action NYC, NY Citizenship, the Rapid
4 Response Collaborative, a new program that addresses
5 emerging needs in the past fiscal year. In total,
6 MOIA oversees more than 10 million in funding for
7 legal services programming, over 8 million of which
8 is baselined. Action NYC makes up the lion's share of
9 that funding with over 8.7 million allocated to that
10 program. Action NYC and RRC providers conducted over
11 11,000 legal screenings in 2021, a 30 percent
12 increase from 2020, and opened over 6,100 new cases,
13 an increase of 21 percent.

14 Turning over to language access and
15 language justice and English language learning. The
16 Mayor Adams Administration is committed to language
17 access. This is a large task. About 22 percent of New
18 Yorkers have limited English proficiency, and about
19 half of immigrant New Yorkers have LEP. In addition,
20 over 200 languages are spoken in the city. This
21 linguistic landscape presents complex challenges for
22 all city government. While the city has made progress
23 on ensuring that all New Yorkers can connect with the
24 services and programming they need regardless of what
25 language they speak, there is much left to do. MOIA

plays several roles in advancing language justice.

First, MOIA conducts multilingual outreach and provides multilingual information to immigrant New Yorkers. This includes providing interpretation and translation services to Mayoral offices. In 2021

alone, MOIA's language services team delivered 2,850 translations of 937 different source documents in 47 different languages. Let me repeat that, in 2021

alone, MOIA's language services team delivered 2,850 translations of 937 different source documents in 47 different languages alone. Second, MOIA helps to

strengthen the city's capacity to communicate effectively with New Yorkers with LEP by advising and providing technical assistance to over 30 agencies and 20 Mayoral offices as well as external entities.

This includes advising on language services procurement, providing guidance and creating

multilingual websites, sharing practices on multilingual outreach and engagement, and advising agencies on and conducting oversight of

implementation of Local Law 30. Third, MOIA's service as an experimental lab to pilot language access best practices and educate partners on those practices.

For example, MOIA piloted contracting with a

2 technology vendor to human translate our website into
3 10 Local Law 30 languages instead of relying on the
4 standard machine translation. MOIA shared its work on
5 creating multilingual websites with other agencies
6 and, as a result, some of these agencies have pursued
7 similar strategies.

8 Other programming within the office also
9 touches on the needs of New Yorkers with LEPs. In
10 2021, MOIA continues to develop and administer We
11 Speak New York, the city's free English language
12 learning program, which was funded at 1 million in FY
13 '22. We Speak New York City launched 2 PSAs and a new
14 Shola's Voice episode in 2021 in collaboration with
15 Democracy NY and CUNY. These new productions
16 emphasize the importance of voting among NYC's
17 diverse immigrant communities and communicated the
18 steps to participate in the cities new Ranked Choice
19 Voting process, which was administered during NYC
20 primary elections. Shola's Voice also addressed the
21 importance of immigrant communities engaging in the
22 democratic process and explored how an individual's
23 voice is heard by voting.

24 Moving on to addressing emergent needs.
25 The COVID-19 pandemic was not the only emergency that

2 faced our immigrant communities over the past fiscal
3 year. MOIA shared its expertise when the city
4 responded to emergency needs by providing language
5 access support to emergencies as it did to the fire
6 in the Bronx most recently and last year during
7 Hurricane Ida and the response to the COVID-19
8 pandemic. In addition, MOIA advised on new
9 programming in the wake of several emergencies. This
10 included helping advise on the joint city and state
11 program to provide relieve for survivors of Hurricane
12 Ida who could not access FEMA funding. The city and
13 state allocated 27 million to provide relief for
14 undocumented New Yorkers who did not qualify for
15 assistance through FEMA. While the state operates
16 this program, MOIA meets regularly with the providers
17 and the state answering questions and advocates with
18 DOS, Department of State, when appropriate. MOIA met
19 with the Department of State multiple times to
20 advocate for changes to the fund as implementation
21 proceeded. As another example, MOIA worked to secure
22 1.5 million in new FY '22 funding for community-based
23 partners providing linguistically and culturally
24 responsive case management and immigration legal
25 services for newly arrived Haitian immigrants. These

2 new arrivals came into New York City due to the
3 recent natural disasters, political upheaval in
4 Haiti, and changes in federal policy. This funding
5 supports case managers who work with newly arrived
6 immigrants to determine eligibility for benefits and
7 connect them to resources and services and also funds
8 legal services for assistance in applying for
9 immigration relief.

10 Finally, in response to global events
11 such as the Afghanistan evacuation and Ukrainian
12 invasion, MOIA takes a primary role in assessing the
13 local community needs that result in how the city can
14 help address them. For example, we have created web
15 pages and resources for impacted communities and
16 those seeking help translated into relevant
17 languages. MOIA continues to monitor the situation in
18 Ukraine and works to respond to the crisis there and
19 its impacts on our communities here. On March 1st in
20 a joint statement, the Mayor and myself asked the
21 Biden administration to consider the use of every
22 tool at their disposal to address the crisis. The
23 Department of Homeland Security subsequently
24 designated Ukraine for TPS for 18 months. MOIA will
25 continue to work to partner closely with community-

2 based organizations, immigration legal service
3 providers, community-rooted volunteer and
4 professional groups, and educational and cultural
5 institutions to provide additional legal assistance
6 and support as needed.

7 I would also like to talk about our
8 empowerment and advocacy, which is a very important
9 component of MOIA. MOIA is mandated to conduct
10 outreach to immigrant New Yorkers to facilitate
11 access to city resources and services. The organizing
12 and outreach teams play a critical role in closing
13 the gap in access for immigrant New Yorkers by
14 helping secure emergency food, PPE, at-home COVID-19
15 testing kits, information on Ranked Choice Voting,
16 and by sharing information on many more topics. In
17 2021, the organizing and outreach team held 299 in-
18 person events including resource fairs, tabling, Know
19 Your Rights presentations, and canvassing, reaching
20 over 83,000 community members across the 5 boroughs.
21 Through over 250 virtual events, the organizing and
22 outreach team reached an additional 36,000 community
23 members. In addition to our Charter-mandated
24 responsibility to conduct outreach, MOIA also works
25 to empower the community to exercise their rights and

2 access key services. MOIA conducts Know Your Rights
3 presentations across immigrant communities and
4 partners covering different topics and utilizing
5 different models to deliver critical information. In
6 2021, MOIA conducted over 600 forums, engaged in over
7 17,000 attendees, and reached over 40,000 live views.
8 The community services team also connects immigrant
9 New Yorkers to the help that they need by offering a
10 real-time support system through in-person public
11 facing events, convening with key stakeholders, and
12 the Ask MOIA hotline. In 2021 alone, the Ask MOIA
13 hotline shifted to in-depth case management and
14 followup to ensure that New Yorkers are accessing the
15 services they are entitled to. In 2021, the Ask MOIA
16 hotline and email inbox, responded to over 4,300
17 calls and 160 emails and made 960 referrals.

18 Finally, addressing the issues that
19 immigrant New Yorkers requires engaging with all
20 levels of government. In 2021, MOIA worked to
21 coordinate local, state, and national advocacy on
22 behalf of immigrant New Yorkers, including by
23 partnering with local elected leaders across the
24 nation to push for federal changes and by submitting
25 comments, supporting legislation, and connecting with

2 state and federal partners on a variety of topics. I
3 want especially highlight the work we do with Cities
4 for Action, a coalition of over 170 U.S. cities and
5 local governments that collectively advocate for pro-
6 immigrant federal policies and exchange best
7 practices on local policies and programs. As one of
8 the founding cities of that coalition, over the past
9 year we have shared toolkits on citizenship for
10 essential workers, TPS advocacy that outlines on the
11 state of play, advocacy talking points in social
12 media messaging. The Coalition has also issued
13 multiple statements and sign-on letters calling for
14 more TPS designations and pushing for relief for
15 Haitian and Afghan immigrants, held special topics
16 calls and equitable vaccine distribution and more,
17 and hosted an annual convening for our partners from
18 across the country.

19 Just to conclude, I want to thank
20 everyone again for being on this call and for your
21 participation in this hearing. I look forward to
22 working with Council on addressing the urgent needs
23 as the budget process continues. I'll be happy to
24 answer any questions that you may have. Thank you so
25 much.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
3 much, Commissioner, for your testimony. I'm going to
4 now turn it to Chair Hanif for questions. If folks
5 from the administration could stay unmuted during the
6 question-and-answer period, that would be helpful.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.
9 Thank you, Commissioner Castro, for a very
10 comprehensive overview of the agency. I'm also really
11 excited about the release of the report. It's so
12 critical that MOIA share this information in writing
13 to the public and to really see how we're doing year
14 to year, and I'm just excited to delve into and dive
15 deep into what you've already shared out with us to
16 better understand MOIA's workings day to day.

17 To begin, as we enter fiscal 2023, what
18 budget recommendations has MOIA provided to the
19 administration related to immigrant issues?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair
21 Hanif, and I wanted to provide as much information as
22 possible in my testimony. I hope I wasn't too long,
23 but I will definitely provide as much as we can in
24 the report so that yourself and the public are fully

2 aware of what we do at MOIA and to work together on
3 these many issues.

4 In terms of the question, I've
5 immediately began to work at looking through our
6 programs and initiatives, and I've emphasized to my
7 Colleagues in the administration how important our
8 work is, not just the work that we do here but the
9 work that we do for New Yorkers and across the city
10 and the work that other sister agencies do with
11 immigrant communities. In the last couple of weeks,
12 I've been in the post 8 or 9 weeks now, I've proposed
13 a number of initiatives to the team here emphasizing
14 language access because for me, and I know the team
15 here, language access and language justice is key to
16 bridging the gap that exists between immigrant
17 communities and city services, and that is something
18 that is a priority for me as I've shared many times,
19 and also proposing or working on proposals that we
20 continue to develop to addressing the crisis at hand,
21 whether it's the conflict in the Ukrainian region
22 and/or anything that might come up in the near
23 future.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So aside from
25 supporting refugees and ensuring language access, are

2 there any other recommendations that you are
3 proposing?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think we're going
5 to have a chance to propose additional programs and
6 services and new needs in the next couple of months,
7 and I'm just excited to be able to work on those for
8 our team here and working collaboratively with you
9 and the Council on these proposals.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Good to know. I have a
11 separate section on language access and so we will
12 delve into that in a little bit, but to continue on
13 the budget priorities. Were there any new needs, and
14 perhaps serving our refugee communities is one of
15 them, any new needs that MOIA has asked from OMB but
16 did not receive funding in the preliminary budget?

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, not as of yet.
18 We're working on a number of proposals, but none as
19 of yet, we have not been denied any of the funding
20 because we haven't proposed any yet, but we're
21 certainly looking at many different issues that might
22 require additional support.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood, and when
24 do you think the proposals will be shared out?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I believe there's a
3 timeline, but I think as needed we are able to
4 propose back to our Colleagues at OMB and to the
5 administration.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood, and I'd
7 love to be a partner in that work as needed. The
8 administration has set an additional savings goal of
9 nearly 2 billion dollars which will be achieved in
10 part by implementing this administration's first
11 Program to Eliminate the Gap. Which city agencies
12 does MOIA think the PEG may affect immigrant New
13 Yorkers? HRA, DYCD? Could you speak on that?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think ID NYC is
15 the one that we, at least in my evaluation, I see
16 will be impacted to the most in terms of the programs
17 that we collaborate on, but I certainly will defer to
18 the OMB to be more specific about the PEG across city
19 government.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood, and then
21 has MOIA provided any feedback or recommendations on
22 programs not to be impacted in fiscal 2023?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: In terms of programs
24 at MOIA?

25 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Correct.

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I've definitely
3 encouraged the team to understand how critical our
4 programs and our work is, which is why the PEG didn't
5 impact us except for, like I mentioned ID NYC. As a
6 result, we lost 3 vacancies, but it didn't impact our
7 current staffing or resources.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood, okay. I'd
9 like to move into health and mental health and at a
10 later portion this afternoon we will talk about
11 vacancies in the agency.

12 Given the spike of anti-Asian violence,
13 the immigration enforcement and family separation and
14 even the experience of moving to a new country, in
15 many ways immigrants experience mental health issues
16 including depression, PTSD, substance abuse, anxiety,
17 and much more. How do you engage with immigrants
18 facing mental health issues? Have there been any
19 specific ad campaigns, outreach and engagement tools
20 that the agency is utilizing to inform Asian
21 immigrants about mental health care services?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's a great
23 question. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
24 and the Office of Community Mental Health does
25 consult with us on ways to reach the immigrant

2 community, and we have provided assistance with
3 language access and cultural competency work. That's
4 certainly a big issue that we partner on with not
5 just those agencies but many other agencies, and
6 we're working closely with community-based
7 organizations to also make sure that communities know
8 the resources that exist and that we're able to reach
9 those communities impacted. From our team who directs
10 many of our interagency language access work is on
11 the call too, and if you'd like to add anything to
12 that. Anne, I don't know if you're unmuted.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Who did you want to
14 call on and then we can make sure.

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Anne Montesano,
16 who's on the call with me.

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: Hi. Yes,
18 just to piggyback on what Commissioner Castro was
19 saying, MOIA engages pretty regularly with a number
20 of offices that provide mental health services and
21 resources so we provide interpretation and
22 translation support to the Office of Community
23 Health. We help translate a number of their
24 materials. They had a trauma guide that they
25 translated, a guide for faith community leaders, a

2 mental health resource guide, LGBTQI mental health
3 guide, and we've been translating these materials. We
4 provide technical assistance to them as well so
5 recently they reached out and we provided language
6 data to them to help inform their ad campaign so we
7 are in sort of constant touch with them as well as
8 the Office to Prevent Hate Crimes on providing those
9 kind of language support.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really good to
11 know. Are you also concurrently doing work with our
12 community-based organizations? I was just in a
13 meeting with Sapna NYC, and they've just put out a
14 really incredible report on the mental health issues
15 of Bangladeshi women in the Bronx and their members
16 and, of course, language access is one big barrier
17 but another is just views on receiving mental health
18 care services, even when the materials are
19 translated, the services are available in our
20 languages. Is there any work that MOIA is doing with
21 CBOs directly and in tandem with sort of cultural
22 revolution to destigmatize approaches to receiving
23 mental health care?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I do believe that
25 our organizing and outreach team is in constant

2 communication, we've partnered with a lot of CBOs
3 across the city, those that we fund and not fund, and
4 that's certainly is something that's a priority. It's
5 one of our anchor activities at MOIA and so we
6 certainly want to continue to do that work and grow
7 it. It's really important that we're very much
8 involved in the day-to-day that community
9 organizations are doing to support their communities.
10 In particular in this case, I think it's urgent that
11 we do more on it.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Agreed. Now NYC Care,
13 what options exist for mental health services? Are
14 there NYC Care doctors and healthcare professionals
15 screening for mental health needs when they interact
16 with their client population?

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I just held an NYC
18 Care event with some of our partners at H&H and
19 Department of Health, and I know that there is an
20 attempt to reach as many communities as possible and
21 open the doors of various agencies to communities
22 that are in need and so the outreach effort this year
23 is going to be extensive. Of course, we don't have
24 oversight of that, but we do provide the outreach
25 support, particularly when it comes to NYC Care,

2 which we help people enroll in and screen and work
3 with communities, especially in immigrant communities
4 that perhaps the city has not been able to reach as
5 much. That is our focus and emphasis as an office,
6 and we'll continue to do that work and double down on
7 it.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How has the rollout
9 been of NYC Care so far and if you can share how many
10 participants have enrolled to this program to date?

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't have the
12 specific number, but about 2 weeks ago we held an
13 event marking the 100,000th enrollee, and that was a
14 very meaningful moment because we had participants
15 who had enrolled and had been positively impacted by
16 the program, and I think it's a good sign that there
17 is a desire for this program to continue and grow and
18 that folks are connected to it. My parents are
19 enrolled in this program, and I know that it's one
20 that we hope that other cities and states can model
21 because it provides access to health benefits to
22 communities that often don't have them but in a
23 culturally responsive way and in such a way that the
24 services are in their communities so I'm really
25 thrilled to continue to work with the team there, and

2 I'm sure that in their testimony they'll also
3 highlight how we've partnered to making sure that we
4 are reaching immigrant communities. NICE, the agency
5 I used to lead was one of those agencies that
6 partnered closely with NYC Care in part because of a
7 contract we received from MOIA. NYC Care clinic
8 happened to be across the corner from NICE, and so
9 it's a great model and I'd like to continue to
10 support it.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really great to
12 hear. Do you know the percentage of participants who
13 are limited English proficient?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't have that in
15 front of me, but I'd be happy to get it. My
16 assumption is that probably most because the program
17 is targeted to immigrant communities and
18 neighborhoods that are predominantly immigrant, but
19 I'll have to look at that data.

20 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Just to add a little
21 context in response to the question on behalf of my
22 Colleagues in MOIA programs. In FY-22, NYC Care
23 outreach reached more than 171,000 people, and NYC
24 Care recently announced that they have 100,000
25 actively enrolled members, and the outreach for NYC

2 Care was conducted in more than 21 languages so I
3 don't have specific information regarding the
4 language proficiency of individuals targeted but can
5 say that the program has been responsive to those
6 needs.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much,
8 Tom. Then, what would you say are the challenges of
9 NYC Care? What can be improved?

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: It's hard for me to
11 specifically talk about the program since we don't
12 have oversight over it, but I do know that we've
13 reached over 100,000. We'd like to double that,
14 right, and we'd like to support H&H, the Department
15 of Health and everyone involved to make sure that the
16 quality of care continues to be high and that we
17 continue to target immigrant communities and the
18 services that they're providing are reaching those in
19 most need, but in terms of the program itself,
20 because we don't have oversight, it's hard to say,
21 but we certainly want to continue the program to be
22 strong for the communities that we serve.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely, and it's
24 really to hear the numbers that Tom shared. Thank you
25 for sharing that. I'd like to know a little bit more

2 about the outreach team. How many folks are
3 responsible for reaching our communities? Could you
4 give me some more background on how MOIA conducts the
5 outreach?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: The outreach team
7 primarily, as I said earlier, works with community-
8 based organizations on the ground and, as I've said
9 before and in my testimony, it's important that the
10 staff themselves also come from the community, right,
11 and so I've been able to witness that most recently,
12 actually on Saturday, I participated in an event in
13 which one of our community outreach staff belongs,
14 and it just makes a difference when there's like that
15 level of reach in immigrant communities and trust and
16 so that is certainly important for me to continue and
17 to grow. We have an external affairs team of which
18 our community organizing and outreach teams belong
19 and so they work as a team to make sure that we
20 identify the different immigrant communities that are
21 going to be targeted in a given week or month
22 depending on perhaps special events or outreach
23 campaigns that we're working on, and this is led by
24 our Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs. In the
25 next year, in previous years, we've made sure that

2 our staff are integrated into some of those planning
3 of these events, whether it's ours or community-based
4 organizations, and that's important because that's
5 where those relationships are built but, in doing so,
6 then we're able to also work closely with those
7 community groups to provide the information, whether
8 it's materials, literature, or training that the
9 different communities need. Now, having been part of
10 the other side of things, leading a community
11 organization, I know that organizers and outreach
12 staff are important for us to be able to access those
13 resources in a timely manner, whether it's COVID
14 testing, vaccines, which the community organization I
15 used to lead benefited from because we were in
16 constant communication with MOIA and were able to
17 access these materials in a timely fashion. That's
18 the case for all the community groups that we work
19 with, and that is a critical relationship that the
20 team has. Now, Tom, if you can help me with some
21 exact numbers. Our outreach team has fluctuated in
22 its numbers. We have 10 outreach team members
23 currently dedicated to this work and currently have 5
24 vacancies.

2 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: To build upon that,
3 specifically for NYC Care outreach, MOIA funds and
4 works together with 21 community-based organizations
5 citywide that serve different immigrant communities
6 in their language and in their neighborhood.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. That was going
8 to be my followup, how you're working with community-
9 based providers to increase enrollment. Thank you,
10 Tom. Then, of course, in this past year's report, the
11 work to reach our communities around COVID care and
12 demystifying falsehoods around COVID were really
13 pronounced in the report. Thank you for that, thank
14 you for your continued work. Could you share how
15 you'll continue to inform immigrants about COVID
16 resources? Will this work continue, and does the
17 agency have the budget and staffing to do this work?

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's certainly a
19 priority. Although we're in a recovery phase, in a
20 reopening phase, this work for us continues. As we've
21 discussed in the past and in my testimony, COVID-19
22 has impacted immigrant communities
23 disproportionately, and it is going to take a while
24 before communities are able to recover from this
25 crisis so we'll certainly continue to monitor as

2 things change, but, yes, outreach is a really
3 important component. Just to clarify, we might have
4 the lines specific to outreach and organizing, but,
5 for me, just like it was in my previous roles, the
6 work of outreach and organizing must be integrated
7 into the culture of the entire agency so in that
8 sense we're all doing outreach and organizing
9 together to make sure that wherever we go and
10 represent the agency we're also making sure that we
11 are informing the communities that we're visiting and
12 that we're in touch with. In previous years, we've
13 organized days of action. Last year, we organized
14 about 70 specifically on COVID and vaccines. This
15 year, we'll continue to organize these days of action
16 to make sure that that is something that we
17 prioritize moving forward.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I'd now
19 like to go into questions about the adult literacy
20 programs. I attended the DYCD hearing this morning
21 and asked similar questions, and I know that you work
22 very closely with DYCD so would love to also hear
23 from you. The adult literacy funding is, of course,
24 critical to support high quality, community-based
25 adult literacy instruction and contributes to the

2 social and civic life of our most vulnerable
3 immigrant New Yorkers. At DYCD's budget hearing, I
4 asked the agency about the budget reduction for the
5 adult literacy program. However, the agency had
6 clarified that there's only a 1.6 million dollars
7 reduction due to underspending on case managers. It
8 looks like DYCD was referring to the adult literacy
9 pilot project. Can you confirm that the only
10 reduction of 1.6 million dollars on DYCD's adult
11 literacy programs relates to the pilot project?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We'll have to get
13 back to that. I want to take a look at it. I defer to
14 OMB. They'll have more specifics, but I'd like to
15 also look into this. As I mentioned in my testimony,
16 we coordinate and have oversight of We Speak New
17 York, which is really an important program that
18 partners with adult literacy providers in the city,
19 but that program alone is not enough. We know that,
20 and so adult literacy providers play an important
21 role in making sure that our communities are able to
22 access those critical English language classes that
23 they need, and so we'll defer to the OMB and also
24 take a look into it to see what's going on.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I'm also
3 similarly investigating, and I see our friends from
4 the Adult Literacy Network here with us. Excited to
5 hear from them later on.

6 What is the number of adult literacy
7 participants in fiscal 2022?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Again, I don't have
9 that data in front of me because we don't have
10 oversight over this program, although I think this
11 might be a moment to say that I think the more we can
12 centralize things, especially programs that impact
13 immigrant communities, the better so that we're able
14 to most appropriately have oversight and be able to
15 reach the communities that we need to reach, but I
16 will get back to you on that. I do know from my time
17 leading an organization that was an adult literacy
18 program provider there are a number of great agencies
19 across the city that are able to provide adult
20 literacy programs to their members in a way that is
21 also culturally appropriate to those communities, and
22 it's important, for instance, in my work with day
23 laborers, to be able to have those funds to support
24 those specific communities.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I had wanted to ask
3 this question later on, but given you brought up
4 centralizing programs and the interagency
5 relationships, do you see an opportunity here for
6 MOIA to become a Department and not be a Mayoral
7 Agency?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: This will take much
9 more discussion and conversation between MOIA, our
10 sister agencies, and City Council. My impression is
11 that there is a lot going on in the city that impacts
12 immigrant communities of which we're able to work in
13 collaboration across agencies and programs as MOIA is
14 constituted now. I would not change that, but I
15 think, of course, as I just said, I too would like to
16 see some centralization so that we are able to
17 appropriately have oversight and measure all the
18 programs that are occurring that impact immigrant
19 communities.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that. On
21 We Speak NYC, could you share what the budget is?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: It's 873,000, and
23 that's baselined.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, and how big
25 are the We Speak NYC classes?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: FY-21, we had, I'm
3 going to need support from my team. By how big, do
4 you mean the enrollment size of the classes?

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You can give me a
6 breakdown of enrollment, recruitment, and then just I
7 know classes are being offered remote, would love to
8 know what the remote class size has looked like.

9 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I can jump in,
10 Commissioner.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, that would be
12 great, Tom, yeah.

13 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Sure. The class size
14 varies. It's hard to give an average number of class
15 size, but we can say that we served 3,407 learners in
16 the fiscal year.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Tom, could you share
18 why it's difficult to share class size?

19 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Just because it
20 varies from class to class, and I don't have an
21 average in front of me, but we can loop back with
22 that.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Will the
24 report that's coming out speak on this? I mean it
25 would be great to have a sense of average class size

2 and the way in which recruitment works and ensuring
3 student success.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: You'll have all that
5 data available in the report. I don't know if we have
6 an average, but we can include that, but we have
7 total hours served, which is 5,320. We have some
8 interesting data there that you'll be able to review.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'd love to follow up.
10 Right now, it would be also good for me to learn how
11 MOIA is measuring the success of this program.

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, for sure.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Are you able to
14 elucidate on that right now?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Oh, sorry.

16 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I can jump in real
17 quick as you're looking, Commissioner. In the notes
18 here, program capacity is 125 in-person courses,
19 which serve between 2,000 and 2,500 students per year
20 and then an additional 15 online courses, and so if
21 you're taking just the in-person courses at the
22 higher number, that's 20 per class, and that's going
23 back to the question about class size. With respect
24 to measuring efficacy of the program, I don't have

2 that information in front of me, but we can loop back
3 with that.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I would say that,
5 just to give a top line, there is a program design.
6 There are a variety of topics that are covered per
7 course including some of which I mentioned in my
8 testimony then progress is measured against those
9 topics so you'll be able to see in more detail how
10 that is constituted.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, and I think
12 that transparency is absolutely necessary given We
13 Speak NYC is the city's successful English language
14 learning program that provides the big focused
15 instructions and it is just such an essential time
16 that we continue this work and so would really love
17 the responses to my questions. I know that the
18 program was being offered remote during this time.
19 Could you share the attendance rate for remote
20 classes versus on-site? Did we see an expansion?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'll have Tom maybe
22 give the specifics, but I'll say that like most
23 providers we had to switch to online classes. There
24 was also a necessary adjustment, like the adult
25 literacy providers in the work and how the work is

2 done, and I know that surveys were used very
3 consistently to track and monitor changes or
4 potential changes to the program and so it was moving
5 to a virtual, remote program design but also still
6 with that ongoing evaluative process. Tom, did you
7 want to provide more specifics?

8 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: No, I don't have
9 anything to add.

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Oh, you don't have
11 anything? Okay.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you plan to keep
13 remote classes available once in-person program
14 resumes?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'll have to get
16 back to you on some of the data points that you
17 requested, but we certainly do see some benefits in
18 the virtual program design, but we'll have to look at
19 what works best, whether a mix of both or going back
20 to in-person.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you,
22 Commissioner. I'll certainly be following up,
23 particularly because we know that through COVID our
24 immigrant communities faced not having broadband
25 access, not having the tech tools required to

2 continue receiving adequate services and so we are
3 seeing a trend in efficacy of programming offered
4 remote. Would really love MOIA to be proactive about
5 ensuring that our immigrant communities have access
6 to the digital ethos in programming.

7 I'm curious now about how MOIA is
8 ensuring that undocumented youth or in partnership
9 with the other agencies are a part of the summer
10 youth employment program.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: If I can answer,
12 quickly go back to the adult literacy question. I
13 certainly, at my previous agency we saw a shift
14 between in-person to digital. It was tough, and we
15 also saw the challenges that you mentioned and there
16 was sort of a moment where we needed to find the
17 resources to make sure that people had the computer
18 literacy skills or even just technology. Something
19 we're very mindful of, and we want to be thoughtful
20 of certainly, not just at MOIA but in also supporting
21 CBOs that are also trying to navigate the same
22 issues.

23 When it comes to the summer youth
24 employment program, I think that is something that
25 we're going to have a number of discussions to make

2 sure that we're working with our sister agencies to
3 make sure that immigrant communities have that
4 information in place, especially at schools, but
5 we're still looking into it. I know from your
6 personal experience it's complicated, right, because
7 if you're undocumented then obviously the challenges
8 there, so we want to be really mindful and we want to
9 make sure that communities are aware of who can
10 access this program and who cannot, but certainly for
11 children of immigrants who are able to, or DACA
12 recipients who are able to access this program, it's
13 critical that we're part of it.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's great to hear.
15 DYCD had given me a hopeful response in that they
16 will be working with CBOs to ensure undocumented
17 youth are included through SYEP, and so I will
18 continue to follow that and would really love the
19 commitment of MOIA to ensure that our undocumented
20 youth are not left out and that we do everything in
21 our power to explore the mechanisms to institute a
22 compensation model that really looks after our
23 undocumented young people.

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's great to
25 know. I'm curious to know more about that, and I'll

2 certainly be reaching out. The team's going to be
3 working closely with our sister agencies to make sure
4 that we're able to communicate that, if that is a
5 benefit, to communicate it with as many families as
6 possible.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Now
8 language access. Really, really glad that we're in
9 agreement and our Mayor that language access,
10 language justice, is crucial in cultivating creating
11 a sanctuary city. The idea of the language bank
12 across city agencies is not new to the Council nor to
13 the administration. The city should implement Local
14 Law 30. What happens when the Council passes a law
15 and the Mayor's office and agencies don't follow?
16 Someone needs to hold them accountable. The budget
17 asks for 2.5 million dollars for the legal language
18 interpreter bank, was called on the Mayor to fund
19 this. Can you give us an update on where the creation
20 of the language bank sits right now on the
21 negotiation?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: To start off, I'd
23 like to say Anne is here with me who has been an
24 expert in championing of language access for many
25 years and is also here to answer questions and

2 provide more details on what we've done at MOIA
3 including technical assistance to sister agencies and
4 our work with the Mayoral offices, but I'll say
5 definitely we're at the starting phase of budget
6 negotiations and thinking through what this might
7 look like and it's certainly really important for us
8 and we need to commit, MOIA, of course, to doing this
9 work in partnership with city agencies and with the
10 city as a whole and with City Council and with your
11 leadership as well. I'd like to see many of these
12 great ideas implemented and also, of course, Local
13 Law 30 be upheld and adhered to and so I'll pass it
14 over to Anne who can respond some specifics around
15 what we've been doing.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: As the
17 Commissioner mentioned, this is an office-wide
18 priority of MOIA's, language access and language
19 justice. We provide extensive technical assistance
20 and support to city agencies, over 30 agencies, and
21 Mayoral offices. We provide translation and
22 interpretation support to those offices as well, and
23 we also are a language lab in terms of piloting new
24 technologies and language access best practices and
25 really sharing those out to city agencies, and, as

2 the Commissioner said, we're open to exploring new
3 innovative ideas as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Anne. Could
5 you tell me more about MOIA's language services team
6 serving as a language lab, like what that entails?

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: Absolutely.
8 We have a language services team that provides
9 interpretation and translation to MOIA and Mayoral
10 offices and providing training to those offices as
11 well in terms of language access obligations, the
12 resources available to them, and then the team pilots
13 technologies for improving language services. For
14 example, a few years ago, the team piloted the use of
15 a technology vender that supports a more automated
16 process that allows us to human translate our website
17 into the 10 Local Law languages so we don't rely on
18 Google Translate or automated translation, which, as
19 you know, there's lots of problems with that..

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank God.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: And this is
22 new, this is a new kind of strategy and so we piloted
23 that. We have our website available in the 10 Local
24 Law 30 languages human translated, and we have shared
25 out those practices and those strategies, the use of

2 this technology vendor, with other agencies, some of
3 whom are exploring now that as a solution to
4 multilingual accessibility of websites so that's one
5 example. Another example is our team uses computer-
6 assisted technology, CAT tools, which helps aid in
7 the quality of translations, the quality and
8 consistency of translations so using this technology
9 to better the quality of our translations is
10 something that the team prioritizes.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How big is the team?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: The team is
13 comprised of 1 baselined staff, 1 temporary staff, 1
14 fellow, and 1 baselined staff who oversees the team.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So 4?

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: And we have
17 contracts with translation and interpretation vendors
18 to support the translation and interpretation needs,
19 although the team does in-house Spanish translation
20 because we do have Spanish language capacity in-
21 house.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So in-house
23 translation only in Spanish and then the other
24 languages are outsourced?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: That's
3 right, and that's just for the Mayoral offices so
4 that's not for the whole city. Agencies have
5 contracts with vendors to provide translation and
6 interpretation support.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. Have you
8 recently reached out to eligible CBOs on the creation
9 of the language bank?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: We have had
11 some conversations with CBOs in the past about that.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Then in recent times?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: We will be
14 continuing those conversations.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. I ask because I
16 know as we talked about outreach around NYC Care and
17 COVID resources, the emphasis was on our communities
18 to be the ones empowered to be on the outreach teams
19 and so why is it that the language access is
20 outsourced rather than relying on the brevity and
21 diversity of languages that we all speak?

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: It's a
23 great question, and I think we're certainly open to
24 ongoing conversations about this and figuring out the
25 best ways to really build the city's infrastructure

2 and the pipeline for, for example, qualified
3 interpreters and to figure out the best ways to
4 partner to do that work so certainly open to ongoing
5 conversations on that.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'd love to follow up
7 on this and see the ways in which the language
8 services team could be an anchor in supporting
9 community members who can provide translation
10 interpretation.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Anne, for
12 that, and, Chair, you're asking a lot of the same
13 questions I've been asking as I came into the
14 position and Anne has been great in supporting me. We
15 understand the scope of this, which is huge, because
16 each of the agencies is responsible for adhering to
17 Local Law and how big a need is for language access
18 across the city for me, and I know that the bank also
19 includes some ideas around establishing cooperatives
20 at local non-profits. For me, it's also important to
21 assess and then provide the capacity building support
22 that non-profits would need to like take on this work
23 and be able to contract with the city so all of this
24 goes hand-in-hand and I'm very eager to figure
25 something out or work with you and with the CBOs and

2 our sister agencies to work out some of these ideas
3 and engage in the process.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I'm with
5 it, yeah.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: And there
7 have been some good examples of practices of working
8 with community groups so Department of Health and
9 Mental Hygiene had a contract with the Endangered
10 Language Alliance to help support some of their work.
11 In response to the Bronx fire, we connected the
12 Office of Emergency Management and the Department of
13 Social Services to International Child Program, and
14 they provided some in-person interpretation on the
15 ground in a variety of African languages so there are
16 sort of these good examples of utilizing community-
17 based groups that have these resources to provide
18 that support.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thanks for sharing,
20 Anne. Is there a separate report on how well the city
21 is doing providing language access?

22 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: Actually,
23 coming up, Local Law 30 requires that we submit a
24 Local Law 30 report annually and so that will be
25 coming your way in June.

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I have to say. Anne
3 and her team are the ones compiling and working
4 through getting reports from different agencies, and
5 we'll be happy to release that soon and review it
6 with your office as well.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Wonderful. I am
8 looking forward to that and, maybe as the Immigration
9 co-Chair, personally visit the agencies to determine
10 how they're doing language access. I'd love the list
11 of language access vendors that MOIA using or the
12 agencies are contracting with just to get a better
13 assessment of are we relying on partners outside of
14 New York City and their track record, really want us
15 to hone in on language justice being something that
16 we can build up by New Yorkers for New Yorkers.

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't know if you
18 have that information, Anne, but we're also very
19 committed to building our team around New Yorkers who
20 are multilingual and who are able to communicate and
21 are from those communities and so not only are we
22 thinking about contracting with different vendors,
23 possibly CBOs, but also building up a team that's
24 able to really communicate in person as outreach
25 staff of the city with the communities that we serve

2 and so that is, for me, a highlight and something
3 that I'm really eager to continue building on. Anne,
4 do you have any specifics?

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MONTESANO: There's a
6 number of different vendors. I think we can get back
7 to you on that.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Would
9 appreciate it. Now moving into legal services, and I
10 have one bucket for this round and I'm going to hand
11 it over to my Council Colleagues and want to
12 acknowledge Council Member Krishnan is here as well.

13 Commissioner, could you give us a
14 breakdown of the fiscal 2023 preliminary budget
15 allocated to immigrant legal services?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: For our Rapid
17 Response Legal Collaborative, we've allocated, first
18 of all, we have a 12.9 million dollar budget
19 allocated to our immigration legal services work. For
20 Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, we've allocated
21 887,041, and that is baselined. As I mentioned in my
22 testimony or in a Q&A, that is work for those cases
23 that are deemed as urgent and often that is where
24 folks are referred from our hotline where we get
25 calls of people who have imminent deportation cases

2 and such. NY Citizenship program was allocated
3 250,000 dollars. Our Action NYC, what's our Action
4 NYC total?

5 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I can jump in,
6 Commissioner.

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Oh, yes, Tom, please
8 do.

9 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Sure, yeah. Action
10 NYC is baselined at 8.7 million and then there's add-
11 on funding to support the fellowship, an extension of
12 the Action NYC hotline, and various other components.
13 In total, MOIA's programmatic budget for immigration
14 legal services exceeds 10 million.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. How much
16 specifically has been allocated to refugee services?

17 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Action NYC and MOIA's
18 immigration legal services are open to all
19 immigrants. Some serve asylum seekers, family-based
20 petitions, humanitarian and family-based applications
21 mostly. Action NYC specifically serves individuals
22 with straightforward cases but consultations are
23 available to all. Refugees in New York City are
24 typically supported by federally and state funded
25 refugee resettlement programs and agencies, and MOIA

2 is in communication with them often but Action NYC
3 doesn't specifically serve refugees.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Okay.

5 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Chair Hanif,
6 apologies, I was giving you current budget numbers. I
7 was confused by my binder, but in terms of proposed
8 numbers we should clarify and Tom can give more
9 specifics.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So then, Tom, just to
11 clarify again, MOIA doesn't provide specific legal
12 services to refugees, but legal services are open to
13 all?

14 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Yes, open to all
15 including refugees.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. The Biden
17 administration announced 2 weeks, around March 3rd,
18 it would give temporary protection to Ukrainians
19 already in the U.S. What mechanisms are in place to
20 help them navigate through this process?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As Tom mentioned, we
22 have our current immigration legal services. We are
23 awaiting more details on what additional needs we
24 might have other than support with TPS.
25 Traditionally, MOIA has been very responsive as those

2 needs come up. For instance, with the Haitian relief
3 work that we have done over the last couple of years
4 and we're still working out our FY-23 budgets, but
5 we're looking forward to discussing these needs as
6 they come up. Currently, we're putting together some
7 of our basic, as I said earlier, outreach materials
8 in different languages, we're clarifying what is it
9 that the city can and cannot do because so much of
10 this we depend on the federal government to take
11 action, but we're certainly doing a lot of work. I,
12 myself, have been to these communities a number of
13 occasions, having engaged in ethnic media work, and I
14 think New York has been a leader in making sure that
15 we're thinking through what is it that we can do as a
16 city to provide services to people as they come and
17 current immigrants from Ukraine and the community
18 here waiting for news.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. What would
20 you say is the greatest need for Action NYC in
21 serving immigrants?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're certainly in
23 constant communication, specifically with Tom and the
24 team, to really understand the needs as they come up,
25 certainly thinking through caseload and the kind of

2 work that the collaborative has engaged in and being
3 able to be responsive to the needs as they come up in
4 the various immigrant communities that we serve as
5 the example we just spoke about. Ukrainian is one,
6 but there are many other communities who come from
7 countries in crisis or even just immigrant
8 communities that might qualify for benefits that they
9 might not know of.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What has the caseload
11 looked like year to year?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: It's significant,
13 and we understand that there's a lot of need for
14 this, which is why we've advocated for a long time
15 MOIA has and I, myself, for universal representation
16 from the federal government. That is something that
17 is still very important to continue to advocate for.
18 The federal government has the resources to be able
19 to make this possible for all immigrant communities
20 that need the support, but, Tom, can you provide a
21 few more details on the work that's happening through
22 Action NYC?

23 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Sure. In calendar
24 year 2021, Action NYC providers throughout the city
25 provided 11,467 comprehensive immigration legal

2 screenings. That was an increase from calendar year
3 2020 of 30 percent, and there was a dip in 2020 due
4 to COVID during those critical months of the initial
5 onset. In terms of cases retained by Action NYC
6 providers, in calendar year '21, providers provided
7 representation in more than 6,000 cases, and that was
8 an increase of 22 percent from the previous year. So
9 in both screening provision and representation in
10 2021, Action NYC exceeded its targets.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really helpful
12 to know. Commissioner, could you describe any
13 challenges outside of just like the shear caseload
14 and expanding caseload, what are some other
15 challenges in this program?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think we've
17 learned quite a lot from working closely with
18 advocates. I think no-show rate is often something
19 that's discussed, reducing that is important using
20 different strategies and making sure that folks who
21 are reaching out for support, we're able to follow
22 through and ensure that they're able to ultimately
23 connect to the resources. The assumption is that
24 often people go and look for other resources
25 elsewhere including in the private sector. I think,

2 of course, when we're speaking about being able to be
3 responsive to immigrants as issues arise, there's
4 challenges there. TPS has been a form of relief that
5 has been helpful over the past many years in the
6 absence of a comprehensive immigration reform, but,
7 like the Ukrainian crisis, you just never know when
8 that's going to happen or become available for
9 communities so, this year, we're now looking to see
10 how do we then provide support to this specific
11 community. As we continue to advocate for TPS to be
12 provided for other communities, we're kind of in a
13 waiting period and so there's a need for flexibility
14 there.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. Could you
16 describe the procurement process for selecting Action
17 NYC's service providers?

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Sure. Tom, can you
19 describe the process?

20 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Sure. Action NYC was
21 launched in 2015 into 2016, and there was an RFP
22 process conducted by MOIA in collaboration with RF
23 CUNY then, and it followed standard procurement
24 practices. It was an RFP process, a procurement
25 process, under 2019 into 2020. The purpose of that

2 was to institutionalize the programs and ensure that
3 they had multiyear contracts and can continue forward
4 under HRA in a more established sort of procurement
5 and contract management system. There was a concept
6 paper drafted and then multiple community events with
7 potential providers in which they provided feedback
8 and then ultimately a formal procurement process
9 under HRA, which lasted from November 2019 to around
10 May 2020 and from there contracting proceeded. The
11 evaluation was conducted under a number of
12 categories, past experience of providing immigration
13 legal services, community-rootedness, in-house
14 language capacity, and experience providing community
15 outreach as well as case management for non-
16 immigration legal services.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's helpful to
18 know. How many responses did MOIA receive for
19 providers wishing to be a part of Action NYC in this
20 fiscal year?

21 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: There hasn't been a
22 call for proposals in this fiscal year or
23 applications to provide Action NYC service. We're
24 currently not in a procurement cycle, and the current
25 contracts, they will terminate the end of fiscal year

2 '23 with an optional 3-year extension after so we
3 don't anticipate engaging in a new procurement
4 process anytime this fiscal year.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So how many providers
6 are there right now?

7 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: There are currently
8 18 contracted providers, but, with subcontractors,
9 that brings it to about 25 community-based
10 organizations of legal service providers.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Then is there
12 an evaluation that MOIA conducts or how do we ensure
13 that access is equitable across all providers?

14 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: We're continually
15 assessing which community members and immigrant
16 communities are receiving services. The Action NYC is
17 open to all and then each provider submits a
18 quarterly report to us with data breaking down the
19 demographics of the populations they serve as well as
20 case types and things of that nature. We do have
21 detailed demographic and service information
22 available.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Excellent. Do you
24 believe that the number of providers is a sufficient
25 amount?

2 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I can say that
3 immigration legal service, demand for those services
4 is extremely high and will continue to grow. The
5 capacity that we have is sufficient to meet the
6 numbers that are contracted for, right, in what we
7 allow for. I think that the RFP process was
8 intentionally designed to increase equity of service
9 provision, and it has been successful. More
10 screenings and legal representation services are
11 provided in hard-to-reach immigrant communities, such
12 as African, Caribbean, and AIPI communities since the
13 RFP was culminated.

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Chair, this is
15 exactly why I think we should continue to insist and
16 advocate for universal representation from the
17 federal government. We need to make sure that
18 everyone that needs access to justice has it, and so
19 we're committed to partnering with you and I'm sure
20 the community groups and advocates on the call to
21 continue to call for this.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. I'm with
23 you on that. Does MOIA see a greater benefit in
24 funding larger legal organizations that serve
25

2 multiple boroughs versus the local homegrown CBOs in
3 immigrant communities?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think that there's
5 a need for both. Certainly, I come from the small
6 homegrown world. I've always worked with the smaller
7 groups. By having led one, I know the benefits of
8 partnering and working with those community-based
9 organizations as scrappy as we might look. I don't
10 know if NICE is testifying today, but they can speak
11 about the work that's happening on the ground, but,
12 certainly, I think that the larger organizations the
13 provide this work are able to do so at scale and with
14 the consistency that we need so I think it's a mix. I
15 don't know if, Tom, you want to add to this, but I
16 think we'll need to discuss capacity building and
17 other work that we can do to help the smaller
18 organizations as we continue to contract with them.

19 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Yeah, I agree with
20 the Commissioner completely. Both types of service
21 provider are extremely important to ensuring that
22 community members get the services they need. Action
23 NYC's most contractors are in the community-based
24 organization program so those services are being
25 provided by CBOs immediately located in communities.

2 The citywide services and Action NYC, hospitals,
3 libraries, and schools are conducted by citywide
4 service providers so the RFP and the way that our
5 services are structured are designed to maximize the
6 potential and the resources of all types of
7 organizations.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. That wraps
9 up the first round of questions from me. I will now
10 ask the Committee Counsel to call on any of my
11 Colleagues for questions for the administration.

12 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
13 Chair. As a reminder, I'd like to ask if any Council
14 Members have questions, you can use the Zoom raise
15 hand function now, and we'll call on you in the order
16 in which you've raised your hands.

17 Not seeing any hands at the moment,
18 Chair, so I'm going to turn back to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Know Your
20 Rights. What is the budget for Know Your Rights in
21 this fiscal year?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: In this current
23 fiscal year, it is 574,200.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Are you coordinating
25 with other agencies on Know Your Rights in order to

2 address topics such as education, health rights,
3 housing rights, worker rights?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. We have
5 multiple teams working on these various issues. It is
6 critical that our team is not only speaking about
7 what folks usually think of us as, like immigration
8 legal services, but the breadth of services that the
9 city is able to provide immigrant communities
10 regardless of their immigration status so our
11 contracted CBOs, providers cover many of these
12 specific topics because I think it's important to
13 also contract with organizations that are working on
14 the ground but also have subject matter expertise,
15 and, of course, the staff are working closely to
16 always identify communities that are underserved and
17 so for us, for myself, it's important to continuously
18 be doing outreach and meeting new community groups,
19 like I said earlier, those who are contracted and are
20 not contracted, and, of course, key offices like City
21 Council offices to partner and provide these Know
22 Your Rights trainings to people.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Is there a public
24 calendar of these Know Your Rights workshops or what
25 is the frequency of them?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't believe
3 there's a public calendar, but we promote our Know
4 Your Rights on social media and our social media and
5 with who we're partnering with. I find that that has
6 been a very effective way to turn out individuals to
7 our events, whether it's most recently or because of
8 the pandemic has been virtual, but we do a lot of in-
9 person work as well. Community groups, again whether
10 we contract with them or not, are able to request
11 these Know Your Rights training, and our team is able
12 to figure out when it best fits in a calendar.
13 They're consistent throughout the month, throughout
14 the week, and we have a staff that do these
15 consistently enough to be able to turn around these
16 trainings, in particular in the evenings and weekends
17 which is when most of these trainings are needed.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How many do you
19 anticipate on hosting in the coming fiscal year?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Do you have that
21 number, Tom?

22 DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I can say that for
23 the KYR program, which is through contracted services
24 provided by community-based organizations, in
25 calendar year 2021 there were 242 KYRs held, reaching

2 8,567 people. So far in FY-22, 3,041 people reached
3 with 126 held. It looks like it would build to about
4 that same number, around 250 KYRs contracted.

5 Separately from that, the MOIA outreach team conducts
6 their own KYRs, and I can pull up those numbers as
7 well. It looks like in 2021 calendar organizing and
8 outreach at MOIA held 140 virtual and in-person KYRs
9 covering all topics, and most of those were provided
10 on MOIA's Facebook Live page as well. There were 58
11 in-person events.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. Thank you.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Also to add, it's
14 important to know it's not just our organizing and
15 outreach teams that provide Know Your Rights but also
16 in the contracts that we provide, our contracted
17 CBOs, for instance, with Action NYC they also provide
18 critical Know Your Rights training so it's a really a
19 priority across the board and across teams.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. Now moving
21 into ID NYC. How many ID NYC renewals have been made
22 to date?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: To date? Let's see.
24 Soon, I will have these numbers off the top of my
25 head. I see we don't have those numbers. One of the

2 key takeaways is that this program is in partnership
3 with the Department of Social Services so in their
4 testimony they'll be able to provide some specific
5 numbers and more specific information. If we find the
6 numbers before the end of the Q&A, I'll give those to
7 you. It is a priority for us. We want to make sure
8 that ID NYC is renewed which is why I have this here.
9 Hopefully, folks watching, please renew your ID NYC.
10 We need to make sure that this ID is something that
11 we're using, that it's important a program such as
12 this is only growing and being used. Again, we don't
13 want this ID to just be used by immigrant communities
14 but by all New Yorkers. Speaking from my previous
15 experience at a CBO, it's so important for our
16 immigrant communities who don't have a form of ID and
17 so we want to make sure that this program is
18 protected and used.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I look forward to that
20 number. If you could elaborate, the relationship
21 between MOIA and the Department of Social Services.

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. ID NYC is
23 operationalized by the Department of Social Services.
24 As many of you know, it's a really big effort. There
25 are sites when it's done in person all across the

2 city. There's (INAUDIBLE) command center that moves
3 around different communities. It's also important to
4 maintain the integrity of the ID, to be done by an
5 agency, in this case DSS, that has the capacity to
6 take on such an initiative which is why we work in
7 collaboration with DSS, that can provide and leverage
8 the capacity of their staff to be able to execute on
9 this program. Again, ID NYC is a secure ID, and it's
10 an ID that you're able to use for many things, and
11 we'll continue to grow the usage of this ID over the
12 coming years. Hopefully soon, we'll be able to
13 announce a couple of new things, but it's important
14 to make sure that this ID is reliable and that it's
15 accepted in as many places as possible. Other states
16 and other countries have actually modeled their
17 municipal ID programs from ours. Again, one of the
18 things that I've discussed, I believe with many of
19 you on this hearing, is that now with the
20 availability of the state ID for immigrant
21 communities I think there's a question of which to
22 get from our neighbors and so we encourage to get
23 both if possible and to certainly get the ID NYC
24 which is your local municipal ID.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'm with you on all of
3 that. Could you expand on how you anticipate PEG cuts
4 could impacted ID NYC as you referenced earlier?

5 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As I referenced
6 earlier, we lost 3 positions. These came from our
7 vacancies, but it will not impact our current work.
8 We continue to figure out ways to meet our goals and
9 our work as is. This is just to say that we didn't
10 have to lay off as a result. This came from existing
11 vacancies.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. In which
13 ways is MOIA increasing ID NYC enrollment and what
14 marketing campaigns has MOIA initiated for renewals?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: This is something
16 that our team is giving priority to. We do a lot on a
17 daily basis to promote ID NYC, whether it's through
18 our social media channels but we do a lot of events
19 and we certainly communicate the importance of
20 renewals through our KYRs and our other programming.
21 We're about to launch a big renewal campaign during
22 Immigrant Heritage Week. We're in planning stages to
23 release some ads to make sure that as the spring and
24 summer come along people remember to get their IDs
25 and they also take advantage of the benefits that the

2 ID comes, the discounts and access to cultural
3 services. We're going to be engaging quite a bit with
4 ethnic community media. That's a really important
5 part of our work through MOIA but now across city
6 agencies and so I'm going to be connecting with
7 different outlets to be able to do that. We're going
8 to be hosting an event soon with Mayor Adams and DSS
9 Commissioner to make sure everyone knows that this
10 campaign is launching and are aware of what we're
11 doing. We recently had a number of events where we
12 also highlighted the need for renewals and for the ID
13 NYC to be prioritized.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. Thank you. I'm
15 really glad to know that ethnic media is being used
16 more deliberately for outreach.

17 It's encouraging to hear you say that New
18 Yorkers should be applying for both IDs, ID NYC and
19 the state ID. Do you expect ID NYC to become a
20 permanent program?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think the ID NYC
22 is something that for many advocates, it's something
23 special because we spent so much time and energy
24 advocating for it and also the state ID so it's both
25 that we should continue to champion and protect and

2 utilize, which is ultimately one of the most
3 important things we can do because something that's
4 not used is always sort of questioned, like why does
5 it exist when it's not used so that's why we are
6 encouraging more people to not only get their ID if
7 they don't have it but renew it. As to whether it
8 becomes a permanent program, I don't think it's at
9 risk of not existing. I'll have to get back to you on
10 that question, but I certainly think it's important
11 to use the ID so that it's not at risk at any point.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you anticipate a
13 need for additional resources in fiscal 2023?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As we start the
15 negotiations process, I think one of the things that
16 are important to us is to communicate how important
17 the work is, not just for immigrant New Yorkers but
18 all of New York City. I highlighted in my testimony
19 how large of an immigrant community exists and the
20 needs it has and so I would certainly welcome
21 additional resources if available, but, again, I'm
22 committed to using the resources that we currently
23 have at our disposal to meet the challenges as they
24 come up work with our community very strategically in
25 partnership with CBOs and other agencies, but, again,

2 I welcome the additional resources if they were
3 available.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Of course. Are there
5 any plans to expand the functions and benefits of ID
6 NYC?

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: The partners and
8 benefits cycle. Some expire. Certainly, when it comes
9 to discounts and access to cultural institutions and
10 so on but, yes, we're always looking into this. Ideas
11 come up and I'm like hey, can we do this. I think
12 that's one of the things that I encourage people to
13 bring ideas and welcome your ideas to figure out how
14 to expand what New Yorkers can use this ID for. When
15 it comes to whether we can use this ID to prove
16 identity for certain services, we're always in
17 discussion, for those that don't yet accept this ID,
18 and we certainly want to encourage more and more
19 institutions to accept it.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Yeah, I'd love
21 to host a ID NYC forum or a town hall with ID NYC
22 recipients to really better understand how the
23 program can be evaluated and what else it can do to
24 serve New Yorkers more efficiently.

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Since I have the
3 chance here, if there are any Council Members who
4 have not renewed their ID NYC, we can certainly do an
5 event around that.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Let's do it. That's a
7 great idea. The Immigration Committee can co-sponsor
8 that. I'd now like to move into one question I have
9 about serving immigrant survivors of domestic
10 violence. To what extent is MOIA involved in the
11 serving immigrant survivors of domestic violence?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think survivors of
13 domestic violence, it's one of those issues that
14 certainly in my time at NICE, it was something that
15 throughout the pandemic it was top of mind. We saw a
16 lot of instances of these cases, and, often, a lot of
17 the serious more challenging cases would come to me
18 as the Executive Director to try and figure out what
19 we could do, what was possible or not, so I recently
20 had a meeting with the agency that is in charge of
21 looking into these and how we can partner, whether
22 it's utilizing their existing resources, perhaps
23 writing op-eds together. I think there are many ways
24 in which we can continue to strengthen that work, one
25 of which has always been making sure that immigration

2 legal services are offered to survivors. That
3 anchors our relationship, and the Commissioner agrees
4 that we can do more. We have a role in coordinating
5 UNT Visa certification and so I think that is always
6 the case, but the agency has these family justice
7 centers in each of the boroughs which I think we
8 could more present in and be able to collaborate
9 more. That was a fascinating conversation I had with
10 the Commissioner. I've been meeting with many
11 different Commissioners, but I'm really looking
12 forward to working with that agency and, of course,
13 the City Council to making sure that we're expanding
14 that work.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. That's
16 encouraging to hear. I'd now like to move into MOCS
17 and city contracts and then wrap up with the MOIA
18 headcount. There is a growing number of community-
19 based organizations facing challenges with the city's
20 contracting process. That's nothing new. How often
21 does MOIA engage with the Mayor's Office of Contract
22 Services on the city's contracting process?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I have a meeting
24 with the Commissioner there and with staff. I want to
25 bring my experience having worked in the nonprofit

2 space for so many years and maybe get some stuff off
3 my chest because I know how challenging it is, I know
4 that many barriers exist, but recently there was a
5 couple of announcements. I think there is a consensus
6 across the city that we all need to work on this to
7 make sure that it's a process that is able to help
8 community organizations strengthen their work and
9 grow their work instead of the opposite because it
10 could derail an agency's sort of mission and it can
11 put them at risk when not done appropriately so
12 contracting is really important for me to be able to
13 provide immigrant CBOs capacity building and think
14 through, one of the challenges is how do we work with
15 MOCS and others to make sure that those are being
16 looked at. I can't lie. There's a lot of work to be
17 done in this area, but certainly I can provide from
18 personal experiences how that's like on the other end
19 and work with other CBOs on this call I'm sure to
20 highlight how we can do this better. It certainly is
21 top of mind for me.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. I hope
23 some of the groups testifying today will add to this
24 conversation later.

2 Now, wrapping up with headcount, could
3 you elaborate on the staffing structure at MOIA?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: When it comes to
5 structure, we have a pretty amazing programs team
6 that do a lot of the work that we described here
7 today. That's where a lot of our immigration legal
8 initiatives live and certainly a lot of the work that
9 Tom described. We also have the work that falls more
10 under policy work and interagency work, which is a
11 lot of what Anne described, in our efforts to ensure
12 all agencies have the support they need to adhere to
13 Local Law 30 and also a lot of our other policy
14 initiatives that you heard from today and certainly
15 our advocacy work. There is our big external affairs
16 team that is in charge of making sure all this
17 information and services get out to the community.
18 MOIA has been a model to other agencies across the
19 country on how to do outreach and organizing, having
20 neighborhood organizers and also outreach staff
21 working hand to hand to make sure that we're going
22 deep into community work. Those are the 3 main
23 pillars of our agency as it stands. It certainly,
24 like most agencies across the city, there's just a
25 fluctuation of the number of staff we have. Because

2 of what you described at the beginning of your
3 comments, we work a lot in partnership with other
4 city agencies, and that is both something that can
5 present some challenges for sure. When you work
6 collaboratively with other agencies, you have to make
7 sure you're on the same page. You often share staff
8 and resources. Then there's opportunities. We are
9 able to work with a number of different agencies that
10 do work across the city, and I'd like to continue to
11 expand on that because as we discussed, I think it
12 was in the last hearing, there are opportunities to
13 do this work with the DOE, for instance, or increase
14 our work with our other agencies that have not
15 traditionally been associated with MOIA. That's sort
16 of the basic structure currently as it stands.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Are you able to
18 provide me with a number? I know that MOIA's
19 headcount includes 7 positions, but how many folks
20 are working in the agency, including from the other
21 agencies?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Oh, I see. Like you
23 said, we have the budget that we're provided with
24 every year, and that's where the headcount that you
25 mentioned comes from but then associated staff,

2 meaning staff that we work with that come from other
3 agencies, the total number or the total universe is
4 72, I believe, yes, but, obviously like I said, this
5 fluctuates depending on the initiatives that we're
6 working on and depending on sort of whether we fill
7 vacancies or not and how that works. I will be able
8 to provide a little more information as I learn more
9 myself about how this looks like, but that's
10 definitely something I'm looking into as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Among the 7
12 MOIA positions, are there any vacancies and then walk
13 me through any other vacancies. I know you mentioned
14 3 vacancies in the outreach team.

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't believe
16 there are any vacancies amongst the core staff, but
17 let me get back to you on that. Not on the core
18 staff, certainly, but in the other positions, and,
19 again, like I described earlier, ID NYC has a massive
20 staff. I didn't even discuss that with you. That is a
21 program that we work on with DSS, the Department of
22 Social Services, and HRA, they should be able to
23 provide more of a headcount. That is where most of
24 the vacancies exist, but I can provide that detail
25 for you or they can provide it.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That would be good.

3 Yeah, I would love to know that. If you could
4 clarify, I know we've sort of had this scattered
5 conversation around the teams at MOIA, how is the
6 workload split among MOIA staff?

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Like I said, there's a
8 little bit of fluctuation here because of whether
9 it's vacancies or initiatives that end or are
10 launched, but the programs team carries the load.
11 It's a significant amount of work that the programs
12 team carries, but there are different initiatives,
13 right, that are launched or renewed or end there. Our
14 policy team, this is a different team, who is in
15 charge of looking at our policy work and our legal
16 work, making sure that frankly the city is adhering
17 to the different laws that it needs to adhere to that
18 impact immigrant communities. That is a team that
19 takes on that work. We are currently for a general
20 counsel. That is the one position that exists there
21 that is most critical to fill soon. There is our
22 external affairs team, which I described. That's
23 where our organizing and outreach team lives. That
24 does a very substantial and critical work because
25 that's where we partner on different initiatives with

2 other agencies and so that's where, for instance, the
3 staff we share with ID NYC and DSS live, and that's
4 where we do most of that work. I don't know if that
5 helps.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That certainly helps,
7 and, as a followup, would you say that MOIA has
8 sufficient staff to conduct all services?

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Like I said earlier,
10 I certainly welcome additional resources if
11 available. I know we're just starting this
12 conversation, and I'm very hopeful that we'll
13 continue to strengthen our team and grow it to be
14 able to meet the needs that our community has. I
15 think, in my testimonies I make it clear that we're
16 taking on these sort of big initiatives and want to
17 make sure that our communities receive the services
18 they need and we're looking after their wellbeing.
19 Like I said, I welcome any additional resources.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Amazing. Thank you so
21 much. Well, that's all I've got for the
22 administration. If there are any Colleagues of mine
23 who would like to ask any questions, I'd like to open
24 that up, and, if not, we can move into public
25 testimony.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
3 Chair. I'm going to ask one more time if any other
4 Council Members have questions, you can raise your
5 hand now. I see that Council Member Sanchez has a
6 question. Council Member Sanchez, you may begin your
7 question when the Sergeant cues you.

8 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Excellent. I
10 first want to just commend and thank the Chair for
11 your thorough line of questioning. I think that
12 there's a lot of outstanding items that we would all
13 benefit from learning more about. One thing that
14 stuck out to me earlier was the conversation around
15 class sizes in our adult literacy programs. It'd be
16 very, very helpful to have an understanding of that
17 once you all can move those metrics more clearly.

18 I actually don't have a question at this
19 time, Commissioner Castro and team, I just actually
20 wanted to thank you for your presence at the Twin
21 Parks Northwest fire response. You and your team were
22 there at the service center which is in my district,
23 in District 14 day in and day out for a very long
24 time, and I just want to acknowledge and thank you
25 for that because you provided language access, you

2 provided a sense of security for folks who had lost
3 all of their documents, had lost so, so much during
4 that emergency, and that's precisely the kind of work
5 that I look forward to continuing with MOIA, is
6 having you just beefing up your capacity to do even
7 more of that, to be there for our communities and
8 help us to cut the red tape in terms of serving our
9 constituencies so I just want to thank you for that
10 and thank the Chair for your incredible thoroughness
11 on this hearing.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much,
13 Council Member Sanchez. I, too, was out there in the
14 Bronx and saw MOIA folks, some of whom are some of my
15 closest homies in this work, and really just thank
16 you so much, Commissioner, Tom, Anne, and the rest of
17 the MOIA team for all that you do and I'll continue
18 to make sure that my line of questioning remains
19 thorough only because we need MOIA to continue to do
20 the work that is urgent, proactive, responsive, and
21 the best agency that it could be for immigrant New
22 Yorkers of undocumented New Yorkers and families and
23 children. Really, really looking forward to our
24 continued partnership and ensuring efficiency at the
25 agency.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you.
3 Chair. Thank you, Council Member. I'm just going to
4 ask one more time if any other Council Members have
5 questions at this time. Again, you can use the Zoom
6 raise hand function.

7 Not seeing any hands, I'm going to thank
8 this panel for their testimony. Thank you to the
9 administration. Now we'll be moving on to public
10 testimony.

11 All public testimony will be limited to 2
12 minutes. We have a large number of people signed up
13 to testify so we ask that everyone please stick to
14 their allotted 2 minutes. Again, thank you all for
15 your patience. We will definitely hear from each and
16 every one of you who is on the call. If anyone has to
17 drop off, you can submit written testimony to
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov, and your testimony will
19 become part of the record and we ensure you that we
20 will read every word of your testimony.

21 I'll now be calling on panelists to
22 testify. After I call your name, please wait a brief
23 moment for the Sergeant-at-Arms to announce that you
24 may begin before starting your testimony. Please note
25

2 that panelists will be able to register for this
3 hearing until the hearing is closed.

4 The first public panel in order of
5 speaking will be Ellen Pachnanda followed by Karla
6 Ostolaza followed by Deborah Lee followed by Sharone
7 Kaufman. I'd like to now welcome Ellen Pachnanda to
8 begin your testimony as soon as the Sergeant cues
9 you.

10 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

11 ELLEN PACHNANDA: Thank you. Good
12 afternoon, Chair Hanif. Thank you, again, for the
13 opportunity to testify. My name is Ellen Pachnanda.
14 I'm the Attorney in Charge of the New York Immigrant
15 Family Unity Project, or NIFUP, at Brooklyn Defender
16 Services. As you know, NIFUP is funded by the City
17 Council, and it is the country's first publicly
18 funded universal representation program for detained
19 noncitizens facing deportation. We are here today
20 asking that the Council continue to fully fund NIFUP,
21 now the national model for immigration defense from
22 detention and deportation. I will quickly outline how
23 NIFUP fought and continues to fight for the lives of
24 New Yorker immigrants in detention during the
25 pandemic. As this Council knows, in March 2020, we

2 sprang into action working long hours to fight for
3 the release of clients from life-threatening
4 conditions as COVID-19 began to spread in the jails
5 and detention. During the height of the pandemic, the
6 3 NIFUP offices have filed hundreds of federal court
7 actions and won the release of 240 people as a result
8 of our litigation and advocacy. In late 2021, despite
9 termination of ICE contracts in New Jersey
10 facilities, ICE refused to release the majority of
11 detained immigrant New Yorkers, instead transferring
12 them to Orange County Correctional Facility. The
13 conditions in detention at Orange County are
14 inhumane. Immigrant New Yorkers are subject to
15 medical neglect, abuse, harassment, and to the
16 dangers of COVID-19. Our offices continued to
17 advocate and demand for the release of all immigrants
18 detained at Orange through release requests, habeas
19 actions, and changes in law. We applaud the Council
20 for passing Resolution 0066 calling on our state to
21 pass the Dignity Not Detention Act ending contracts
22 with ICE for immigrant detention and look forward to
23 continuing to collaborate with this Committee to end
24 immigrant detention. Thank you.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you for
3 your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Karla
4 Ostolaza to testify. You may begin as soon as the
5 Sergeant cues you.

6 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

7 KARLA OSTOLAZA: Hi. My name is Karla
8 Ostolaza. I am the Managing Director of Immigration
9 Practice at the Bronx Defenders. In my testimony, I
10 will explain why the work of NIFUP continues to serve
11 a critical role in protecting immigrant communities
12 from ICE surveillance, policing, and arrest. NIFUP
13 staff have been fighting for our client's freedom
14 with an extreme sense of urgency given the tortuous
15 conditions and high risk of serious illness and death
16 posed by immigration detention during the pandemic.
17 While we have often been successful in our advocacy,
18 many clients were released subject to electronic
19 surveillance by ICE and are at a high risk of re-
20 detention. We will continue working diligently to
21 reduce the risk of re-detention of our clients and
22 will remain vigilant and ready to assume
23 representation of new clients as detention rates
24 continue to rise. Immigration courts have also played
25 a significant role in eroding our clients' rights by

2 prioritizing expediency above anything else. Although
3 the Justice Department formally ended the case
4 completion quota system for immigration judges last
5 fall, we have not seen any changes in the practices
6 of immigration judges in the detained docket with our
7 clients being regularly forced to trial within weeks
8 of intake. We're actively challenging these practices
9 through multiple appeals. Non-detained immigration
10 courts present their own challenges to our ability to
11 preserve our clients' rights and to manage our
12 workflow. Over the last year, non-detained
13 immigration courts have adopted the practice of
14 issuing scheduling orders hoping to expedite case
15 completion. The orders instruct parties to submit all
16 the evidence relevant to the trial while no trial has
17 been scheduled. The evidence submitted will surely be
18 stale at the time of trial but failing to submit this
19 evidence will result in a finding that our clients
20 have abandoned their claim to stay in this country.
21 DHS also has launched its own initiative aimed at
22 reducing the immigration court backlog. Last year,
23 ICE announced guidelines for the Favorable Exercise
24 of Prosecutorial Discretion for cases pending before
25 the courts. Every person...

2 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

3 KARLA OSTOLAZA: Thank you. Just one
4 thought. NIFUP continues filing these applications
5 for every client and this work will continue into
6 fiscal year 2023. Thank you.

7 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
8 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
9 Deborah Lee to testify. You may begin when the
10 Sergeant cues you.

11 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

12 DEBORAH LEE: Hello. My name is Deborah
13 Lee. I'm a Deputy Attorney in charge of the
14 Immigration Law Unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank
15 you, Chair Hanif and other Council Members, for the
16 opportunity to address you. In addition to the other
17 NIFUP partners that have already testified, I wanted
18 to just highlight that ICE raids, while they have
19 been lower in the past year, we do anticipate that
20 they will increase in the near future, and we need
21 our staff to be fully available to respond to ICE
22 detention activities. We are seeking an increase from
23 16.6 to 18 million to help address our increased
24 costs. In addition to NIFUP support, the Council has
25 been a steadfast supporter of unaccompanied minors

2 since 2014 through the Unaccompanied Minors and
3 Families Initiative, which is granted annually to
4 Legal Aid and the ICARE partners that we have, and
5 for fiscal year '23 ICARE is seeking enhancement to
6 4,570,000, 1,075,000 which would be for Legal Aid and
7 this would offset a loss of funding from the Robin
8 Hood Foundation, which was a temporary funding source
9 that will end this fiscal year. We also applaud the
10 city for its ongoing support for removal defense and
11 affirmative immigration benefits work through the
12 Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, and we encourage
13 the city to continue its flexibility it adopted in
14 the last 2 years regarding meeting deliverables
15 through units of service, and we ask the city to
16 support continued funding for our Low Wage Worker
17 Initiative. Finally, we're seeking 710,000 dollars
18 for our Immigration Federal Practice which allows us
19 to continue our cutting edge work, litigating on
20 behalf...

21 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

22 DEBORAH LEE: Of our clients. Thank you
23 very much.

24 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
25 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome

2 Sharon Kaufman to testify. You may begin when the
3 Sergeant cues you.

4 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

5 DEBORAH LEE: I was speaking on behalf of
6 Legal Aid so Sharone is not going to be testifying.

7 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you
8 so much. Chair, that concludes this panel if you have
9 any questions or comments.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much,
11 Ellen, Karla, Deborah. Deborah, could you run through
12 the numbers one more time? The budget allocations and
13 the increases.

14 DEBORAH LEE: Sure. For each of the
15 different initiatives? Sure. For NIFUP, it's an
16 increase from 16.6 to 18 million, and that's spread
17 across the 3 partner agencies within NIFUP, spread
18 evenly across. The Unaccompanied Minors and Families
19 Initiative, that's with the ICARE partners, that
20 would be an enhancement to 4,570,000; 1,075,000 which
21 would be for Legal Aid and it's, again, just to
22 offset the loss of the Robin Hood Foundation funding.
23 For the Federal Practice, Legal Aid's Immigration
24 Federal Practice which works on impact litigation on
25 behalf of our clients as well as clients more

2 broadly, that would be seeking 710,000 dollars to
3 help us with our work.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. The idea is to
5 sustain the Low Wage Worker Initiative?

6 DEBORAH LEE: Exactly, to sustain it.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Could the 3
8 providers share any challenges or issues beyond just
9 the budgetary limitations you face as providers?

10 DEBORAH LEE: I don't know if Ellen or
11 Karla want to speak on behalf of NIFUP.

12 KARLA OSTOLAZA: Hi, yes. There are
13 several challenges aside from the budget constraints.
14 I was talking about a lot of challenges that we're
15 facing in terms of how to manage our workflow and how
16 to protect our clients' rights that are challenges
17 that are coming from the courts under the interest of
18 expediting every case above any other consideration
19 and imposing a lot of arbitrary deadlines. There are
20 other challenges as well in contracting and having
21 our contracts registered timely with the city that
22 also impose additional challenges to the
23 administration of the program.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. I just want to
25 show my tremendous gratitude, the Reso 66 passing is

2 thanks to all of you and all the advocates present
3 here and those who were present at our first
4 Immigration Committee hearing a couple weeks ago and
5 to hear from formerly detained, currently detained
6 neighbors at Orange County was so, so powerful and
7 moving and absolutely affirms my commitment to
8 ensuring that we end immigrant detention in all
9 facilities so I hope you can count on me to fight as
10 hard and loud as possible to ensure that we abolish
11 ICE and abolish these jails in our city.

12 Bonnie, we can move on to the next panel.

13 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
14 Chair, and thank you to this panel for their
15 testimony. We'd like to now welcome our second public
16 panel. In order, I'll be calling on Monique Francis
17 followed by Allan Wernick followed by Meetu Dhar
18 followed by Mario Russell followed by Melissa
19 Peterson followed by Alexandra Rizio followed by
20 Genia Blaser followed by Alli Finn. Monique Francis,
21 you may begin your testimony when the Sergeant cues
22 you.

23 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

24 MONIQUE FRANCIS: Good afternoon,
25 everyone. Thank you, Chairperson Hanif and Members of

2 the Immigration Committee, inviting us to testify
3 today. As mentioned, my name is Monique Francis. I am
4 the Deputy Director at CUNY Citizenship Now. Joining
5 me today speaking is Meetu Dhar, our managing
6 attorney for City Council services. We are here to
7 testify today in support of the citywide Council
8 initiatives that provides funding, which allows us to
9 assist New York City immigrants all on the path to
10 U.S. citizenship. As you all know, CUNY Citizenship
11 Now is the largest university-based program in the
12 nation. We are a trusted and safe space for
13 immigrants. We provide free high quality and
14 confidential immigration law services to all New
15 Yorkers, no matter their affiliation with CUNY. We
16 aim to educate immigrant communities on the path to
17 citizenship and demystify the regulations as they
18 access immigration benefits. Our attorneys and
19 paralegals provide one-on-one consultations to assess
20 immigrants' eligibility for legal benefits and assist
21 them when qualified. We currently are in 42 City
22 Council offices, and, since the inception of the
23 program, we have assisted 58,000 immigrants. As a
24 whole, the organization helps over 140,000 immigrant
25 New Yorkers so far. We're asking for an increase from

2 our 3 million dollars to 4 million dollars for the
3 upcoming fiscal year to address the growing demands
4 for services from the immigrant communities citywide.
5 While the pandemic hampered our delivery of in-person
6 services in FY 2021, we were resilient in our efforts
7 in helping 4,634 constituents virtually in a number
8 of online platforms and over the phone. In the fall
9 of 2021, we did resume in-person services at a number
10 of our locations, and, to date in FY 2022, we've
11 provided services to more than 3,072 immigrants at
12 our offices and community events.

13 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

14 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
15 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
16 Allan Wernick to testify. You may begin when the
17 Sergeant cues you.

18 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

19 ALLAN WERNICK: Okay. Thank you. I'll just
20 continue. We were anticipating a little bit longer
21 presentation. I apologize. We are seeking to expand
22 our pro se model. Our goal is to reach all immigrant
23 communities in New York City. We have access to a
24 language line that allows us to communicate in over
25 180 languages, but we don't think that's sufficient.

2 We are hoping to serve the community more effectively
3 and looking to hire additional foreign language
4 speaking attorneys and support staff, and we're also
5 outreaching to our wide student base for language
6 assistance. We are also looking to increase our
7 service dates at City Council sites. The current City
8 Council is particularly attuned to the needs of New
9 York immigrants. Already, new Members are asking for
10 services in their districts and served by their
11 predecessors and others are asking for an increase in
12 services. We believe that there is a growing need for
13 the services that Citizenship Now provides and we
14 need your support in helping the immigrant community
15 navigate the complexity of U.S. law and provide them
16 a path to U.S. citizenship. We aim to reach every
17 immigrant in need of immigration services, and,
18 together, we think working with the Council we can
19 help immigrants rise from the pandemic with a pathway
20 to U.S. citizenship.

21 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
22 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
23 Meetu Dahr to testify. You may begin as soon as the
24 Sergeant cues you.

25 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

2 MEETU DHAR: Thank you, Chair Hanif and
3 Committee on Immigration. Again, my name is Meetu
4 Dhar. I'm the managing attorney at CUNY Citizenship
5 Now. Just to add a little bit more to what my
6 Colleagues had said. To continue with our testimony,
7 as we emerge from the pandemic, it seems unlikely
8 that broad immigration reform will become a reality
9 in the upcoming year. Still, we're hopeful for new
10 opportunities for New York's immigrants, an example
11 being the recent grant of TPS to Ukrainians. CN with
12 the support of City Council has the ability to
13 respond quickly to changes in immigration policy.
14 When DHS announced TPS for Ukrainians, we immediately
15 implemented a plan to help this community. While our
16 core service to the community is helping immigrants
17 become U.S. citizens, we also assist New Yorkers
18 petition for relatives to bring them here from
19 abroad, and we also help many in adjusting their
20 status in the United States. We prioritize those
21 individuals who entered the United States as children
22 by assisting individuals apply for DACA, DACA
23 renewals, and advanced parole applications. We've
24 also dedicated City Council sponsored days solely to
25 assisting those constituents applying for TPS, DACA,

2 and Green Cards. An important part of our pro se
3 model includes our large-scale City Council sponsored
4 Saturday Citizenship events. These Saturday bi-
5 monthly events allow us to reach a broader segment of
6 the New York City immigrant community. Another
7 important component of our pro se model is
8 prioritizing the education of New York City's
9 immigrant population on emerging immigration issues.
10 In partnership with the City Council, we aim to reach
11 out to the immigrant population before (INAUDIBLE)
12 and unethical businesses prey upon them. We
13 disseminate information to the community on the
14 constantly changing immigration policies through
15 media promotions, briefings, presentations at town
16 halls, immigration forums, and Facebook Live events.
17 Again, there is a pressing need in New York City for
18 the services that CN provides. We need your support
19 in helping New York City immigrants..

20 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

21 MEETU DHAR: Navigate the complexity of
22 U.S. immigration law. Thank you so much, again,
23 Chairperson Hanif and Members of the Committee, for
24 inviting CUNY Citizenship Now on this very important
25 hearing today.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
3 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
4 Mario Russell to testify. You may begin as soon as
5 the Sergeant cues you.

6 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

7 MARIO RUSSELL: Good afternoon, Counsel,
8 Chair Hanif, and Members of the Council Committee on
9 Immigration. I'm Mario Russell, Director of Immigrant
10 Refugee Services at Catholic Charities. Thank you so
11 much for the opportunity to testify today. For more
12 than 40 years, Catholic Charities has welcomed New
13 York's immigrants, refugees, and those who have been
14 undocumented for many, many years without a pathway
15 forward. Each year we serve almost 100,000 through
16 our Division of Immigrant Refugee Services in
17 basically 6 main areas. Work with refugees,
18 resettling those about 600 a year, advice and legal
19 representation to between 5,000 to 8,000 adults in
20 proceedings, legal assistance to about 5,000
21 unaccompanied children each year, again who have been
22 transferred from the border and placed in detention
23 shelter facilities in the New York area. We provide
24 work-related job development, theft prevention, wage
25 assistance, and other remedies for day laborers,

2 about 1,500 of those in the Bronx. Of course, we
3 provide information referrals through our Action NYC
4 hotlines and English instruction to about 800 each
5 year. Most importantly, with new global crises
6 emerging and continuing, whether it's Ukraine or
7 Afghanistan, we have also understood the need to be
8 present and responsive. With the evacuation of over
9 76,000 from Afghanistan, we have worked to resettle
10 over 100 individuals now in New York City and in the
11 New York area, and we're working now to develop
12 proper legal responses and resettlement responses to
13 those who will, of course, be coming from Ukraine,
14 making their way to the U.S. Someone asked earlier
15 the question, what about refugees, it may have been
16 in the sense of technical and legal question, but I
17 think it's actually a substantive and a moral
18 question, what is the city doing with refugees, and,
19 really, that means asylees, asylum seekers, there's a
20 lot there to be done. I'll end my testimony simply by
21 offering continuing...

22 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

23 MARIO RUSSELL: Appeal to this Council's
24 support of the initiatives that have been discussed,
25 the legal ones, absolutely important the Haitian

2 Response Initiative, absolutely critical
3 Unaccompanied Children, and in particular the Terra
4 Firma, which you know is a medical partnership in the
5 Bronx, and I want to stress again the loss of Robin
6 Hood which has been said so by my Colleagues, the
7 Action NYC hotline which is critical, and, of course,
8 work through our ESL language programming. Thank you
9 very much for the time.

10 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
11 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
12 Melissa Peterson to testify. You may begin as soon as
13 the Sergeant cues you.

14 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

15 MELISSA PETERSON: Good afternoon, and
16 thank you for this opportunity to be heard. My name
17 is Melissa Peterson. I'm a Supervising Attorney at
18 the Doors Legal Services Center. We receive city
19 funding through the ICARE coalition, and with that
20 funding we represent nearly 200 immigrant children
21 and youth facing deportation in New York City each
22 year. Under the Doors holistic and client-centered
23 model, we provide members with a variety of resources
24 in addition to legal representation with a goal to
25 empower them and help them achieve long-term success

2 and stability in the U.S. We have an integrated
3 social work team that works closely with our
4 immigrant youth to provide needed support in their
5 cases and connect them with other in-house services
6 such as healthcare and supportive housing, crisis
7 assistance, free nutritious meals, career and
8 education services, creative arts, and community-
9 centered programming. So continued economic support
10 from City Council is imperative to support the
11 remarkable people that we work with now more than
12 ever because the ICARE Coalition has lost private
13 funding for the next fiscal year. The harmful effects
14 of the anti-immigrant policies of the previous
15 administration are not gone. We're still up against
16 restrictive policies that directly affect our young
17 people, and we have seen increasing delays with U.S.
18 CIS since the start of the pandemic. With a great
19 number of our young people waiting years for answers
20 on their immigrant applications, this leaves many of
21 our young people in a state of limbo with no legal
22 status, limited access to public services.
23 Furthermore, a drastic recent change in the
24 Department of State Visa Bulletin affects a large
25 number of people that we work with. With this change,

2 people from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador who
3 have been granted special immigrant juvenile status
4 may be waiting more than 5 years before they can
5 apply for legal permanent residence in the U.S. This
6 will be particularly challenging for those who are
7 approaching adulthood and trying to plan for the
8 future.

9 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

10 MELISSA PETERSON: It will also require
11 greater legal advocacy for those with active cases in
12 immigration court so continued funding through ICARE
13 in the fiscal year 2023 will enable us to provide our
14 young people with the legal advocacy and the
15 supportive services they will need during this
16 challenging time. Thank you.

17 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you for
18 your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Alexandra
19 Rizio to testify. You may begin as soon as the
20 Sergeant cues you.

21 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

22 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you to the
23 Committee on Immigration and Chair Hanif for inviting
24 testimony today. My name is Alexandra Rizio, and I'm
25 a Managing Attorney at the Safe Passage Project, a

2 nonprofit legal services organization that provides
3 representation to immigrant children facing
4 deportation. We serve children who live in the 5
5 boroughs of New York City and the 2 counties of Long
6 Island. The City Council has been a stalwart
7 supporter that allows us to fight on behalf of young
8 immigrants. You fund our work through the
9 Unaccompanied Minors Initiative and the IOI grant
10 stream. Without the support which we've had since
11 2014, we would not be able to serve the over 1,200
12 clients that Safe Passage currently works with.
13 Organizations like Safe Passage are facing
14 unprecedented challenges. First, a record number of
15 unaccompanied children arrived at the U.S./Mexico
16 border in 2021, over 100,000 of them. Some of these
17 young people have been expelled from the border under
18 the Trump administration due to specious public
19 health rules and are only now being processed
20 according to the law. At least 10 percent of them are
21 headed to New York to reunite with family members,
22 but they will be simultaneously placed into removal
23 proceedings and will need attorneys. Second, cases
24 continue to take an extremely long time to resolve,
25 meaning that we cannot turn over cases as rapidly as

2 we once we could. Our caseloads continue to grow.
3 Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and
4 heightened many of the inequalities in our system.
5 Undocumented immigrants may work in essential jobs,
6 but most lack job security, are less likely to have
7 health insurance, and may be hesitant to seek
8 emergency medical treatment. At the same time, our
9 immigration work hasn't stopped. Filings still have
10 to be made on time, kids were being entered into
11 removal proceedings and they needed lawyers so Safe
12 Passage Project and our fellow organizations have
13 continued to do this work. With the City Council's
14 support, Safe Passage Project and our partners will
15 hopefully help even more..

16 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

17 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Client navigate the maze
18 that is the immigration system, defend them against
19 deportation, and help them access stability and
20 essential services. Safe Passage Project offers our
21 sincere thanks to the City Council for being a leader
22 on the issues of legal representation in immigration
23 court, especially for children, and for caring for
24 all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status.
25 Thank you.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you for
3 your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Genia Blaser
4 to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

5 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

6 GENIA BLASER: Hi. Thank you, Chair Hanif
7 and the Committee on Immigration. My name is Genia
8 Blaser, and I'm a Supervising Attorney at the
9 Immigrant Defense Project, and I'll be testifying
10 about the critical work of IDP's hotline for detained
11 New Yorkers. IDP has submitted an application for
12 Council discretionary funding to support this work
13 which we'll submit again with our testimony. IDP is
14 the only organization in New York devoted
15 specifically to fighting for justice for immigrants
16 caught at the intersection of the racially biased
17 U.S. criminal and immigration legal systems. We've
18 been running a free-of-charge for over 20 years. Our
19 unique hotline provides information referrals and
20 legal analysis specifically to immigrants who come
21 into contact with the criminal legal system and those
22 who are arrested by ICE. In addition to providing
23 constitutionally mandated advice about the
24 immigration consequences of conviction to assigned
25 18B criminal defense attorneys in all 5 borough,

2 IDP's hotline is a vital space of immigration
3 information for immigrant New Yorkers and their
4 families during times of high stress and often
5 unexpected contact with the criminal or immigration
6 systems. NIFUP, who we just heard from on the last
7 panel, and the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative who
8 it think we'll probably hear from soon are key
9 programs for many of IDP's callers. These programs
10 exemplify New York City's commitment to due process
11 for detained immigrants. Our hotline also supports
12 detained immigrants. We're often the first to provide
13 orientation to the criminal and immigration systems
14 for immigrants. We help families locate loved ones
15 who have been taken by ICE or who are in criminal
16 custody, and we work with detained people and their
17 families to assess options including potential legal
18 referrals. This work has become all the more critical
19 now. ICE uses jails across the country to detain
20 immigrants and the bed spaces in the New York City
21 area jails has greatly decreased. We're hearing from
22 community members who are detained by ICE as far away
23 as Louisiana, Texas, and Alabama. As you know, in the
24 immigration system, New Yorkers arrested by ICE have

2 no right to be detained or have their immigration
3 case heard near their residence. Our work plays a...

4 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

5 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: I'll just end by saying
6 that we've been trying to absorb the increased work
7 of serving detained New Yorkers across the country
8 and their families in the city and would benefit
9 greatly from the proposed funding and support of our
10 hotline. Thank you.

11 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you for
12 your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Alli Finn to
13 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

14 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

15 ALLI FINN: Thank you so much, Chair Hanif
16 and to the Committee. I'm also here today from the
17 Immigrant Defense Project but would like to speak
18 about the importance of maintaining the ID NYC
19 program and protecting it against attempts to add a
20 smart chip or to digitize the ID, which would have
21 dire consequences for immigrants and other
22 communities. IDP and 65 other organizations who are
23 key to the success of ID NYC and its initial
24 implementation spoke out about De Blasio's plan to
25 add a smart chip to the ID in 2018/19 citing

2 unacceptable risks around privacy, surveillance, and
3 financial equity. All of these risks very much still
4 hold. The current status of the plan to digitize the
5 ID is unknown, but we are deeply concerned about
6 Mayor Adams' campaign statement to enhance the ID NYC
7 program and digitize city services including My City
8 platform to access city services and benefits and a
9 plan to add a chip to the ID. While the Mayor framed
10 this proposed plan as one of convenience and
11 modernization, digitizing ID NYC poses monumental
12 risks for a wide range of New Yorkers, especially
13 undocumented immigrants. We have been stating and
14 repeating these same risks since 2014. These risks
15 include increased surveillance, monitoring, policing,
16 and data collection without consent on black, brown,
17 and immigrant communities already subject to
18 discriminatory policing and invasive surveillance,
19 excluding residents from key city services, exposing
20 governments and residents to massive data breaches,
21 and eliminating needed resources for community-led
22 initiatives and long-term urban planning and
23 redirecting those resources into business-led
24 technological interventions that consistently fall
25 short. We need to preserve the ID NYC as is and

2 protect the privacy and security of all cardholders.
3 There is no other government-issued ID that offers
4 the same level of protection for undocumented
5 immigrants from intrusion by police and ICE, and we
6 urge the Council, MOIA, and the other relevant
7 Mayoral offices and agencies to refuse digitization
8 and especially to refute claims that digitization is
9 needed as a way...

10 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

11 ALLI FINN: To cover the program's cost
12 and ensure its sustainability. My last point is that
13 we ask the city to involve stakeholders including the
14 community-based organizations and advocates essential
15 to the program's success at the start of any proposal
16 to change the ID NYC. Thank you.

17 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
18 much for your testimony. I'd like to now turn it to
19 Chair Hanif for any questions or comments.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much.
21 I really look up to the groups that shared testimony.
22 Appreciate your continued work. To the CUNY
23 Citizenship Now team, whom I love and we're hosting a
24 Day of Action in the 39th at the end of this month
25 which I'm really looking forward to, and in my

2 district alone, and I'm sure this is the same for
3 others across the city, it was the single most used
4 legal services in the 39th when I was a staffer at my
5 predecessor's office, former Council Member Brad
6 Lander, so I'm excited about the continued work and
7 your own sort of acknowledgement of some of other
8 language access shortcomings. Would love to learn a
9 little bit more about how many citizenship
10 applications CUNY Citizenship Now filed in fiscal
11 year '21 and '22.

12 ALLAN WERNICK: Could you unmute Monique,
13 please? She's the one that's prepared to answer those
14 questions with the numbers.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sure.

16 MONIQUE FRANCIS: One second. Meetu.

17 MEETU DHAR: I can give you the numbers
18 that we completed this year, so far this fiscal year.
19 For the number of citizenship applications completed
20 so far, it's 192. As far as consults are concerned
21 for citizenship, we have done 734 for this fiscal
22 year.

23 ALLAN WERNICK: But we should point out
24 that, of course, our numbers are much larger pre-
25 pandemic. The challenges of the pandemic doing the

2 work remotely substantially lowered the number of
3 applications that we were able to prepare.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you share, and
5 this is a question broadly to the others in this
6 panel, how you've been able to innovate and continue
7 providing services remotely?

8 MEETU DHAR: We're actually transitioning
9 back to in-person services which we're really excited
10 about so a lot of Council Members are reaching out to
11 us to go back to in-person, but we've been working
12 remotely. We've been meeting with constituents via
13 Zoom, via the phone, WhatsApp, basically whatever
14 works for the constituent we'll meet. If it's an
15 applicant who is unable to have access to email and
16 they're not able to print out their application,
17 we'll actually mail the application to them for their
18 signature and so we've been really innovative in
19 trying to figure out how to navigate the pandemic,
20 and we're happy to say that we're going to continue
21 to use that remote component even when we go back to
22 in-person services, completely back to in-person
23 services.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's encouraging. If
3 others want to chime in, if you could use the raise
4 hand function. Great. Could we unmute Genia?

5 GENIA BLASER: Thanks. I was just going to
6 say IDP's hotline, which has been running for over 20
7 years, has always been remote so we were able to
8 transition pretty seamlessly over the pandemic in
9 terms of being able to receive calls and complete
10 intakes and analysis and work on making referrals and
11 providing support for families.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Then I have
13 a question for Melissa Peterson, if we could unmute
14 Melissa, and perhaps also Alexandra from the Safe
15 Passage Project, could you share a little bit more
16 about how immigrant youth are connected to your
17 organizations?

18 MELISSA PETERSON: I can start. The Door
19 is a comprehensive youth development organization,
20 and, as part of this larger group of services, we
21 offer legal services and something that's unique to
22 the Door is that we are a fully integrated group of
23 services so we work with social workers. Our legal
24 team is primarily focused on immigrant youth, and we
25 serve people who are between the ages of 12 and 24.

2 Specifically my team and through the city funding
3 through ICARE, we represent young people who are in
4 active removal proceedings, facing deportation.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

6 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Safe Passage is
7 connected to clients in a variety of ways, word of
8 mouth certainly. We're on a variety of referral lists
9 so as immigration court opens back up, immigration
10 judges hand out lists of pro bono legal services and
11 we're on that list. We're also connected through the
12 federal government so when young people cross the
13 U.S./Mexico border and they're unaccompanied, they're
14 processed in a certain way so they generally spend a
15 period of time in the custody of the Office of
16 Refugee Resettlement, and, as that office releases
17 those young people from group homes or foster homes
18 to family members to care for them, they alert some
19 number of legal services providers in the location
20 where the child is going and so Safe Passage receives
21 referrals directly from the government when we learn
22 that a child is arriving in New York City.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

24 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: I will say that we've
25 completely pivoted to online intakes during the

2 pandemic, which I was surprised that it actually
3 worked pretty seamlessly, but it works for our
4 clients specifically because they don't have to take
5 time off school, if they have working parents or
6 their caretakers don't have to make it to our
7 physical offices, we can do this all virtually and we
8 screened about 330 children over the last year using
9 that method.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that. If
11 we could unmute Melissa one more time.

12 MELISSA PETERSON: Thank you. I just
13 wanted to add that during the pandemic I think we did
14 see a decrease in the amount of usual walk-ins that
15 we would get because through the Door we intake a lot
16 of young people just from being members of the Door
17 and walking through and from other members, but we do
18 receive referrals from other organizations and we did
19 a lot of outreach for that over the pandemic, and, as
20 we see that the city has opened up a little bit,
21 we're getting more people in person and those numbers
22 have increased again.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that.
24 Just 2 comments. Thank you, Mario, for just sharing
25 more broadly about our city's approach to serving

2 refugees, deeply committed to that as the Chair of
3 the Immigration Committee, so thank you for doing all
4 that you are in the capacity within Catholic
5 Charities and then Alli, absolutely cosign making
6 sure that our undocumented neighbors are not further
7 burdened by surveillance mechanisms and that there
8 aren't any micro opportunities to surveil our
9 communities within the ID NYC project and program so
10 I cosign that effort with you and look forward to
11 making sure that we double down when the time comes.

12 Bonnie, we can move on to the next panel.

13 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
14 Chair, and thank you to this whole panel for their
15 testimony. We're now going to be moving on to our
16 next public panel. In order, I'll be calling Rex Chen
17 followed by Jodi Ziesemer followed by Terry Lawson
18 followed by Victoria Roseman followed by Katherine
19 Barenboim followed by Mia Soto. Rex Chen, you may
20 begin your testimony as soon as the Sergeant cues
21 you.

22 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

23 REX CHEN: Good afternoon. I'm Rex Chen.
24 My pronouns are he/him. I'm the Immigration Director
25 at Legal Services NYC. We receive Immigrant

2 Opportunities Initiative funding, and that helps our
3 team give immigration legal services to households
4 that had over 25,000 people a year. I'm going to
5 cover 3 quick points about our immigration work.
6 First of all, immigration cases are taking longer. As
7 Alex Rizio mentioned, it's more difficult to close
8 out our cases, hearings are often postponed, others
9 require preparing for a video hearing for immigration
10 court, and it's harder for clients to prepare cases
11 during the pandemic.

12 My second point is that we see that
13 there's even more needs for social work than before.
14 Thank you for the City Council helping to fund
15 through IOI social workers to help especially with
16 children's immigration cases. More funding for social
17 workers would help adults and families address their
18 needs, prepare their cases, and really be able to
19 talk more as they need to about their traumatic
20 experiences.

21 A third thing I'll point out is
22 flexibility under IOI. We appreciate the flexibility
23 to address the service targets to provide services
24 for emerging immigration needs, like you've heard
25 some of the new needs.

2 I'll make one closing point, and that's
3 how important the Low Wage Workers Initiative funding
4 is. It's helped some of my teammates at LS NYC work
5 with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance to get over
6 45,000 New York City app-based drivers, Uber and Lyft
7 drivers, the unemployment benefits they deserve from
8 the New York State Department of Labor, and that
9 probably totaled around 30 million dollars so that
10 LWWI funding provides critical help to low-wage
11 workers in New York City and many of them are
12 immigrants. Thank you.

13 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
14 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Jodi
15 Zieseemer to testify. You may begin as soon as the
16 Sergeant cues you.

17 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

18 JODI ZIESEMER: Thank you. My name is Jodi
19 Zieseemer. I'm the Director of the Immigrant
20 Protection Unit at the New York Legal Assistance
21 Group, or NYLAG. Thank you for this opportunity to
22 testify. Time permitting, I'd like to touch upon 4
23 points.

24 First, a request for an increase in
25 funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative,

2 which funds legal screenings and representation for
3 immigrant New Yorkers with deportation orders who are
4 detained or at risk of detention and imminent
5 deportation. With an increase in funding to 1 million
6 dollars, the RRLC will be able to continue to respond
7 to emerging crises and issues with immigrants in
8 detention, track and educate the community about
9 changes in law and policy, and hold ICE accountable
10 for releasing non-priority immigrants.

11 My second point is funding for emerging
12 needs and responding to refugee crises. As the Chairs
13 and others have mentioned, the recent crises in
14 Afghanistan and Ukraine have resulted in greater
15 immigration needs for people fleeing that crisis.
16 Just to be clear, the Afghans that were brought to
17 the United States were not brought as refugees but as
18 humanitarian parolees, and all 50,000 plus of those
19 people will still need to resolve their immigration
20 status within the next 2 years when their parole
21 status expires. NYLAG was founded by Soviet refugees
22 and is deeply connected to this community as well. To
23 respond to both crises, we have dedicated programs to
24 help Afghans and Ukrainians through pro bono clinics
25 and programs. We have filed almost 200 parole

2 applications to bring Afghans who are in danger to
3 the United States to be reunited with their families,
4 and we are mentoring asylum cases. We are also
5 screening and advising recently arrived Ukrainians as
6 well as existing clients and immigrants who have been
7 in the community for years. We seek funding to
8 support this work and prepare for future refugee and
9 immigration crises.

10 We would also like to echo Rex in asking
11 for an increase and renewal of the Low Wage Worker
12 fund. This will support NYLAG's Employment Law
13 Project which provides...

14 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

15 JODI ZIESEMER: Advice and counsel to
16 legal representation for low wage workers who are
17 victims of discrimination.

18 Finally, this is mentioned in the written
19 testimony, we seek funding for a caregiver program to
20 start a pilot project to provide legal services to
21 caregivers throughout New York City. Thank you.

22 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
23 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
24 Terry Lawson to testify. You may begin as soon as the
25 Sergeant cues you.

2 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

3 TERRY LAWSON: Good afternoon. My name is
4 Terry Lawson, and I'm the Executive Director of
5 UnLocal, a community-centered nonprofit that provides
6 direct community education, outreach, and legal
7 representation to New York's undocumented immigrant
8 communities. I'm also the co-founder and Steering
9 Committee Member of the Bronx Immigration
10 Partnership. UnLocal provides free high-quality legal
11 services for New York's most vulnerable immigrants,
12 and, last year, we handled 1,290 legal matters for
13 those seeking asylum, DACA, SIJ, and much more. Our
14 Queer Immigrant Justice project, which receives
15 support from the City Council's LGBT caucus, works
16 with the LGBTQIA+ immigrants eligible for asylum and
17 are QIJP Ambassador Program provides current and
18 former clients with opportunities to develop
19 leadership skills and connect with other queer-
20 identified immigrants. We are also a part of the
21 Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, which Jodi just
22 described brilliantly, and we seek 1 million in
23 continued funding for that complex defense work.
24 Those who serve on our team are fighting tirelessly
25 to stop deportations and end ICE detention where our

2 neighbor's physical and mental health are endangered
3 daily as so many testified about at last month's
4 hearing, and we applaud the City Council's passage of
5 the Resolution in support of the passage of Dignity
6 Not Detention as a critical step to protecting
7 immigrant New Yorkers. Though our Rapid Response team
8 won the release from ICE detention for a member of
9 the Muslim community in Brooklyn, he continues to
10 feel the full weight of the U.S. government bearing
11 down on him and his family. With RRLC funding, we are
12 continuing to work closely with him and his family
13 and many others to fight the relentless tools of
14 surveillance and deportation of the post-9/11 era
15 deployed against him and so many others.

16 Another example of our work, our
17 education and outreach team conducted 70
18 presentations in 2021 including through a MOIA
19 partnership to conduct Know Your Rights presentations
20 across the city and to educate and assist over...

21 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

22 TERRY LAWSON: Tuition assistance under
23 the New York State Dream Act. I know at last month's
24 hearing so many Council Members talked about wanting
25 to hear about what kind of education and outreach was

2 being done at New York City schools to protect
3 students and their parents, and UnLocal has been
4 doing this work and will continue to do this work
5 with support from the City Council. I'll just end by
6 saying that world events are demonstrating more
7 clearly than ever that migration is a human right,
8 and we support efforts to create greater access to
9 migration for all, having spearheaded a letter last
10 week to the Biden administration signed by 72
11 organizations in the New York Metropolitan area
12 seeking expansion of TPS protections for countries
13 long ignored as well as a path to citizenship. Thank
14 you to the Council for holding this hearing.

15 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
16 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
17 Victoria Roseman to testify. You may begin as soon as
18 the Sergeant cues you.

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

20 VICTORIA ROSEMAN: Thank you so much for
21 this opportunity to testify and good afternoon,
22 everyone. My name is Victoria Roseman, and I'm a
23 Staff Attorney at Volunteers of Legal Service, or
24 VOLS, in the Unemployed Workers Project. VOLS was
25 established in 1984, and our purpose is to leverage

2 private attorneys to provide free legal services to
3 low-income New Yorkers to help fill the justice gap.

4 Since the start of the pandemic, VOLS has worked
5 directly with unemployment insurance claimants to
6 fight for their benefits, navigate the Department of
7 Labor systems, and advocate for fair determinations.

8 It is undeniable that immigrant workers kept New York
9 moving forward during the COVID-19 pandemic yet

10 received little to no assistance themselves when it
11 was needed most. With VOLS' background and the

12 intersection of the immigration law and unemployment
13 insurance law to our connections to immigrants' right

14 organizations, immigrant workers need and turn to
15 places like VOLS to figure out their options during

16 times of uncertainty. In addition to the legislative
17 exclusion of immigrant workers from unemployment

18 insurance benefits, it's relevant to note that

19 applying for benefits is not immigrant friendly in
20 and of itself. Language access issues plague the

21 Department of Labor's forms and without in-person
22 locations and little phone support available, it's

23 nearly impossible to reach the Department of Labor
24 for assistance. Questions are framed in a confusing

25 format, even for native English speakers. By law, the

2 Department of Labor's forms are supposed to be
3 translated into other languages including Spanish,
4 traditional Chinese, Russian, Haitian, Creole,
5 Bengali, and Korean. However, many notices and
6 documents are still not available in any language
7 other than English. The Department of Labor does
8 state on its website that other documents can be
9 translated into other languages but fails to specify
10 which documents and which languages. At VOLS, we do
11 understand the importance of employing trained
12 interpreters and translators as we help limited
13 English proficient workers navigate these systems or
14 troubleshoot when reaching the Department of Labor
15 appears impossible or futile. If language access
16 issues continue post application, as claimants are
17 required to continue certifying for benefits every
18 single week, without adequate language access
19 measures...

20 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

21 VICTORIA ROSEMAN: The Department of
22 Labor's system sets up immigrant claimants for
23 failure. VOLS alongside other legal services
24 organizations have pushed the Department of Labor to
25 engage in more language access programs and to make

2 the entire system more accessible to immigrants with
3 a FOIA request of engagement with Department of Labor
4 representatives.

5 In closing, it is essential to fund legal
6 services organizations, like VOLS, who assist
7 immigrants with not only immigration law issues but
8 other legal issues, like immigrant workers rights and
9 children's law issues. VOLS not only provides direct
10 services to immigrants but also advocates on a larger
11 scale to the Department of Labor to fix these systems
12 that simply don't work for most claimants, much less
13 immigrant limited English proficiency claimants. It's
14 imperative that we continue to push for safety nets
15 for immigrant workers who are too often pushed out of
16 traditional form of relief. Thank you so much.

17 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you for
18 your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Katherine
19 Barenboim to testify. You may begin as soon as the
20 Sergeant cues you.

21 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

22 KATHERINE BARENBOIM: Good afternoon. My
23 name is Katherine Barenboim, and I am a Staff
24 Attorney at Legal Information for Families Today,
25 also known as LIFT. Thank you to Chair Hanif and the

2 Members of the Immigration Committee for the
3 opportunity to testify about the issues facing
4 immigrants with cases in family court. LIFT's mission
5 is to increase access to justice in New York's family
6 courts. We combine legal guidance, easy to access
7 technology, and compassionate support to help
8 unrepresented parents and caregivers self-advocate on
9 critical family law issues. We work primarily on
10 cases of child support, custody and visitation,
11 guardianship, and domestic violence. Even before the
12 pandemic, the New York City family courts were
13 already overburdened and under-resourced, hearing
14 over 200,000 cases per year. Eighty percent of
15 litigants come to family court without a lawyer.
16 During the past few years, LIFT has expanded outreach
17 and services to immigrants across New York City. Like
18 all families, immigrants encounter family law issues,
19 but those who are undocumented face increased
20 vulnerability due to their immigration status. Many
21 fear deportation as a result of family court
22 involvement. We work to address this by informing
23 them of their right to file petitions and be heard
24 regardless of immigration status and to their right
25 to a translator. We offer legal consultations and

2 information through our helplines, both of which have
3 seen a record-breaking demand over the last 2 years.
4 We also help immigrant parents plan ahead by
5 appointing a stand-by guardian. This is someone who
6 is preapproved by the parents to take care of their
7 children in the event of the parents' deportation.
8 During the pandemic, the justice gap for
9 unrepresented litigants has been worsened by the
10 inaccessibility of and now delays in the family
11 court. The courts have begun hearing more virtual and
12 hybrid cases, but a significant backlog remains.
13 Unrepresented litigants need support to navigate
14 family court, and undocumented immigrants especially
15 can benefit from compassionate, understanding legal
16 care. Thank you so much for your time. The New York
17 City Council's support will help LIFT continue to
18 provide the legal advice and information that
19 immigrant families need to advocate for positive
20 outcomes in the family court.

21 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

22 KATHERINE BARENBOIM: Thank you.

23 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
24 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Mia
25

2 Soto to testify. You may begin as soon as the
3 Sergeant cues you.

4 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

5 MIA SOTO: Good afternoon. My name is Mia
6 Soto. I'm the Community Health Justice Organizer at
7 New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, also known
8 as NYLPI. NYLPI is privileged to be part of the City
9 Council's Immigrant Health Initiative, and we really
10 thank you for that support. Today, I am here to ask
11 the Council to continue their support and renew
12 funding for the Immigrant Health Initiative, which
13 has really saved lives and improved health across the
14 city of New York. Your funding specifically supports
15 NYLPI's Health Justice Program to continue to fight
16 for racial equity and immigrant justice, particularly
17 through healthcare advocacy including our ongoing
18 work addressing the human rights crisis in
19 immigration detention and advocating for the
20 healthcare for all New Yorkers, regardless of their
21 immigration status. Your support has allowed us to
22 continue to provide critical services to immigrant
23 communities all throughout the city in various ways,
24 including legal, medical, and community-driven
25 advocacy. Most importantly, we were able to provide

2 and continue to provide comprehensive screenings and
3 legal representation to individuals, particularly
4 those with serious health emergencies including
5 holistic support during these challenging times of
6 pandemic. Just last week, we have learned that the
7 City Council has passed Resolution number 0066
8 calling for the New York State to end immigration
9 detention contracts with ICE, and, for that, we are
10 really thankful as that is something that I work on
11 personally. Without the support of the City Council,
12 we would not have been able to hold the State
13 accountable towards reducing the physical and
14 emotional harm caused by detention and ensuring that
15 all immigrants in New York are treated with dignity.
16 We thank you so much for allowing us to present
17 testimony, and we look forward to working with you
18 continuously and really healthcare is a human right.
19 Thank you.

20 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you for
21 your testimony. This concludes this panel so I'm
22 going to turn it to Chair Hanif for any questions or
23 comments.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much.
3 Question for Jodi at NYLAG. Could you expand on the
4 caregiver program?

5 JODI ZIESEMER: Yes, happy to. There are
6 an estimated 900,000 to 1.3 million family caregivers
7 in New York City, the majority of whom are women over
8 50. NYLAG is seeking to start a pilot project to
9 provide legal services to caregivers through
10 partnerships with caregiver services provided across
11 the city, and, as you are probably also aware, many
12 of these caregivers are immigrants themselves or
13 assisting immigrant parent or children in giving
14 care. Our Legal Health Unit would staff this program
15 with on-site clinics at 3 to 4 partner organizations
16 in Brooklyn and receive additional referrals from
17 caregivers through a citywide intake line. Under this
18 model, these sites would be covered by a general
19 attorney and would serve as a one-stop shop for any
20 sort of legal concerns. This is modeled on a program
21 that we provide for taxi drivers where we will
22 provide them with legal consultations and referrals
23 for a variety of different issues through a one-stop
24 shop.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How much are you
3 asking for for the pilot?

4 JODI ZIESEMER: We're seeking just 150,000
5 dollars for this pilot project.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: At this time, are
7 there any other community groups or maybe like
8 organized domestic workers cohorts that you're
9 working with in developing this pilot?

10 JODI ZIESEMER: We work with NYC Health
11 and Hospitals and already have lawyers who are
12 embedded in many of the area hospitals to provide the
13 same type of comprehensive legal screening and
14 services, so we would work with them as well as
15 probably with the union that serves these workers as
16 well as other contact points.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Thank you so
18 much. Just wanted to share my gratitude to Terry and
19 the UnLocal team, particularly around the case I
20 think is the one I'm thinking about in the 39th
21 District. This constituent of ours had his
22 citizenship revoked, and it was such a scary time and
23 just showing the extension of ICE's claws years after
24 an incident and really for the Muslim community we
25 have been impacted devastatingly by ICE and other

2 interventions of surveillance apparatus by the police
3 department and other mechanics of the carceral system
4 and so, Terry and your team, really thank you so much
5 for being so diligent and providing care and
6 continued support to this family. If you'd like to
7 share anything about the case and just how shocking
8 it was for us to see that citizenship could be
9 revoked, I mean it was something I learned, I mean I
10 didn't think I'd see that in this time and day. If
11 you'd like to speak more about the case, would really
12 appreciate it so that others on this call, my
13 Colleagues who are here could hear.

14 TERRY LAWSON: Thank you for that, Chair
15 Hanif. While I can't provide too many details about
16 the case, I can just say that it is continuing, ICE
17 is continuing to fight this individual despite the
18 fact that they've been here for 27 years, despite the
19 fact that they violated no laws, and this is just
20 what we're seeing across the board, and we are really
21 grateful to the City Council for expanding resources
22 or continuing resources to the Rapid Response Legal
23 Collaborative because we really need these resources
24 to attack ICE and its tactics on all fronts. It takes
25 a lot of resources to request release, to do federal

2 litigation, to do habeas, to do appeals, and so this
3 work is very complex, and this individual who we got
4 out of detention 2 years ago, we're continuing to
5 fight in immigration court for relief from removal so
6 that he can just continue to be a lawful permitted
7 resident which ICE is intent on stripping from him
8 through no fault of his own.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Terry.
10 Bonnie, we can move on to the next panel.

11 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
12 Chair, and thank you to this whole panel for your
13 testimony. We will now be moving on to our next
14 public panel. In order, I'll be calling on Ira
15 Yankwitt followed by Antonia followed by Jeffrey Lau
16 followed by Julie Quinton followed by Lena Cohen
17 followed by Ydenise Alba. Ira Yankwitt, you may begin
18 your testimony as soon as the Sergeant cues you.

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

20 IRA YANKWITT: Thank you, Chair Hanif, for
21 the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt,
22 and I'm the Executive Director of the Literacy
23 Assistance Center. I'm also a proud member of the New
24 York City Coalition for Adult Literacy. Currently,
25 there are more than 2.2 million adults in New York

2 City with limited English proficiency or who lack a
3 high school diploma, the majority are women and
4 people of color. Over 75 percent are immigrants
5 including many who are undocumented. Others are BIPOC
6 who were born in the U.S. and underserved by the
7 public school system. When it comes to funding for
8 adult literacy education, there are 3 main issues.

9 First, combined city and state funding is
10 so limited that fewer than 4 percent of the 2.2
11 million adults who could benefit from adult basic
12 education high school equivalency or English language
13 classes are able to access seats in any given year.

14 Second, the level of investment per
15 student is so low that programs are unable to provide
16 the full range of support services and resources that
17 students need and deserve.

18 Third, funding places such an emphasis on
19 increasing test scores, accruing credentials, and
20 achieving workforce outcomes that it fails to
21 recognize and honor the full breadth of students'
22 goals and the myriad ways that programs work to build
23 the collective power of individuals, families, and
24 communities.

2 Last year, the City Council made great
3 strides in addressing these issues by pushing then-
4 Mayor de Blasio to baseline 8 million dollars in
5 year-to-year funding for adult literacy education,
6 creating a total of 13.5 million in baseline funds
7 and by allocating 2.5 million dollars of Council
8 discretionary funding to a pilot project that
9 provided 20 programs with additional funds to invest
10 in full-time teachers, counselors, expanded support
11 services, and upgrades to technology. The pilot also
12 recognized and encouraged a broader range of outcomes
13 including support for health literacy, financial
14 literacy, immigrant and workers' rights, housing
15 advocacy, culturally responsive education, and
16 student leadership development. What do we need to do
17 now?

18 First, the city must maintain the 13.5
19 million dollars in previously baselined funds and
20 increase the baselined funding by an additional 13.5
21 million in order to double the level of investment
22 per student in the upcoming DYCD RFP.

23 Second, the Council should extend the
24 adult literacy pilot project for a second year and
25

2 expand it to 5 million dollars to continue to support
3 the...

4 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

5 IRA YANKWITT: 20 programs currently
6 funded as well as to include an additional 20
7 programs.

8 Finally, the Council should renew the 4
9 million dollars of Council adult literacy
10 discretionary funding to continue to provide for
11 program sustainability.

12 Thank you, and I'd be happy to address
13 the discrepancy between the Council pilot and the
14 DYCD pilot in question and answer.

15 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
16 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
17 Antonia to testify. You may begin as soon as the
18 Sergeant cues you.

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

20 ANTONIA: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank
21 you for inviting me. My name is Antonia Bernal
22 (phonetic). I studied English in Literacy Partners
23 program. I was born in Mexico. Five years ago, I came
24 to the United States in search of opportunities and
25 security. When I arrived in this country, I arrived

2 full of dreams. I never imagined that the country of
3 the dreams was so hard because life in the United
4 States is very hard for immigrants. That's an
5 experience for brave people. (INAUDIBLE) my family
6 and friends, I started working housekeeping. I'm not
7 ashamed to say it, but I couldn't get a better job
8 because I didn't know English or ask for a better
9 salary because I didn't know how. I felt inside a
10 cave trapped with chains which didn't allow me to
11 have something better. I was working full-time, and I
12 didn't really have time to study. When my daughter
13 was born, I felt frustrated because I didn't
14 understand the doctors and the hospitals, and I was
15 afraid to go to my daughter's appointments. I never
16 imagined that the Literacy Partners would call me to
17 offer me English classes, and I accepted because the
18 main benefit was taking classes from home. I couldn't
19 take care of my daughter and study. Also, in the
20 program, they worried about offering me social
21 services. I understood that the person with problems
22 hardly takes advantage of the classes then the
23 program sent me the books for my daughter. Now, I can
24 read for her with confidence. I feel confident to
25 show her the word in English. I don't need translate

2 in a doctor. I feel safe talking to her teachers and
3 principal of my daughter's school. I have a beautiful
4 job where I learn every day. Today, I have a very
5 important goal to tell parents about my experience
6 and motivate them to learn English. I have the goal
7 of showing that the United States is the real country
8 of the dreams and that by...

9 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

10 ANTONIA: They can be achieved. Thank you
11 for the opportunity because this money can help
12 someone like me. It's time to change life. Thank you.
13 Have a great day.

14 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
15 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
16 Jeffrey Lau to testify. You may begin as soon as the
17 Sergeant cues you.

18 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

19 JEFFREY LAU: Thank you, Chair Hanif, for
20 this opportunity to testify today. My name is Jeffrey
21 Lau. I'm the Program Director of the Adult Literacy
22 Program at the Chinese American Planning Council.
23 Like so many adult literacy programs throughout the
24 city, CPC relies on city funding to provide quality
25 programming to our communities. I urge the city to

2 continue funding adult literacy programs and continue
3 the Adult Literacy Pilot Program Initiative. At CPC,
4 this funding opens the door to about 600 immigrant
5 ESL students seeking free English classes every year.

6 It is also meant providing much needed wrap-around
7 services to our students. For example, throughout
8 this pandemic, students have received up-to-date
9 information on COVID-19, testing sites, and

10 vaccination centers. Students learned digital

11 literacy skills to help their children with remote

12 learning. They learn American civics, how to register
13 to vote, and what ranked choice voting is. Students

14 learn about healthcare assistance and, if needed,

15 receive services for domestic violence. Classrooms

16 provide information regarding rental and food

17 assistance, and, as Asian hate crimes ravage our

18 communities, students are learning to recognize

19 discrimination, racism, and how to report crimes to

20 authorities. Investing in our communities works.

21 However, at the current cost per student rate, adult

22 literacy programs citywide have struggled to maintain

23 the costs for services and staffing needed. The Adult

24 Literacy Pilot Project Initiative attempted to answer

25 the question of what a fully funded adult literacy

2 program can provide our communities. CPC is one of
3 the recipients of the pilot initiative. Even though
4 only a fraction of the originally asked amount was
5 received, this recently enacted addition means that
6 we've been able to triple the outreach and wrap-
7 around services to our students. This means more
8 hours are dedicated to our students seeking
9 childcare, senior care, housing, food assistance,
10 insurance, college access and workforce counseling.
11 Modernizing aging technological and digital
12 infrastructure has allowed students to access our
13 classrooms remotely and learn digital literacy skills
14 needed to remain competitive. As our communities
15 rebuild from this pandemic..

16 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

17 JEFFREY LAU: I urge the continued funding
18 of adult literacy programs. Schools are often the
19 heart of the community, and adult literacy classes
20 have stepped up. In order to meet the needs of today
21 and tomorrow, we need to invest. Our students are
22 ready to lend their voices, eager to join the
23 workforce, ready to participate in our city with our
24 vote and so much more. I thank you for your time.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
3 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
4 Julie Quinton to testify. You may begin as soon as
5 the Sergeant cues you.

6 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

7 JULIE QUINTON: Thanks so much. Good
8 afternoon. My name's Julie Quinton. I direct adult
9 literacy programs at Make the Road New York, an
10 organization of over 25,000 members dedicated to
11 social transformation through education, survival
12 services, community organizing, and policy change.
13 Thank you, Council Member Hanif and everyone else for
14 the opportunity to speak with you and thank you
15 everyone who is still on from earlier. It's been a
16 truly inspiring day. Seriously.

17 Adult literacy is a critical part of Make
18 the Road's vision for how to make New York and
19 equitable and just city. Every day we leverage all
20 the power we have to push back and creatively try to
21 address the myriad challenges facing immigrant
22 communities in which we are rooted. Our members and
23 students are grappling with a massive housing crisis,
24 unemployment, and worker exploitation, COVID
25 recovery/huge health disparities, a school to prison

2 pipeline that's still in place, and challenges
3 accessing immigrant legal services. On top of that,
4 2.2 million as Ira said, almost 25 percent of our
5 population, lacking English proficiency or a diploma.
6 You all represent the most progressive City Council
7 that we have seen in many years. We really want to
8 work with you to ensure that our city's adult
9 literacy budget addresses the depth of the need as
10 well as the tremendous possibility that comes with
11 funding adult literacy programs as a right and not a
12 bone to be fought over by those of who some would
13 prefer to keep silent or unempowered or in the
14 shadows. Investments that lead to the development of
15 English language literacy and numeracy and high
16 school diplomas have a transformative effect as
17 everyone has been saying on every aspect of public
18 life for our community members. Literacy skills are
19 the most permanent language access tools there are,
20 allowing immigrants who have them to more effectively
21 access housing, health, legal, and transportation
22 services. Funding literacy well will create
23 conditions where immigrants are more able to vote
24 under new laws, access jobs...

25 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

2 JULIE QUINTON: Or push back against wage
3 theft, and, most importantly, especially in
4 community-based programs, we are excellently
5 positioned to be frontline spaces for Know Your
6 Rights, health, education, and service info sharing
7 and doors to community engagement and organizing.
8 Thank you in advance for your work with us and look
9 forward to working with you this budget season.
10 Thanks a lot.

11 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
12 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Lena
13 Cohen to testify. You may begin as soon as the
14 Sergeant cues you.

15 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

16 LENA COHEN: Thank you so much, Chair
17 Hanif and to the Members of the City Council for
18 taking this hearing. My name is Lena Cohen. I
19 represented United Neighborhood Houses. We're a
20 policy and social change organization of 45
21 settlement houses across the state. At UNH, we
22 advocate for an education system that provides high-
23 quality, comprehensive, and accessible adult literacy
24 for all New Yorkers in need. Currently, there are
25 about 15,000 New Yorkers enrolled in city-funded

2 programs, and, as my Colleagues just pointed out,
3 we're only able to serve a fraction of the rest of
4 our adults who are in need. Today my testimony really
5 focuses on 3 of our main budget asks for adult
6 literacy.

7 First, we are really eager to grow the
8 City Council's Adult Literacy Pilot Project to 5
9 million dollars. That would allow us to fund up to 40
10 programs in this pilot and it would address some of
11 those additional costs that, again, my Colleagues
12 outlined such as teach salaries, additional case
13 management services, and just overall program
14 sustainability.

15 The second budget ask is really for the
16 Council to renew its continued 4 million dollars in
17 discretionary funding, which does allow about 40
18 programs each year to keep their doors open.

19 Lastly, we really are in a critical year
20 regarding what the Mayor can do with adult literacy
21 funding. We're asking him to double the baseline,
22 which would bring it to 27 million dollars, and that
23 would increase per student funding rates before DYCD
24 issues the next RFP which we anticipate at the end of
25 this calendar year.

2 Adult literacy is definitely about more
3 than just learning English. It's also a vehicle for
4 civic engagement. For example, adult literacy classes
5 are an ideal space to talk about the new Our City Our
6 Vote legislation. UNH is a proud co-lead of the Our
7 City Our Vote work, and we want to just acknowledge
8 the historic moment we're in right now to implement
9 this legislation successfully. With that, UNH
10 recommends a 25 million...

11 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

12 LENA COHEN: Thank you. UNH recommends a
13 25 million dollar City Council initiative to support
14 community-based outreach to newly enfranchised voters
15 under this bill including voter education,
16 registration, and get out the vote activities. Thank
17 you so much for the time today, and I look forward to
18 working with you.

19 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
20 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
21 Ydenise Alba to testify. You may begin your testimony
22 as soon as the Sergeant cues you.

23 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

24 YDENISE ALBA: Good afternoon, everyone.
25 My name is Ydenise Alba. I am a student in the ESL

2 program at Lehman College. I would like to take this
3 opportunity to thank you for supporting adult
4 learning centers. It is important for me and my
5 family for it represents a step towards our future. I
6 would like to begin with some of my background
7 history. I am a single mother, and I've been in the
8 United States for 3 years. At first, I felt insecure
9 because I couldn't communicate and didn't understand
10 anything in English. I couldn't understand my
11 children's homework, and I couldn't help them out.
12 With what I have learned so far, I feel more
13 confident when talking to someone or when I am in a
14 meeting with the children's school or doctors. The
15 program has also served as support for my college and
16 for me in these times of pandemic where it made us
17 more united and we moved to learn virtually. My
18 expectations with the program is to be able to go to
19 the college and consequently have a stable economic
20 environment with which I can provide a better future
21 for my children. Thanks in advance for your
22 contribution for the development of (INAUDIBLE).
23 Thank you so much.

24

25

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
3 much for your testimony. I'm going to turn it Chair
4 Hanif as this panel is complete.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much,
6 Bonnie. Just want to first thank Antonia and Ydenise
7 for your testimonies. Appreciate hearing how
8 effective and life-saving adult literacy programming
9 has been to your lives and for your families. I'd
10 like to first turn to Ira and, if others on this
11 panel could just use the raise hand function, because
12 I've got some just other questions that I think I'd
13 love to hear from all. Ira, could you address the
14 discrepancy between DYCD and the MOIA budgets on
15 adult literacy programming?

16 IRA YANKWITT: Are you referring to the
17 different pilot projects?

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Correct.

19 IRA YANKWITT: As we mentioned and as you
20 know, last year the Council pushed the Mayor to
21 baseline 8 million dollars in what had previously
22 year-to-year funding in addition to the Council
23 creating this historic pilot project. The
24 announcements about who was awarded funding for the
25 pilot project weren't made until the late fall so we

2 knew that it was moving forward but it was somewhat
3 dormant for those first few months of the fiscal
4 year. At the same time, because DYCD itself
5 recognized the need not just to increase funding to
6 expand services beyond that 4 percent, but also to
7 make greater investments in resources for students,
8 one of the things they were able to do this year with
9 the 8 million dollars that was baselined, and some of
10 my Colleagues here can talk about this because
11 they've benefited from this, is that they actually
12 provided funding for case managers in all of their
13 contracted programs, and they refer to this as a
14 pilot as well so we learned that the Council was
15 moving forward with the pilot for 2.5 million
16 dollars, we learned that there was 8 million dollars
17 baselined, over the summer DYCD announced that as
18 part of that baselined funding, it would invest in
19 case managers for programs. It referred to it as a
20 pilot and then the City Council pilot was initiated
21 in the fall so I suspect, although I don't have this
22 confirmed, that that 1.7 million dollars that they
23 are cutting from the baseline funding, my guess is
24 that it corresponds to the amount that they're
25 investing in in case managers, but that's speculation

2 on my part, but that's the pilot that they're talking
3 about.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Thank you for
5 that. Next, I'd like to go to Jeffrey. In the
6 conversation we had several weeks ago with the Adult
7 Literacy Network, you articulated how adult literacy
8 programming were outlets and spaces, particularly for
9 our Asian immigrant students in articulating or being
10 able to really put into words their fears in the wake
11 of anti-Asian violence. Could you speak on that?

12 JEFFREY LAU: Yeah. Thank you for this
13 opportunity to talk about that. Our spaces have been,
14 once of the consistent things that happened through
15 the COVID shutdown was that we were able to keep our
16 classes together so there was this community that was
17 built out where folks can get information, whether
18 that was about COVID and the symptoms and the testing
19 but as well as the violence that was happening around
20 the city. Students were given the ability to express
21 those fears, and those fears are real. Students are
22 still continuing to talk about how they are afraid to
23 leave their homes, they are afraid to come into in-
24 person classes. Just for context, one of our
25 classrooms is right next door to where the murder

2 happened in Chinatown recently. Our classes meet
3 right next door, and our students walk past the
4 makeshift memorial site that is wrapped around a tree
5 directly in front of the entrance every single day
6 and they see that. Students are learning how to
7 recognize racism. I did have a student, I think she
8 expressed it probably in the clearest terms, was how
9 do I even recognize racism if I can't even speak
10 English, right, how do I learn to even protect myself
11 without learning how to speak English. That's what
12 this has meant. It's meant being able to protect
13 themselves, being able to defend themselves. With
14 language and with these skills, students are learning
15 how to recognize the racism and discrimination that
16 they might be hearing on the street and can take
17 necessary actions if needed. They're learning how to
18 fill out a police report if need, right. This is just
19 one example of so much good that adult literacy
20 classes have provided throughout the city, just that
21 place to find the assistance needed. Of course, it
22 goes more than that. Some students need food access
23 or rental assistance or domestic violence, again, our
24 classes have been an outlet for that. We have had
25 students in our classroom talk about domestic

2 violence, receive the help, and through our program
3 find shelter, find rental assistance, find legal
4 assistance, find food assistance, and we're really
5 just there. It's a community.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you share if
7 there's like outside of just students feeling safe to
8 share what's happening with them or what's on their
9 mind in this community, is there curriculum that's
10 being incorporated into the course around anti-Asian
11 violence or Asian history in our state?

12 JEFFREY LAU: Yeah, all of that is built
13 in. We do have a civics curriculum in CPC, but also
14 we do invite folks outside as well. I did hear, and I
15 was glad to hear that you brought this up through the
16 Know Your Rights workshops, we brought those into our
17 classrooms as well, and, just within our agency, I
18 was trying to get the exact numbers, I only got
19 ballpark numbers, but we got about 540 community
20 members were reached through that where students were
21 learning about their rights, about how to protect
22 themselves, about students and community members
23 within our agency, it's not just students, it's
24 everybody who comes to our agencies, did receive
25 whether that be like the whistles in case for seniors

2 if they were ever in trouble or self defense like if
3 they were interested in learning about self-defense
4 we were giving them information on how to get that. I
5 think that answers your question. I'm not sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. Would the
7 groups on here agree that there's more funding needed
8 to really look after, particularly our Asian
9 immigrant communities at this time, through adult
10 literacy programming?

11 JEFFREY LAU: I would say yes. I mean on a
12 typical year we see about 1,600 folks coming into our
13 doors looking for adult literacy classes, and, just
14 by the nature of the funding, we're only able to sit
15 about 500 or so. That puts so many folks on waiting
16 lists. They're putting their lives on hold, but there
17 could be more opportunities that they would be
18 receiving through access of these classes if we would
19 just fund it what it costs to actually fund a program
20 and meet the demand that's there.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: More broadly, is there
22 like a desegregated breakdown of which immigrant
23 communities are participating or joining adult
24 literacy programming?

2 JEFFREY LAU: I think I could defer that
3 to one of my Colleagues over here.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sure. Is there anybody
5 who feels comfortable articulating? If you could just
6 use the raise hand function and then we can, I saw
7 Ira's physical hand go up.

8 IRA YANKWITT: I don't have those figures
9 in front of me, but I know DYCD absolutely has those
10 figures. Also, the question that you were just asking
11 and Jeff was speaking to, I think one of the most
12 powerful things about the pilot project wasn't just
13 that it was increasing funding for additional
14 services, supports, and resources, but that it was
15 recognizing the kind of role that adult literacy
16 programs have the power and possibility to play and
17 allowed programs to invest those resources in things
18 like culturally responsive education, student
19 leadership development, more work around worker's
20 rights, immigrant rights, housing rights so we really
21 want to continue the pilot, not just to increase the
22 funding as necessary but also to build out program's
23 capacity to do more of that essential work, and,
24 again, especially with the enfranchisement of so many
25 more New Yorkers now, and we'd be happy to talk with

2 you about what kind of programming would look like
3 that really did that more fully.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Awesome. Thank you.
5 Lena, I thank you so much for raising just how
6 critical it is to prioritize implementation of Our
7 City Our Vote, and this is a question to you and the
8 rest here on the panel. Could you just describe what
9 the civic education of your programming has looked
10 like and its reach?

11 LENA COHEN: Yeah, absolutely. With the
12 Our City Our Vote implementation, right now what
13 we're planning to do is work with our 60
14 organizations that are signed onto the coalition to
15 break out into 4 committees that will play essential
16 roles both coordinating with the city's Campaign
17 Finance Board as well as the city's Board of
18 Elections and the Civic Engagement Commission. The 4
19 kind of different buckets of our plan for the next
20 year leading up to the implementation, like the date
21 that the bill goes active, which is December 9, 2022,
22 we have a committee that's focused on fundraising
23 which is actually leading the work to present a
24 proposal for a 25-million-dollar discretionary
25 initiative, and we envision that rolling out similar

2 to what we saw in the 2020 census with community-
3 based organizations really taking on the lead, not
4 just being at the table but having the resources they
5 need to do that voter education and outreach,
6 especially since we know that the Board of Elections
7 isn't mandated to do voter education outreach. That's
8 why, again, we really see ourselves working closely
9 with the Campaign Finance Board. While fundraising is
10 a big piece of that, the other 3 areas, the first
11 includes legal. There are 2 lawsuits challenging the
12 legislation itself. However, the city is very much
13 moving forward with the implementation as planned and
14 so, therefore, as are we, but we still want to be
15 monitoring the legal case. That's one area of our
16 work. Then the 2 really main ones, third would
17 include our community outreach and education, and
18 this is where we're seeing just already an incredible
19 intersection with the adult literacy field, for
20 example, just kind of getting the right folks in the
21 door early to start planning program integration and
22 whatnot and so community outreach is a big one.
23 Finally, implementation, so that'll be the part
24 where, again, we're working very closely with
25 Campaign Finance Board but also Board of Elections in

2 their process for developing the Municipal Voter
3 Registration forms, the ballots, and election day
4 operations.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Excellent. Thank you.
6 Julie, did you want to add on?

7 JULIE QUINTON: Yeah, Council Member
8 Hanif, I just wanted to add, just make a comment
9 about the earlier item we were discussing, the
10 potential cut to DYCD's use of baselined funding for
11 case management. I have to say that would be a
12 tragedy. Our case managers are so happy right now,
13 and we're just getting the program running. It's
14 allowing us to have a kind of a case manager to
15 student ratio that is finally robust, that allows
16 kind of preemptive check-ins as opposed to just
17 responding to emergency situations and crisis
18 management. We're going after people, we're helping
19 people to identify needs that they might have not
20 even identified for themselves and make connections
21 in a more holistic way. Frankly, if we were able to,
22 it's not really an either/or situation, if we were
23 able to preserve that funding and preserve the pilot,
24 the pilot money could, of course, be focused in other
25 directions, perhaps paying part-time teachers to

2 become full-time teachers or at a better rate or
3 digging in on curriculum development that can be
4 shared across the network. I just want to put that
5 out there early. I don't really understand how that's
6 all going to play out, and it sounds like there's a
7 lot of balls in the air in terms of how we're going
8 to be talking about this potential cut, but I just
9 want to put in a plug. That was a smart move on
10 DYCD's part. They were actually advocating to fund
11 the positions at a decent rate as well. I think it
12 was just rolled out very late at a time when programs
13 were already quite fragile and challenged, but I
14 really feel like we can talk more about it, but I
15 just want to put in a plug for that particular piece
16 of the pie and how it's working right now for
17 programs.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, I appreciate
19 that. I'll certainly be investigating as well. I see
20 Jeffrey's hand up.

21 JEFFREY LAU: Thank you, Julie. I
22 definitely want to echo that cuts would be very
23 destabilizing as it took a while for the money to
24 finally come in, and it took it us even more time to
25 get the ball rolling so cutting these pilot programs

2 now when we've really only had about 6 months, less,
3 to try and institute what was supposed to be a year's
4 plan would be very destabilizing. I also want to echo
5 that part-time instructors would very much appreciate
6 some stability in hours, right. We're talking about
7 3-month blocks and then maybe a month off and then
8 another 3-month blocks and folks still need to pay
9 their rent in New York City so just keeping that
10 there and in place and thinking about the staff would
11 be very helpful as well.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. One final
13 question for this panel. I'd like to know a little
14 bit more about the just profile of the teachers and
15 the pipeline to becoming an adult literacy educator
16 at this time. Ira, this is something we've talked
17 about, really moving from a community-centered
18 approach to training folks in our neighborhoods
19 bilingual in the population they're serving alongside
20 English. Would love to just learn a little bit more
21 about our educators.

22 IRA YANKWITT: Absolutely, and I think
23 Jeff and Julie can speak directly to the teachers in
24 their programs who I think are probably
25 representative of who we're seeing in the field. What

2 I can say is that in doing this for now going on 30
3 years, there has been a real demographic shift among
4 the teachers in programs at the same time as there's
5 been greater level of professionalization so
6 certainly the field looks very different than it did
7 in the '90s, both the teachers and more and more the
8 leaders of programs are actually from the communities
9 that they're serving, they come with the same lived
10 experience as the students that they're working with,
11 and there's been more of an investment in
12 professional development. As the organization is very
13 gratefully funded to provide professional development
14 to the DYCD funded CBOs, I can just give an example
15 that for years we had a certificate program that
16 taught people to be teachers of English to
17 immigrants, but it was tuition based because we
18 didn't have the funding for it and so we tended to
19 find people who were middle class, upper middle
20 class, skewed white, or who were able to participate.
21 DYCD, when we got expanded funding, allowed us to
22 provide that course free of charge to those who were
23 interested in taking it and the demographics changed
24 dramatically and what we started to see more of were
25 immigrants themselves who sometimes at the beginning

2 of their career path, sometimes in the middle,
3 sometimes at the end of their career path who were
4 interested in giving back to their community in the
5 same way that they were able to learn English in
6 their community-based organizations so the
7 demographics have really shifted with that investment
8 in professional development so we've seen staff more
9 representative of the communities and, at the same
10 time, a greater professionalization of those staff
11 members to serve their communities.

12 JEFFREY LAU: I think Ira just said it
13 all. I can speak that it does range as well. They're
14 all driven with this need to be an active member in
15 their community and support in the ways that they
16 know how to, right. I can't say it any better with
17 their professionalism than the way Ira just put it. I
18 was also once an instructor, and the reason why I
19 came into this field is because I know it works. My
20 mother also needed to learn English through a
21 nonprofit, and she also received these services many,
22 many years ago before I was born. I know it works.
23 You hear all these stories of why teachers want to
24 work in nonprofits, want to work with their
25 communities, and chose this field.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

3 JULIE QUINTON: I would just add put in a
4 huge plug for whatever we can do to continue to try
5 to fund and support the training programs like Ira's
6 described. Even when we're in a hiring position and
7 we want to hire bilingual folks and we want to hire
8 folks from the community, sometimes if the training
9 is not there it's really not good for the students,
10 and it's hard, I think, for programs on our own, even
11 if we want to try to create internal pipelines of
12 training to do that on top of all the other work so
13 to have an external provider who works with us
14 closely and can partner and can have folks run
15 training classes, get their feet wet in our programs,
16 it's just better for everyone concerned because not
17 everybody is being stretched too thin to do more than
18 they are best suited to do. It's like drawing from
19 people's best skills and then we're so happy to
20 receive them once they've had the training. It'll be
21 great to see that continue to grow. I'm glad you're
22 thinking about it. I think if we can pay folks,
23 there's also all the issues of pay, which means that
24 if people come into the field and they already have
25 debt from previous education or family debt, it's an

2 extremely moving and important job but if there's
3 incredible economic burdens we're trying to fight
4 that from the kind of teacher salary angle, and I
5 think that'll be longer term one of our fights as
6 well. It's been inspiring to see that get some
7 traction in Council for childcare workers. If we can
8 start to expand it to include adult literacy workers
9 longer term, we'd be thrilled. It's just we haven't
10 been able to prioritize that right now because we've
11 just been trying to save our necks every year.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I understand. You can
13 count on my support for this. This is something I've
14 bugged Ira about because just looking at my own
15 district, we haven't been able to have sustaining
16 programming and like for communities where entire
17 classrooms could be one singular community it is
18 essential for us to have educators from that
19 community to be able to speak the language of the
20 students while also being able to provide material in
21 English and the other language, and we can be
22 innovative about this. We can be experimental about
23 this so I'm looking forward to prioritizing this.

24 Bonnie, we can move on to the next panel.
25 Thank you all so much.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
3 Chair, and thank you to this whole panel for their
4 testimony. We'll be moving on to our next public
5 panel. In order, I'll be calling on Theodore Moore
6 followed by Maimouna Dieye followed by Sylvia Peng
7 followed by Jeehae Fischer followed by Kenny Minaya
8 followed by Lakshmi Sanmuganathan followed by Adama
9 Bah. Theodore Moore, you may begin your testimony as
10 soon as the Sergeant cues you.

11 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

12 THEODORE MOORE: Good, is it evening now?
13 I think it's evening. Just wanted to speak quickly on
14 some of the initiatives of the New York Immigration
15 Coalition and then ditto a lot of the work that the
16 previous panelists spoke on. My name is Theodore
17 Moore. I'm the Interim Vice President of Policy at
18 the New York Immigration Coalition. I want to say
19 that the City Council took an important step towards
20 New York City really being a true representative
21 democracy with the passage of the Our City Our Vote
22 legislation, Intro 1867, that was passed on December
23 9, 2021, and adopted on January 9, 2022. In January
24 2022, over 800,000 individuals with green cards and
25 those authorized to work will become eligible to

2 vote. Those same individuals will be able to vote
3 depending on when the first election is held in
4 January 2023. This City Council's investment in the
5 implementation of this law will be crucial to the
6 initial and future success of municipal voting in New
7 York City. Not only that, but it will serve as a
8 blueprint for other municipalities around the state
9 and around the country that are really going to be
10 following what this Council did and passed and pass
11 similar legislation. Because of these factors,
12 there's a huge need and opportunity to ensure that
13 organizations are funded sufficiently to perform
14 duties at an adequate and necessary level. Because of
15 this, the NYIC is proposing a couple things. One is
16 the creation of a 25 million dollar fund that
17 distributes to CBOs, particularly the Our City Our
18 Vote Coalition to conduct truly expansive citywide
19 voter registration, voter education, and get out the
20 vote efforts.

21 Secondly an increase in the overall
22 budgets of every city agency, department, and office
23 that will be involved in the implementation of
24 municipal voting, and that includes a 25 million
25 dollar increase to the previous budget..

2 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

3 THEODORE MOORE: To the Board of
4 Elections, a 10 percent increase to the budget of the
5 Civic Engagement Commission, Campaign Finance Board,
6 and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and a 5
7 percent increase to the previous budget of DYCD.
8 Thank you.

9 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
10 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
11 Maimouna Dieye to testify. You may begin when the
12 Sergeant cues you.

13 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

14 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: Good afternoon, Members
15 of the Immigration Committee and Council Member
16 Hanif. My name is Maimouna Dieye, Program Manager at
17 African Communities Together, also known as ACT. At
18 ACT, I lead our Community Interpreter Program and
19 supervise the development of African Language
20 Services Worker Cooperative. I am before here today
21 to discuss the importance of funding programs that
22 will help immigrant New Yorkers to receive
23 interpretation in their language at the point of
24 service. Language barriers are particularly
25 significant for communities that languages of limited

2 diffusion, LLDs. LLDs include most African languages,
3 many Asian languages, and indigenous Latin American
4 languages. Speakers of LLDs are often hard to reach
5 communities who are most disconnected from
6 immigration services and outreach. During the
7 pandemic, ACT conducted a survey to measure the
8 impact of COVID within the African community. We were
9 able to survey over 1,475 community members, and the
10 results of the question "did you receive any
11 information from the government about the coronavirus
12 or other health information or resources like
13 unemployment in your language," over 65 percent said
14 no. During the height of this life-threatening
15 pandemic where thousands of people lost their lives,
16 if no other time made language access a priority,
17 this should serve as an example as to why this is
18 extremely necessary. ACT is proud to work in
19 partnership through the Language Access
20 Collaborative, language access champions like Asian
21 American Federation, MASA, NYIC, and at the state
22 level, Empire Justice Center. Our collaborative is
23 proposing 2 critical initiatives to lower the
24 barriers for immigrants to access services. The first
25 being the creation of a community interpreter banks,

2 which is a model that the District of Columbia has
3 successfully used since 2007, and it recruits,
4 trains, and dispatches interpreters who provide
5 services free of cost to city agencies and
6 nonprofits. Second being the development of language
7 services worker-owned cooperatives, one for African
8 LLDs, one for Asian LLDs, and one for indigenous...

9 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

10 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: Latin American LLDs.

11 These will be community-based agencies that will
12 build a pipeline of trained language services
13 professionals while creating skilled employment and
14 business ownership opportunities for New York
15 immigrants. These co-ops will also help meet the
16 demand for high quality language services in the
17 courts, city agencies, educational institutions, and
18 the private sector.

19 As the city decides on the budget for the
20 coming fiscal year, we urge you all, Members of this
21 Committee, to continue in your advocacy to fund
22 language access expansion and to work with our
23 collaborative by allocating 3 million dollars to fund
24 these 2 programs which will help address the needs
25 for New York's most vulnerable populations to be able

2 to access vital city services in their language.

3 Thank you for your valuable time and consideration in
4 implementing our recommendation.

5 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
6 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
7 Sylvia Peng to testify. You may begin as soon as the
8 Sergeant cues you.

9 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

10 SYLVIA PENG: I want to thank the City
11 Council Members for giving Asian American Federation
12 the opportunity to provide testimony at this year's
13 budget hearing. I'm Sylvia Peng, and I'm the
14 Immigrant Community Navigator at the Asian American
15 Federation. AAF represents the collective voice of
16 more than 70 members nonprofits serving 1.3 million
17 Asian New Yorkers. While leading the AAF Citywide
18 Immigrant Integration Program, I worked closely with
19 our partners to provide services to low-income Asian
20 immigrants, and here's what we saw. Because of our
21 wide cultural and language diversity, our Asian
22 immigrants are often the last to know about key
23 information. Language is a central barrier to access,
24 but it is not the only barrier. Our immigrants also
25 struggle with the digital divide, financial

2 struggles, mistrust or just unfamiliarity with city
3 resources and missions, and barriers created by legal
4 statuses. During the pandemic, our immigrants
5 struggled to keep up with the changing COVID
6 policies, recovery assistance, and legal processes.
7 Technical gaps such as webinars without an in-
8 language preregistration form, applications with a
9 web portal only process, and hotlines without Asian
10 language speaking operators all can create a gap
11 within the service that's supposed to be language
12 accessible. As a result, our CBO partners became the
13 trusted center and (INAUDIBLE) stepped in to offer
14 wraparound services for legal support, food
15 insecurity, and recovery application assistance just
16 to list a few. These case management and bridge
17 services unfortunately are often invisible labor that
18 are not funded by the city, leading to bilingual
19 staff departures and burnouts. We're asking the city
20 to continue to invest in building the capacity of
21 Asian CBOs as we are one of the city's most greatest
22 asset to immigrant integration for such a diverse
23 community. We need funding so that case management
24 and outreach efforts can be fairly and sustainably
25 compensated. We're also asking similar to the other

2 panelists on this panel for the City Council to
3 commit to a community legal interpretation bank and
4 to a workers co-op...

5 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

6 SYLVIA PENG: That will help with our
7 recruiting, training, and dispatching of qualified
8 interpreters. The city also has to make sure that in
9 this budget it includes funding such that the Local
10 Law 30 is fully and consistently implemented across
11 the city agencies. Thank you very much.

12 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
13 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
14 Jeehae Fischer to testify. You may begin as soon as
15 the Sergeant cues you.

16 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

17 JEEHAE FISCHER: Aloha and good evening. I
18 would like to begin by thanking Chairperson Hanif,
19 Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to
20 testify today. My name is Eric Agarijo, and I'll be
21 speaking on behalf of Jeehae Fischer, Executive
22 Director for the Korean American Family Service
23 Center. For over 33 years, KAFSC has provided direct
24 services to immigrant survivors and their children
25 who are affected by gender-based violence, domestic

2 violence, and all forms of violence. KAFSC provides
3 comprehensive services for our clients including
4 counseling services, case management, transitional
5 housing, economic empowerment programs, after school
6 programs, and other wraparound services. All of our
7 programs and services are offered in a culturally and
8 linguistically appropriate setting which operate
9 year-round and our 24/7 bilingual hotline, emergency
10 shelter are in operation 24 hours a day, 7 days a
11 week. Our culturally sensitive and linguistically
12 appropriate crisis intervention and counseling
13 service support more than 2,500 individuals annually.
14 98 percent of our clients are immigrants, and 100
15 percent of our staff members are immigrants
16 themselves or children of immigrant background. Over
17 95 percent of our clients' first language is not
18 English and come from low-income backgrounds or live
19 under the poverty line. Many of our survivors are
20 unfortunately undocumented, uninsured, and now
21 unemployed. We have expanded and launched new
22 initiatives to meet the heightened need for domestic
23 violence case management support, mental health
24 services, academic enrichment for youth, cash
25 assistance, access to health insurance, food

2 security, and much more. Many of our survivors are
3 undocumented and excluded from accessing unemployment
4 insurance and all other income support, yet the needs
5 of the community are constantly overlooked and
6 uncared for. They lost financial means, some
7 temporarily, others permanently, resulting in a loss
8 of livelihood and unable to support themselves and
9 their children while facing the layered trauma of
10 gender-based violence and domestic violence. Many in
11 our community...

12 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

13 JEEHAE FISCHER: Let me wrap up in this
14 note. Many in our community and their loved ones have
15 contracted the virus and died while facing a spike in
16 anti-Asian violence and racism, all while receiving
17 the essential support and services they need. Without
18 financial support, our immigrant survivors can't
19 afford food, rent, basic necessities, personal
20 protective equipment and supplies, medical care, or
21 even basic living expenses, phone, internet, utility
22 bills, etc. To address these barriers and challenges,
23 KAFSC along with our partnering community-based
24 organization request that the city ensure that all
25 legislation and funding addresses the unique and

2 multilayered challenges, support our comprehensive
3 programs to the Asian American and Pacific Islander
4 community. KAFSC looks forward to working with this
5 Council, the Committee, and our community partners to
6 address the continued services for immigrant
7 survivors and their children. We thank this Council
8 and Committee for the opportunity to testify this
9 evening. Thank you.

10 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
11 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
12 Kenny Minaya to testify. You may begin as soon as the
13 Sergeant cues you.

14 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

15 KENNY MINAYA: Good evening, everyone,
16 Chair Hanif, Members of the Committee, and my
17 Colleagues who are doing all this great work across
18 the city. Thank you for your testimony. My name is
19 Kenny Minaya. I'm Director of Government Affairs at
20 Make the Road New York, and I join my Colleagues in
21 calling on the Council to hold the administration
22 accountable here and ensure that we continue to fund
23 adult literacy, increasing that baseline from 13.5
24 million to 27 million. We ask the Council to double
25 its funding for the Adult Literacy Pilot Project to 5

2 million and to continue and renew the amount
3 allocated to the Adult Literacy Initiative to the
4 tune of 4 million dollars.

5 I wanted to talk a little bit about our
6 employment legal services. There's 2 specific sources
7 of funding that we depend on as members of this
8 (INAUDIBLE) coalition to deliver such services. The
9 first is funded by HRA. That's the Low Wage Worker
10 Initiative. As of last week's hearing, March 9th,
11 where HRA testified before their Committee of
12 jurisdiction, still uncertain whether HRA is going to
13 extend that contract for fiscal year '23. That's
14 particularly for the Low Wage Worker Initiative. I
15 know Council Members Restler and Krishnan were
16 concerned about that. Would ask Members of the
17 Committee on Immigration to join us in advocating for
18 that funding to be extended. There's a Council
19 initiative of Low Wage Worker Support. Funding for
20 that initiative has been trending downward over the
21 last several fiscal years. We would love Council to
22 restore and actually increase the amount allocated
23 there to 1 million dollars. That funding goes to help
24 connect workers to employment legal services. I join
25 my Colleagues on the immigration legal services front

2 in calling for continued baseline and actually an
3 increase in the amount allocated to the Rapid
4 Response Legal Collaborative to 1 million dollars.

5 Lastly, on the health access front, we thank Council
6 for their previous support and ask that Council
7 continue its 2 million dollar allocation for the
8 Immigrant..

9 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

10 KENNY MINAYA: Health Initiative. Thank
11 you.

12 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
13 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
14 Lakshmi Sanmuganathan to testify. You may begin as
15 soon as the Sergeant cues you.

16 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

17 LAKSHMI SANMUGANATHAN: Good evening,
18 everyone. Thank you, Chairwoman Hanif and the
19 esteemed Members of the Committee on Immigration for
20 holding this important hearing and giving us the
21 opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Lakshmi
22 Sanmuganathan, and I am the Budget Policy Coordinator
23 for the Coalition for Asian American Children and
24 Families, CCF. For more than 35 years now, CCF has
25 been the nation's only pan-Asian children and

2 families advocacy organization, and we lead the fight
3 for improved and equitable policies, systems,
4 services, and funding to support our most
5 marginalized community members in need. CCF also
6 leads the 18% and Growing Campaign which brings
7 together 60 AAPI led and serving organizations across
8 all 5 boroughs of New York City to protect the needs
9 of our most vulnerable community members by fighting
10 for a fair, inclusive, and equitable New York City
11 budget. Our AAPI community in New York is heavily
12 immigrant in nature, 78 percent of AAPI New Yorkers
13 are actually foreign born. Our AAPI community is by
14 percentage the fastest growing racial population in
15 New York City. We now make up 18 percent of our
16 population. Hence, our campaign's name. Despite our
17 community's expansive growth and development, current
18 levels of public funding for the AAPI community
19 remain disproportionate to our community's needs. For
20 example, last fiscal year our organizations received
21 less than 4.7 percent of City Council funding and
22 less than 1.5 percent of social service contract
23 dollars. These past 2 years have also been an
24 extremely exceptionally painful time for our
25 community members as COVID-19 and the rise in anti-

2 Asian violence has left a devastating impact on AAPI
3 New Yorkers but also exacerbated and illuminated
4 systemic inequities that were existing in our
5 communities far before the pandemic. For example,
6 more than 1 in 4 AAPI immigrants in New York City
7 live below the poverty line, but at the start of the
8 pandemic AAPI New Yorkers also experienced the
9 largest rate of joblessness with roughly 26 percent
10 of our community being unemployed as of May 2020.
11 Asian Americans in New York City were also 2 times..

12 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

13 LAKSHMI SANMUGANATHAN: (INAUDIBLE) test
14 positive for COVID-19 compared to their white
15 counterparts. Last year, there were over 9,000
16 reported incidents of anti-Asian violence in New York
17 City, which was the highest reported rates of
18 incidents of all cities in the U.S. I'm here today to
19 call on New York City Council to enhance the AAPI
20 Community Support Initiative to provide support to
21 more than AAPI led and serving community-based
22 organizations across New York City who are providing
23 vital culturally relevant and language accessible
24 social services and programming to our community
25 members during this time when we need to recover and

2 heal and we need our community network support that
3 have been lifelines for our community members long
4 before the pandemic but especially now. Thank you to
5 the Committee, and we look forward to continuing to
6 partner together.

7 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
8 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
9 Adama Bah to testify. You may begin as soon as the
10 Sergeant cues you.

11 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

12 ADAMA BAH: Hello, everyone. My name is
13 Adama Bah. I'm here to testify as someone who's
14 formally undocumented and now supports other
15 immigrants in trying to navigate a system that's not
16 created for us. I can go on forever on many concerns
17 and issues, but I've chosen to speak on 3. That is
18 the expanding of Action NYC legal service, ID NYC,
19 and language access. Immigrants have different status
20 but trying to get legal help is truly hard. Because
21 of lack of legal assistance, immigrants are being
22 taken advantage by paid attorneys. Due to fear of
23 retaliation, immigrants are afraid to report an
24 attorney who has taken advantage and taken thousands
25 off their hands. As far as ID NYC, the program is

2 excellent, but accessing those services for some have
3 generally been hard. From getting appointments or
4 having a number of points to receive the ID NYC card,
5 the program doesn't factor into the different
6 scenarios of immigrants and how they arrived. The ID
7 NYC card needs to be expanded and enforced where it
8 can be accepted. We need to address and modify the
9 list to meet the community needs. As for language
10 access, this can be a translation which needs to be
11 addressed, English classes. ESL classes are hard to
12 register because they provide such a time restriction
13 for immigrants that work under the table in jobs that
14 don't consider or modify their hours to meet their
15 educational or individual needs. Lastly, we can talk
16 and have many discussions about immigrants and the
17 issues we face, but if individuals like myself who
18 have been traumatized, criminalized simply for
19 wanting a better life to not have a seat at the table
20 to make a better decision, we will continue to have a
21 system that fails not just us but for generations to
22 come. Immigration is not a U.S. or a New York issue.
23 It's a worldwide issue. Thank you.

24

25

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
3 much for your testimony. I'm going to now turn it to
4 Chair Hanif for any questions or comments.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much
6 for your work and advocacy. I have a question for
7 Maimouna. Could you speak a little bit more about the
8 Worker Cooperative at your organization?

9 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: Sure. Currently, African
10 Communities Together is in the incubation process of
11 creating an African language services worker
12 cooperative so we have recruited and trained workers,
13 interpreters. Initially, we help them to get tested
14 so they all needed to go through an English language
15 test...

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Did African
17 Communities Together do that or an outside entity?

18 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: African Communities did
19 that. We received the funding from WCBDI, which is
20 the Workers Cooperative Business, so we've been
21 advocating for this for so many years. When we went
22 and got that funding, we decided to show that this
23 can actually work so that's the reason why we
24 recruited members in the community who are interested
25 in creating a language worker cooperative. Last

2 summer, we got all of them to be tested in English
3 and also in the language of their choice, and
4 everybody who passed the test moved on to the second
5 stage, and those who didn't pass, we asked them to
6 retake it for a second time. They were given a second
7 chance to retake those tests. If they passed the
8 test, then they went to a 60-hour intensive training
9 with an organization that is known for training
10 professional interpreters so we have 12 people who
11 successfully passed the exam, both the language
12 testing and the 60-hour interpreter's training where
13 they learned things like professional ethics of an
14 interpreter, code of standard of being a professional
15 interpreter. Right now, we are in the process of
16 launching the interpretation program, the co-op, by
17 the summer so interpreters currently are going to
18 learn about creating cooperative business, creating
19 the bylaws, how do they manage the back office
20 management when they receive interpretation services
21 and translation services, and, then eventually after
22 the co-op launch, we'll also create a language
23 instruction for anybody who wants to learn an African
24 language, and then for new Africans, just like Adama
25 was mentioning earlier, who are new into the country

2 and can't access ESL classes due to their work
3 schedule, we will accommodate ESL classes for those
4 members as well.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really, really
6 inspiring, encouraging work. I think worker
7 cooperatives are the way to go about addressing,
8 solving, expanding language access in New York City
9 so please keep me posted about the launch. I would
10 love to be there with the Immigration Committee, and
11 I'm just really inspired by all the work that has
12 gone in to recruiting community members and getting
13 trained and ensuring the success that they pass. How
14 many African languages are covered among the 12?

15 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: We have around 10
16 languages. A lot of people are multilingual speakers
17 so just the top languages, we have French, Mandingo,
18 Wala, Fulani, Arabic, a lot of languages because a
19 lot of people will speak at least 2 or 3 languages so
20 initially we just asked them to be tested before
21 funding resources because those testing needed to be
22 paid so we covered the English testing and also one
23 additional language. If we do get funding in the
24 future, they'll be tested in other additional
25 languages because they speak those languages, and

2 we've been running a Community of Interpreter program
3 where we have over 90 people who are in that program,
4 and we have 25 or 30 languages and we receive a lot
5 of requests from organizations like TakeRoot Justice,
6 NYLAG, the schools such as Columbia asking us to
7 provide an interpreter for an African language or
8 French and Arabic.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's excellent.

10 Really excellent work. Really inspired to see how
11 thoughtful your approach has been and just a better
12 awareness for our city in serving our African
13 communities so thank you so much, really serving as
14 an example. What is the pay scale of interpreters? I
15 mean one of the biggest issues is, of course, we want
16 our city to be language accessible but oftentimes
17 language access providers are seen as volunteers and
18 unpaid or very, very low pay, but they are indeed
19 essential workers and should be making a livable wage
20 so could you speak on the pay scale?

21 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: Sure. A lot of our
22 members, when we ask them, they used to do
23 interpretation with services like Language Line, and
24 they were only getting paid 25 dollars per hour, and
25 we know Language Line gets at least 80 dollars per

2 hour from the city. Anybody who is using our
3 services, we ask them to pay their interpreter 75
4 dollars per hour, and, if it's an in-person
5 interpretation, they have to be paid a minimum of 2
6 hours and everything goes to the interpreter, all
7 that money, and for translation it's 100 dollars per
8 page, but then organizations that we have a
9 partnership such as TakeRoot Justice and I forgot the
10 other organization, because they provide immigration
11 services free for community members, for those
12 organizations, if they need interpretation, we ask
13 them to pay the interpreter 50 dollars per hour, but
14 anybody else it's 75 dollars per hour with a minimum
15 of 2 hours payment for in-person interpretation
16 service.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Excellent. Thank you
18 so much. This conversation really made me excited and
19 inspired so really looking forward to our continued
20 fight for language banks in our city.

21 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: Thank you for your
22 support.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Of course. Bonnie, we
24 can move on to the next panel.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
3 Chair, and thank you to this panel for their
4 testimony. Next, I'll be calling on the following
5 folks in order, Veronica Piedra Leon followed by
6 Ligia Guallpa followed by Nadia Marin-Molina followed
7 by Gale Johnson followed by Plinia Moray Duran
8 (phonetic) followed by Estefania Galvis followed by
9 Diana Moreno (phonetic) followed by Yesenia Mata
10 followed by Magdalena Barbosa. Veronica Piedra Leon,
11 you may begin your testimony as soon as the Sergeant
12 cues you.

13 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

14 VERONICA PIEDRA LEON: Good evening,
15 Councilwoman Hanif. It is a pleasure for us to speak
16 here at the Immigration Committee hearing. I'm the
17 Coordinator for the Day Laborer Coalition, a
18 coalition that is comprised of New Immigrant
19 Community Empowerment, Workers Justice Project, La
20 Colmena, Catholic Charities, and Northern Manhattan
21 Coalition for Immigrant Rights. We serve 100,000 day
22 laborers, and we provide key services to this
23 population. We provide job dispatching, workers'
24 rights information sessions, wage theft support,
25 referral to critical services and workforce

2 development and training. This is all done through
3 the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative. This year,
4 we're asking the City Council to increase the current
5 funding to 5.4 million dollars. This is a 1.6
6 increase, and this increase will help us to sustain
7 the work that we have done this past 2 years. Since
8 the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have not
9 closed our doors. We help provide critical services
10 that go beyond the scope of work of this initiative.
11 We provide workforce development and training to
12 construction workers through, not only the Day
13 Laborer Workforce Initiative, but through the
14 construction site safety training Training Saves
15 Lives. This training comes through Local Law 196. At
16 this point, the funding that was allocated through
17 Local Law 196 will be renewed for an additional year,
18 but, as we know, recent death of a worker, training
19 needs to continue and training needs to be provided
20 to our communities in a language of their own. We
21 need to be able to continue to provide this training
22 and provide not only construction site safety
23 training but other training that allows for workers
24 to be on the construction sites. We serve not only
25 the construction industry but other industries and

2 among these 5 organizations we have seen and touched
3 the lives of more than 100 workers...

4 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

5 VERONICA PIEDRA LEON: And their families.

6 We really ask the Members of this Committee and we
7 ask you, Council Member Hanif, to provide us with the
8 support that we need to ensure that workers, day
9 laborers, and low-income New Yorkers continue to have
10 access to the services under this initiative. Thank
11 you so much.

12 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
13 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
14 Ligia Guallpa to testify. You may begin as soon as
15 the Sergeant cues you.

16 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

17 LIGIA GUALLPA: Good afternoon, Chair
18 Woman Hanif. It's good to see you again. Thank you so
19 much for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the
20 Workers Justice Project, which is a worker
21 organization that represents day laborers, delivery
22 workers, and construction workers who are essential
23 to the city's recovery. As you all know, without
24 immigrant New Yorkers, there is no essential
25 workforce in our city, and we're here along with my

2 Colleagues to urge City Council to demonstrate its
3 commitment to protect, invest, and honor essential
4 workers, particularly day laborers, construction
5 workers, and delivery workers by investing in key
6 initiatives such as the Day Laborer Workforce
7 Initiative, but also we're asking for support for the
8 Day Laborer Worker Support Initiative, the Worker
9 Cooperative Business Development Initiative. These
10 key initiatives are the safety net that immigrant
11 essential workers have been relying as frontline
12 workers, not only during COVID but also during
13 climate change disasters, and they have been relying
14 on these key initiatives to make not only possible
15 New York City's recovery but also to have safer jobs,
16 living wage jobs, as it was mentioned by Veronica, my
17 Colleague. These initiatives at WJP have trained
18 close to 1,500 workers in construction, specifically
19 in site safety training. We connect every year more
20 than 1,000 living wage jobs to workers from Brooklyn
21 and across the city. We have connected more than
22 4,000 workers to critical services, make sure they
23 can access healthcare, legal services, and other
24 critical services that they were needing..

25 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

2 LIGIA GUALLPA: In order to recover from
3 the pandemic, and we're here again just to say we're
4 counting on your support to make sure that the city
5 continues to invest in these key initiatives and that
6 these are considered in your budget priorities. We
7 look forward to working with you. Thank you.

8 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
9 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
10 Nadia Marin-Molina to testify. You may begin as soon
11 as the Sergeant cues you.

12 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

13 NADIA MARIN-MOLINA: Thank you. Thank you
14 to the Committee on Immigration, and thank you to
15 Chair Hanif for the opportunity to testify today. My
16 name is Nadia Marin-Molina. I'm the co-Executive
17 Director of NDLO, the National Day Laborer
18 Organizing Network, and my testimony today is in
19 support of the request of the New York City Day
20 Laborer Workforce Initiative and its renewed funding
21 for 5.4 million dollars to allow them to strengthen
22 their work, include new programs, and expand their
23 training capacity, and build the power of immigrant
24 and low-income workers in New York City. We'll
25 provide more background on NDLO and day laborers in

2 our written testimony, but I wanted to highlight a
3 few key facts for the Committee about day laborers
4 and centers in New York. New York City has an
5 estimated 75 to 100 day labor corners, or paradas,
6 and the day laborer centers are reaching those
7 workers on those corners, many of them immigrants who
8 would otherwise be left out or left behind. New York
9 City has one of the only female day laborer corners
10 in the country which means organized women on a day
11 laborer corner, and the Workers Justice Project,
12 Ligia, could speak more to that work as well. Day
13 laborer centers function as both alternative
14 workforce development institutions and an important
15 form of grassroots enforcement of workers' rights and
16 improving wages. 50 percent of workers nationwide on
17 corners report that employers have stolen their wages
18 in the past 2 years, and at day laborer centers
19 that's reduced to a small percentage who pay less
20 than agreed. A study in Seattle showed that an
21 organized center is able to raise workers' wages,
22 both of workers in the center and of workers out on
23 the street corners. In addition to the core work of
24 the initiative, which has been mentioned, I would add
25 that the day laborer organizations have supported the

2 implementation of the Excluded Worker Fund, 2.1
3 billion dollars, COVID implementation and cash
4 assistance, and construction site safety training..

5 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

6 NADIA MARIN-MOLINA: Under Local Law 196.

7 The city needs to do more to protect workers, and the
8 recent death of construction worker Angel Pilataxis
9 in Brooklyn, fall from heights are preventable and
10 the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative works on that.
11 We're proud to be able to support our member
12 organizations, and we ask that City Council continue
13 the expansion and development of the Day Laborer
14 Workforce Initiative. Thank you.

15 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
16 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Gale
17 Johnson to testify. You may begin as soon as the
18 Sergeant cues you.

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

20 GALE JOHNSON: Good evening, Chairperson
21 Shahana Hanif, distinguished Members on the
22 Immigration Counsel. My name is Gale Johnson, and I'm
23 a worker at HOPE WellCare Childcare Cooperative, a
24 member of the Carroll Gardens Association, and I'm
25 here on behalf of 13 organizations which make up the

2 Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative,
3 WCBDI. Our cooperative is made up of immigrant women,
4 black and indigenous women of color from the
5 Caribbean, Latin America, and Nepal speaking 4
6 languages. Our members speak French Creole, Bengali,
7 Spanish, and, of course, English. We were founded in
8 2017, creating employment for members who support
9 families here and abroad. As immigrant women, we
10 support many New York City coalitions who are
11 fighting for health and budget justice, climate
12 change, language justice, immigrant justice, ICE
13 removal, social justice coverage for all, public
14 banks, just to name a few. We also provide much
15 needed service to a community across the whole of New
16 York City in childcare. We are grateful here to get
17 assistance from WCBDI who are also provide legal
18 support from TakeRoot Justice as well as training on
19 technology, industry training, health and safety,
20 childcare, and other coalition partners. Carroll
21 Gardens Association has been our incubator and
22 continues to support us in our daily needs. Childcare
23 is not a socially distanced service. As a result of
24 the pandemic, our immigrant community especially has
25 experienced a lot of challenges in our industry,

2 including house insecurities, income challenges,
3 accessibility, and immigrant restriction. We work in
4 solidarity with other allied organizations like
5 National Domestic Workers Alliance hand-in-hand to
6 foster better working conditions for our members. We
7 believe the city can continue to support us through
8 grants and loans and help lead immigrant cooperatives
9 in need. It is also for this reason that we also
10 support the creation of a public bank so that the
11 city can invest public dollars back into the
12 communities and small businesses. Finally, we hope
13 that the city will support education and technical
14 assistance for Community Land Trust and coverage for
15 all for all immigrant workers. Thank you so much for
16 listening.

17 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
18 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
19 Plinia Moray Duran to testify. You may begin as soon
20 as the Sergeant cues you.

21 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

22 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Okay, I'm not
23 seeing them on the call any longer so I'll move on to
24 the next panelist. Estefania Galvis, you may begin as
25 soon as the Sergeant cues you.

2 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

3 ESTEFANIA GALVIS: Hello, everyone. My
4 name is Estefania Galvis, and I am the Director of
5 Workforce Development at New Immigrant Community
6 Empowerment, NICE. We are grateful to share our
7 testimony today on behalf of our organization and the
8 millions of immigrants that live in this city and the
9 day laborers and families in New York City. We really
10 have to urge City Council to invest in the Day
11 Laborer Workforce Initiative, the Low Wage Worker
12 Support, and the Construction Site Safety Training so
13 that we can continue the work that organizations like
14 ours provide for over 15,000 immigrants per year. Day
15 laborers, especially newly arrived immigrants and
16 women, working some of the most unsafe and
17 unregulated industries. They experience rampant wage
18 theft, pervasive construction accidents, unchecked
19 workplace hazards, and lack of access to free in-
20 Spanish and culturally dignified training. This is
21 particularly true for elder workers and women who are
22 transitioning from domestic work to construction work
23 and vice versa. On day laborer corners, las paradas,
24 day laborers also lack access to shelters, water,
25 bathrooms, and basic necessities. The goal of the

2 DLWI is to work together with NICE and other job
3 centers and address these issues by connecting
4 workers to critical services providing training on
5 safety and legal rights, leading wage theft clinics,
6 facilitating access to good jobs, and, most
7 importantly, creating safe and dignified places for
8 all the day laborers looking for a job. The services
9 we provide at NICE are more essential now than ever.
10 Every year, over 7,500 workers use NICE during the
11 mornings to get jobs, and, in the last year, we have
12 dispatched over 1,200 jobs across over 100 different
13 types of jobs. Finally, in the last 2 years, our
14 membership has increased to help to 12,000 members
15 because of the pandemic. Day laborers who secure work
16 through centers like ours, like (INAUDIBLE) have said
17 it before...

18 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

19 ESTEFANIA GALVIS: Wage theft. We urge the
20 Council to renew and expand the Day Laborer Workforce
21 Initiative coalition budget for the fiscal year '23
22 to 5.4 million to increase the access to workforce
23 development and training opportunities for day
24 laborer centers and low-income New Yorkers. We also
25 urge the Council to renew and expand the Site Safety

2 Training funding under the Local Law 196. It is more
3 than important than ever that New York City protects
4 immigrants and that we do everything that we do
5 everything that we can to help them get the services
6 that they need and they deserve. Thank you so much
7 for your time.

8 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
9 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
10 Diana Moreno to testify. You may begin as soon as the
11 Sergeant cues you.

12 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

13 ESTEFANIA GALVIS: I will be the person
14 doing the testimony for New Immigrant Community
15 Empowerment (INAUDIBLE) EG sends her hello and let's
16 keep up the fight and get everyone to speak their
17 voices.

18 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
19 much. I'd like to now welcome Yesenia Mata to
20 testify. You may begin as soon as the Sergeant cues
21 you.

22 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

23 YESENIA MATA: My name is Yesenia Mata. I
24 am the Executive Director of La Colmena, a day
25 laborer and immigrant rights organization based in

2 Staten Island and form part of the Day Laborer
3 Coalition. I want to thank Chairwoman Hanif and the
4 rest of the Committee Members for holding this
5 important hearing. Due to the timeframe, I won't be
6 able to highlight all of the work that we have done,
7 but I do want to emphasize that our work saved lives
8 during the pandemic. We provided Staten Islanders
9 with food, COVID vaccine, PPE, and were part of the
10 MOIA cash distribution. La Colmena was the only
11 center on Staten Island that was open since the
12 beginning of the pandemic. We never closed our doors
13 because day laborer centers are among the first to
14 respond to emergencies. We were the first during
15 Hurricane Sandy, and we were among the first to
16 respond to the pandemic, and this is exactly what the
17 Day Laborer Coalition has done, but now it seems as
18 if the Coalition's work is being forgotten. I say
19 this because I'm here today to share with you what is
20 presently happening with our city contracts. For
21 example, La Colmena's contracts are still pending to
22 be registered despite us submitting all of the
23 necessary paperwork. La Colmena along with my
24 Colleagues here today are wondering if we will get
25 reimbursed. La Colmena has accrued over 500,000 to

2 date, and we have yet to be able to invoice for work
3 provided. Given the present circumstances, we have
4 had to cut down some of our programming, and we don't
5 know how long we can keep our doors open. We have
6 been able to keep our center running in the meantime
7 thanks to our supporters. La Colmena and the Day
8 Laborer Coalition, we just want to continue
9 supporting the immigrant worker, and I do have faith
10 that you will look into this and continue funding us
11 because I have seen the work that you all have done.
12 We are here to work with the City Council to push not
13 just for La Colmena's city contracts to be registered
14 but for other organizations as well that are going
15 through this. An open and equitable New York City
16 should not leave behind those organizations like ours
17 that were literally on the frontlines of the war
18 against COVID. I repeat, we cannot forget about
19 essential immigrant workers. Thank you for your time.

20 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
21 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
22 Magdalena Barbosa to testify. You may begin as soon
23 as the Sergeant cues you.

24 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

2 MAGDALENA BARBOSA: My name is Alice
3 Davis, and I am a Supervising Attorney at Catholic
4 Migration Services. I'm presenting this testimony on
5 behalf of our Director of Legal Services, Magdalena
6 Barbosa. Catholic Migration Services is a nonprofit
7 legal services organization with offices in downtown
8 Brooklyn and Queens. We represent immigrants in all 5
9 boroughs. I am specifically submitting this testimony
10 on behalf of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment
11 Collaborative, otherwise known as CILEC, and this in
12 support of the renewal of the Low Wage Worker
13 Initiative funding. This is the only funding from the
14 city that is specifically dedicated to employment
15 related legal services, to assist low wage and
16 immigrant workers. We're also submitting this in
17 support of the Low Wage Workers Support for Community
18 Outreach and Community Organizing from our partner
19 organizations. Catholic Migration Services is part of
20 CILEC, which is a collaborative of several legal
21 services organizations and community-based
22 organizations to provide quality legal services,
23 community outreach, and case management for low-
24 income immigrant workers. Since fiscal year 2019, the
25 budget has included 2 million for the Low Wage Worker

2 Initiative and an additional 500,000 for the Low Wage
3 Worker Support. We are strongly urging the City
4 Council to continue to demonstrate its commitment to
5 New York City's most vulnerable workers including
6 undocumented immigrants who work in some of the most
7 dangerous and low-paying jobs in the city. At the
8 outset of the pandemic 2 years ago, CILEC represented
9 over 1,660 low-wage workers in legal actions and have
10 helped to obtain over 9 million dollars in
11 settlements and judgements. This is particularly
12 relevant for many of the workers who were excluded
13 from unemployment insurance who were able to have a
14 safety net during a very precarious economic time.
15 Groups like Catholic Migration Services have provided
16 support to workers in not just receiving pandemic-
17 related emergent legal services needs such as paid
18 sick leave and access to the...

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

20 MAGDALENA BARBOSA: Workers Fund but also
21 helping them identify previous wage theft violations
22 and assisting them in collecting money for those
23 violations. Catholic Migration Services and the CILEC
24 consortium urge the Council to demonstrate its
25 commitment to these workers by ensuring the renewal

2 of the Low Wage Worker Initiative and the Low Wage
3 Worker Support. Thank you.

4 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
5 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Alba
6 Lucera Villa to testify. You may begin as soon as the
7 Sergeant cues you.

8 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

9 ALBA LUCERA VILLA: Hello. Good evening.
10 Thank you, Chair Hanif and the rest of the Members of
11 the City Council for listening to our testimony. My
12 name is Alba Lucera Villa. I am the Executive
13 Director of the Coalition for Immigrant Freedom, also
14 known as Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant
15 Rights. This year, the coalition is celebrating its
16 40th year, and, at 40 years, the organization has
17 been serving thousands of New Yorkers every year. As
18 a highlight and respected cornerstone of the
19 community, we provide exceptional legal services,
20 adult literacy programming, and worker-center
21 services to New Yorkers. Most of the individuals who
22 we serve are low-income New Yorkers hailing from the
23 Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle
24 East. Some come from generations of New Yorkers, many
25 have lived here for decades, and others are recent

2 immigrants. Regardless of whether they're LPRs, U.S.
3 Citizens, or refugees, asylees, or have yet attained
4 status, they are New Yorkers. Many, however, do not
5 feel they can access traditional avenues for help due
6 to lack of language access, fear, or many other
7 barriers. Our organization is often the first place
8 they come to ask for help, be it for legal assistance
9 or for basic social services, and we take that very
10 seriously by making sure that we follow a holistic
11 delivery of service model like my partner
12 organizations that have testified before me. What
13 this means in practice is that we look beyond just
14 the initial legal matter that brought someone in or
15 the unemployment that's brought someone in, and we
16 try to complement that with the legal services we
17 offer in addition to the workforce development, adult
18 literacy, and civics education, mental health
19 screenings, and direct job placements. We can do this
20 in large part because of City Council funding for
21 adult literacy, construction site safety, (INAUDIBLE)
22 and the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative. Under the
23 latter, we opened Manhattan's only worker center, a
24 fully operating center with space for workers to
25 meet, hiring hall, a cadre of organizers, teachers,

2 and lawyers who are all committed to dispatching and
3 training workers, fighting wage theft and abuse, and
4 building our local economy.

5 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

6 ALBA LUCERA VILLA: In FY-21, we've served
7 over 1,500 workers, surpassing all deliverables,
8 meeting all trainer goals, and we dispatched this
9 year already 599 workers with months remaining. We
10 did this despite reimbursement delays and delays in
11 contract registration, which we have not been paid
12 for some deliverables from last year. As we know, the
13 COVID-19 pandemic exposed many systemic failures and
14 highlighted the disparity in communities of color and
15 we met those challenges along with the worker centers
16 that previously testified. I really urge City Council
17 to allow us to continue being a lifeline to our
18 community and acknowledge that community-based
19 organizations are a key partner in the idea of
20 building back better so we need more resources, not
21 less, to be able to serve our communities and all the
22 communities of color in New York. Thank you.

23 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
24 much for your testimony. I'm going to now turn it to
25 Chair Hanif for any questions or comments.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, and
3 thank you all for testifying this evening, and big
4 thanks to Yesenia for just naming the egregious
5 issues around the city's contracting process. I'll
6 absolutely be looking into this, and we'll be doing a
7 followup just to learn a little bit more about what's
8 been going on. I absolutely empathize and understand
9 that you all have been lifelines to our communities.

10 I want to dig a little deeper into the
11 plight and conditions of women workers, women day
12 laborers, and women domestic workers. Gale, really
13 good to see you here. Please extend my love to Ben.
14 Carroll Gardens Association is in the 39th and really
15 love the work that you all have been doing to
16 organize domestic workers on the advocacy level and
17 on the ground in Carroll Gardens and Cobble Hill so
18 thank you and really good to see you.

19 I see Ligia's hand go up. Ligia, if you
20 could just start us off.

21 LIGIA GUALLPA: I just want to remind, New
22 York City actually is the home of also women day
23 laborers. WJP actually runs the first women day
24 laborers hiring hall in the city that is actually run
25 out of Brooklyn near the only women day laborer

2 corner in the country. The reality is that women,
3 especially those that are working in domestic work,
4 also construction, have been struggling not only with
5 low pay jobs, unsafe working conditions, but actually
6 are struggling the hardest because they're not just
7 workers, but they're mothers, they had to become
8 teachers so one of the biggest struggles has been job
9 stability and how to have job flexibility, and most
10 workers, especially women day laborers, have been
11 relying on day labor centers like ours not only
12 because they're able to access better wages because
13 the ability to get more job flexibility and a lot of
14 day labor work that they do offers the ability to
15 have that job flexibility so they can take care of
16 the kids. Now that their kids are moving back to
17 schools, they still need to be able to figure out how
18 they are able to take care of their families.

19 Discrimination is one of the biggest issues as they
20 enter in the construction industry. We're so glad to
21 actually get the first contract of Cleanup Corps that
22 will put, at least for WJP and I know for La Colmena
23 and many others, a great cohort of women into male-
24 dominated industries like construction and, for WJP,
25 also more women entering even into delivery work,

2 making these jobs not only safe jobs, better paid
3 jobs, but also jobs that women are able to access and
4 in more dignified way.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. If we could
6 unmute, okay, I see Alba is unmuted. Go ahead.

7 ALBA LUCERA VILLA: Yes, I wanted to share
8 a little bit about a screening that we implemented
9 because we saw such a mental health need in the
10 workers we were serving, in the clients we were
11 serving. We had some small funds from a foundation to
12 put together a mental health screening and had a
13 part-time mental health coordinator who triaged that
14 and then referred folks, and in the first 2 months
15 that we implemented it in the late fall, 214 clients
16 were screened, mostly women. Out of those, 63
17 screened positive for either domestic violence or
18 mental health related needs. Because of the one
19 person we had, we were able to really properly refer
20 to appropriate services, and now everyone that comes
21 in through our doors gets that screening. We ran out
22 of that small funding and, fortunately, last week got
23 some (INAUDIBLE) money to be able to continue it and
24 so we're really trying to meet those needs. It's been
25 rampant. I think in the past we used to survey our

2 community members and more than 50 percent had
3 domestic violence or knew someone close to them that
4 had, and that jumped to 75 percent during the
5 pandemic so the need is really out there. I know that
6 right now our worker center has an influx of women.
7 Our ability to offer English classes remotely has
8 opened doors for women. I've been in touch with the
9 Office of Gender-Based Bias because now, in addition
10 to the general wage theft and everything that we see,
11 we're also seeing actual trafficking and need to pull
12 in from all sorts of resources so we've been
13 partnering up with different city agencies. I think
14 that's something that we all can relate to, that we
15 may do 1 or 2 or a couple things primarily, but we
16 end up doing it all because you know that once that
17 person is in your office telling you their stories,
18 they may not go somewhere else and so you really want
19 to reel in that trust and deliver because if you
20 don't deliver and you don't connect them to the right
21 resources, they're just going to feel like one more
22 person failed them.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Yesenia.

24 YESENIA MATA: Thank you, again,

25 Chairwoman Hanif, for allowing us the opportunity to

2 advocate for our organizations. While I indicated
3 even though we still have not been able to get
4 reimbursed because none of our contracts are
5 registered and it doesn't allow us to invoice, we
6 still understand the duty that we have as day laborer
7 centers to the immigrant worker. We still have
8 started the initiative Cleanup Corps, and, as Ligia
9 mentioned, this initiative also allows women to
10 partake in a male-leading sector. For example, in the
11 Cleanup Corps, it's through La Colmena, majority of
12 the participants are women. There's 34 participants,
13 and more than, I would like to say 2/3 are women. If
14 you actually look at our Twitter, you will see how
15 all of them are always cheering on and cleaning up
16 the parks and it's beautiful. It's a beautiful
17 initiative, and this is the reason how despite we're
18 not getting reimbursed or are able to invoice, again,
19 we understand the duty that we have to the immigrant
20 worker and this includes women. If you really look at
21 the initiative, it's actually women led. We have Eds
22 in this area that was predominantly led by men, and
23 now it's being led by women and through the Cleanup
24 Corps, but as well through our census, you are able
25 to see that there are many women who are now going to

2 our centers because they also see women leading in
3 these positions that are predominantly led by males
4 and this is why I really appreciate you giving us
5 this opportunity to advocate because we want to
6 continue having our centers open because we know the
7 opportunities that it provides to the immigrant
8 worker, including women.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, and
10 I absolutely see it in this panel. It's been powerful
11 to see you all lead in these organizations in these
12 positions and advocating. The city is one that must
13 be feminist, and, as we work towards more dignified
14 positions for women in the sectors of domestic work
15 and construction work, it is just absolutely
16 essential that women lead the work. Thank you just
17 for your work and would really love an opportunity to
18 meet the workers as a followup, particularly women
19 workers as a followup, and we can organize that soon.

20 Could we hear from Estefania and then
21 Veronica?

22 ESTEFANIA GALVIS: I have the perfect
23 opportunity for you to come see women. On the 25th,
24 we are graduating our third class of Women in
25 Apprenticeship from NICE that we have used this money

2 we don't have to create because that's the ongoing
3 theme. We have tried this very successful program
4 we're building that has to do with sisterhood,
5 elevating women, creating spaces just for women, also
6 it being in construction, them having training and at
7 the same time hands-on practice and the practice has
8 been supporting the communities that were affected by
9 the hurricane last year so we have gone full circle.
10 We are giving stipends, and we're giving undocumented
11 women that are recently arrived in the country, and
12 they are getting to learn and do the job while
13 they're helping their communities that are the most
14 affected in New York City. That is the vision. The
15 vision is that we have the power to do all of the
16 things, like we deserve all of the things. We know
17 how to do it. As someone that was a construction
18 worker and as a stagehand and the first day at work
19 someone was like why don't you go look for that tool
20 in your purse. I cannot imagine what other people
21 that probably have even more difficulty with their
22 language barriers can go through. I do think that as
23 you said and I see it with all the (INAUDIBLE) the
24 thing is it's not a matter of we don't know what to
25 do or how to do it, it's a matter of we need the

2 funding to be able to do it and we need this
3 administration to see the importance of that. The
4 relationship is women are being beat up, took from
5 their homes, taken away from their children, and at
6 the same time they have to go pay 800 dollars to be
7 able to become a caregiver but they also don't know
8 if the person that they're paying the 800 dollars to
9 be a caregiver is actually the right person that they
10 can do that from and vice versa with other types of
11 safety precautions that are so important because the
12 safety courses are just good for them to stay with
13 themselves, their communities, and their workplace so
14 it all really comes together, and I invite all of you
15 to come. Today was our first day of our third cohort.
16 We will be in Elmhurst tomorrow, and next Friday we
17 will be having our graduation, and we welcome all of
18 you to come next Friday to NICE if you'd love to
19 come.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that.
21 Veronica.

22 VERONICA PIEDRA LEON: I just wanted to
23 say, Council Member Hanif, that the work that the day
24 laborer centers are doing, this is our 7th year,
25 we're asking for funding on the 7th of our

2 initiative, and, as you can see, this is a women-led
3 initiative where we are transforming the lives of not
4 only day laborers but really women, women who have
5 been at the forefront of this pandemic, who have been
6 elevating New York City, who are at the core of what
7 the work that we do which is provide opportunities
8 for day laborers and low income workers to really
9 learn skills and do it in a way that is safe and that
10 it provides them the flexibility that they need to
11 really work and at the same time manage their
12 families. You have a lot of women who need childcare,
13 who need the resources to sustain their families, who
14 are single mothers, and these are the populations
15 that we serve so we really want to invite you to come
16 and visit our centers to see the diversity that
17 exists within each of the centers. We have 11 day
18 laborer centers currently operating, and we continue
19 to expand, and this year is more important than ever
20 because it means that we are strengthening the growth
21 of our organizations and we continue to do the work
22 and the opportunity to carry on through Cleanup Corps
23 and all the initiatives that support the work that we
24 do so we want to thank you so much for this space.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. No, thank
3 you, Veronica, for lifting that up so powerfully. I'd
4 like to now just call on Gale who I know would like
5 to read on behalf of another Colleague, but, but
6 before you go, I just wanted to affirm my own
7 commitments to public banking and community land
8 trusts and coverage for all so thank you for
9 including that in your testimony.

10 GALE JOHNSON: Thank you so much, Chair,
11 and thank you so much for this opportunity. This
12 testimony is from Ruth Lopez. She is a worker owner
13 for a cooperative called Pa'Lante Green Cleaners. I'm
14 reading her statement. We offer cleaning services to
15 offices, apartments, houses, and we do cleaning on
16 post-construction. We were created in 2014 as a
17 solution to a lack of jobs in the city with living
18 wages that will allow us to survive in the city and
19 to help the families in our country. Like my
20 cooperative, there are a number of cooperatives in
21 New York City with different economic activities for
22 cleaning, support for elderly, childcare, dog care,
23 and a lot more service that helps the economic growth
24 of the city. The cooperatives have been able to
25 improve the lives of many immigrants and improve

2 unemployment rates in the city. However, the pandemic
3 as with a large number of small businesses reeked
4 havoc on most of the cooperatives. Some failed to
5 survive and closed their doors. Others, mine, are
6 suffering the economic consequences of the pandemic.
7 That is why today I want to tell you that we need
8 your support. We need you to put your eyes on this
9 type of business that undoubtedly helps the
10 prosperity of all. I believe that the future of the
11 economy could be cooperative to achieve a better
12 world with equality, justice, and fair economic
13 growth for the hardworking owners of the cooperatives
14 and for the economic growth in the city of New York.
15 If my cooperative grows, if you support us, we will
16 have many more immigrants who can join these
17 businesses. We will have a happier and more committed
18 workforce...

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

20 GALE JOHNSON: New York City a leg up in
21 the economic growth. Your support, your commitment to
22 the cooperatives is necessary and urgent to continue
23 the growth and not to be just another number in the
24 statistic of small business that disappears as a

2 result of the pandemic due to lack of support. I'm
3 confident that we can count on you. Thank you.

4 Thank you for the opportunity to read for
5 Ruth, and I will deliver your message to Ben. Thank
6 you so much for all that you have done, Councilwoman,
7 and we appreciate you greatly. Thanks.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. No more
9 questions for this panel, Bonnie. We can move on.

10 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
11 Chair, and thank you to this panel for all your
12 testimony. We'll now be moving on to our final public
13 panel. Thank you, again, everyone for your patience.
14 In order, I'll be calling on Zara Nazir followed by
15 Dania Darwish followed by Dmitri Daniel Glinski
16 followed by Alexi Shalom followed by Yasmin Hassan.
17 Zara Nazir, you may begin your testimony as soon as
18 the Sergeant cues you.

19 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

20 ZARA NAZIR: Hi. Good afternoon, Chair
21 Hanif. Good to see you. Wishing you a good recovery.
22 My name is Zara Nazir. I use she/they pronouns. I'm
23 here for the New York City Antiviolence Project where
24 I'm a Deputy Director, and we appreciate the
25 Council's past support of our work with immigrant

2 LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of violence. During
3 times of crisis, political and economic instability,
4 and many forms of violence increase. Right now, AVP's
5 work is more important than ever. AVP is the only
6 LGBTQ specific victim services agency in the city. We
7 operate an English/Spanish bilingual 24/7 hotline and
8 provide legal services, counseling, community
9 organizing, and advocacy. All of our services are
10 free and confidential and currently offered in a
11 remote and in-person hybrid. We work with community
12 members who are also among the most marginalized and
13 vulnerable in this city and who have become more so
14 during the pandemic including LGBTQ and HIV-affected
15 immigrant survivors of violence who are facing
16 economic and housing insecurity, the devastation of
17 the pandemic, and, in some communities, increased
18 threats of hate violence and other forms of violence.
19 Currently, we have 122 open immigration cases that
20 includes full representation for U non-immigrant
21 status, U-Visa, (INAUDIBLE) petition, asylum, work
22 authorization, and adjustment of status for immigrant
23 clients. In addition to these matters, we also
24 provide holistic legal care for multiple needs that
25 may arise. This includes legal name change,

2 advocating for their behalf in criminal court when
3 they are complaining against a witness involved in
4 intimate partner violence or hate violence,
5 petitioning for a family court order of protection,
6 housing and tenant issues, public benefits,
7 employment discrimination, and more.

8 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

9 ZARA NAZIR: To continue and better
10 support survivors of violence, AVP is seeking a
11 restoration of funding for the Council Initiative for
12 Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence and the
13 Legal Services for the Working Poor Initiative. We
14 appreciate past support and look forward to working
15 with you. Thank you.

16 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
17 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
18 Dania Darwish to testify. You may begin as soon as
19 the Sergeant cues you.

20 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

21 DANIA DARWISH: Thank you, Chair Hanif and
22 to the Committee. My name is Dania Darwish. I am the
23 Executive Director of the Asiyah Women's Center. The
24 Asiyah Women's Center is a survivor-led gender
25 justice advocacy organization that shelters survivors

2 of color, particularly from the AMEMSA and black,
3 indigenous, people of color population. I want to
4 talk today about domestic violence and immigrants.
5 There is absolutely no pleasant way to say this, but
6 domestic violence survivors are falling through the
7 cracks across the board in this city. Many shelters
8 across the city are asking survivors for IDs, and
9 that terrifies domestic violence survivors that are
10 undocumented and there are rumors that the city would
11 report them to ICE. Whether that is or is not true,
12 undocumented folks cannot access several types of
13 food stamps and other essential services that would
14 help them become independent of an abuser. Last
15 night, I picked up a survivor from a major hospital.
16 Major hospitals, by the way, report domestic violence
17 cases to us and so does Safe Horizons, so do Family
18 Justice Centers. They are places that call us when
19 there is no other type of service to take them in,
20 and I picked up a woman that was beaten by 5 family
21 members, undocumented, could not call on anyone else
22 for help. Her ex had threatened to put her in jail
23 because she was undocumented, and on Valentine's Day
24 alone we had 47 cases, 5 of them being from major
25 hospitals that called us. Post-COVID, we're looking

2 at an increase of 3 times. The amount of clients that
3 we have had lately is startling and it is beyond our
4 capacity, and that is why we are in dire need of City
5 Council funding to...

6 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

7 DANIA DARWISH: With being able to handle
8 the capacity that is critical to the wellness of
9 survivors of domestic violence and that is why the
10 Asiyah Women's Center is seeking City Council funding
11 to continue mental health and shelter programming for
12 domestic violence survivors, and we're requesting a
13 total of 600,000 dollars. Thank you so much.

14 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
15 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
16 Dmitri Daniel Glinski to testify. You may begin as
17 soon as the Sergeant cues you.

18 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

19 DMITRI DANIEL GLINSKI: Thank you, Chair
20 Hanif, for this opportunity to address such an
21 informative hearing. I am Dmitri Glinski, leader of
22 the Russian-Speaking Community Council founded in
23 2011 by and for our immigrants, especially exiles
24 from dictatorships and refugees from conflict areas.
25 We were the first to bring Ukrainian and Russian

2 Americans together for anti-hate dialogue and
3 collaboration on advocacy in response to the first
4 invasion of Ukraine 8 years before the current one.
5 For a decade, we have provided educational events,
6 advocacy from New York to D.C. for our nationwide
7 project, organizing translations into Russian and
8 Ukrainian, at times other services, almost all of it
9 pro bono. We haven't had city funding after a few
10 discretionary contracts for which we stopped applying
11 for lack of operating support to manage them and to
12 grow. This funding disadvantage is shared by Russian
13 and Ukrainian immigrant-led CBOs. Just for example,
14 the Council discretionary award tracker will show you
15 just one Ukrainian and one Russian group cleared for
16 the grants every year, each for about 5,000 dollars
17 only. My message is not about specific budget items,
18 but a call to acknowledge and begin addressing
19 systemic issues. Refugees and exiles from entire
20 regions ravaged by dictatorships and war whose own
21 institutions have no public funds to employ their
22 community professionals and are run by full-time
23 volunteers while the oligarchs from whom they fled
24 have wielded influence here in New York affecting
25 community services through private sector lobbying,

2 dark campaign money, some large philanthropists where
3 they have laundered their funds and reputations and
4 even in local government where their business
5 partners have held jobs. I'd like to commend our
6 Mayor and Commissioner for their early advocacy for
7 Ukrainians. I urge them to provide in the range of
8 1.5 million dollars for services to the Ukrainians
9 eligible for TPS and the refugees that will be
10 coming. We urge MOIA and others to advocate for a
11 substantial increase of the Regional Refugee
12 (INAUDIBLE) and for relief for the growing number of
13 Russian and Belarussian dissenters fleeing from
14 persecution...

15 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

16 DMITRI DANIEL GLINSKI: All of them are in
17 great need for more language access but much more so
18 for cultural competency that our government would
19 gain by hiring more professionals from these
20 backgrounds. We ask each of you to help our
21 government and philanthropy start engaging with the
22 unprivileged in our community and their own agencies
23 to address these issues. Thank you for your
24 attention.

2 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
3 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
4 Alexi Shalom testify. You may begin as soon as the
5 Sergeant cues you.

6 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

7 ALEXI SHALOM: Good evening. My name is
8 Alexi Shalom, and I am a representative of United
9 Auto Workers Local 2325. UAW Local 2325 is a labor
10 union representing almost 3,000 advocates in New York
11 City who fight every day to make New York City a more
12 just place. We are proud to represent the employees
13 of many of the service providers testifying here
14 today who carry out the programs and initiatives
15 being discussed. Among our members are the staff of
16 New Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE, who
17 provide support services and organizing resources to
18 day laborers and recently arrived immigrants in New
19 York City. Throughout the pandemic, our members at
20 NICE have been at the frontlines in delivering relief
21 and support to the most affected communities in our
22 city. UAW Local 2325 urges the Council to invest in
23 the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative, Construction
24 Site Safety Training, Low Wage Worker Support, Adult
25 Literacy Initiative, and NYC Care to continue the

work that organizations like NICE provide to over 10,000 immigrant workers per year. Our members are extremely proud of the work that they do and thankful to the Council for giving them the opportunity to serve the people through these crucial programs. Day laborers and recently arrived immigrants work in some of the most dangerous and precarious industries. Most of these workers experience wage theft, suffer accidents in the workplace, labor exploitation, discrimination, and threats and lack of access. The goal of the DLWI is to work together with NICE and address these issues by connecting workers to critical services, providing training on safety and legal rights, and dignified spaces for day laborers looking for a job. The services our members provide at the NICE Center for Workers are more essential now than ever before. Last year, the NICE Center for Workers referred approximately 1,500 people to critical services including health clinics, legal aid, and financial services. Crucially, NICE also offered these services in Spanish and in a space where their members feel safe and empowered. Our union strongly urges the Council to invest in and

2 expand the DLWI and the other initiatives mentioned.

3 Thank you so much.

4 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
5 much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
6 Yasmin Hassan to testify. You may begin as soon as
7 the Sergeant cues you.

8 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

9 YASMIN HASSAN: Good evening, everyone. My
10 name is Yasmin Hassan. I also go by Yasin Hassan. I'm
11 an Immigration Case Manager working at the Yemeni
12 American Merchants Association, also known as YAMA.
13 YAMA is a grassroots non-profit social services
14 organization founded in 2017. Our mission is to
15 educate and elevate Yemeni American merchants and
16 their families through education, civil rights
17 advocacy, business, social services support, and
18 immigration support. Based in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn,
19 New York, we seek to advocate and advance policies
20 that support New York City's estimated 6,000 Yemeni
21 American bodega owners and their families. We are
22 here today as an organization serving Yemeni American
23 immigrants to speak on the lack of funding for
24 immigration services, not only for YAMA but all
25 across New York City. The work that YAMA's

2 immigration program currently does entails
3 citizenship applications, green card, TPS, DACA,
4 immediate family and spouse petitions, travel
5 documents, work permits, and advocacy work with
6 Congressional and City Council representatives. Now
7 more than ever, YAMA needs to see additional funding
8 allocated all across the board to orgs that aid in
9 deportation proceedings, that offer advocacy efforts
10 for delayed cases with extreme life or death
11 hardships as well as for interpreters that speak a
12 wide range of Arabic dialects, namely the Yemeni
13 dialect. Sadly, many organizations currently do not
14 have the capacity to advocate on deportation cases.
15 We'd like to see more funding provided to New York
16 Immigrant Family Unit Project to ensure more clients
17 can be serviced, needing emergency representation
18 upon receiving an NTA. It can be heartbreaking not
19 finding enough organizations to refer clients out to.
20 The Cultural Immigration Initiative has been very
21 successful with large organizations offering cultural
22 programming that have the capacity to complete the
23 difficult DCLA application and contract requirements.
24 We ask that the city simplify the DCLA contracting
25 procedures to allow more organizations to benefit.

2 YAMA urges the Committee to continue to keep small
3 organizations like ours in mind. YAMA represents a
4 community that is often under-represented. Thank you,
5 again, and thank you to all that attended the
6 Committee hearing today and hear what YAMA had to
7 say.

8 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
9 much for your testimony. I will now turn it to Chair
10 Hanif for any questions or comments.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much.
12 Really glad to see my friend, Dania Darwish, one of,
13 if not, the first resident at Asiyah was from the
14 39th District, and I remember when Asiyah had just
15 cut their ribbons and weren't fully prepared to take
16 in anybody and I had been scrambling to figure out
17 how to provide housing at a very late hour of the
18 night and seeking refuge for a very young Muslim
19 immigrant woman who was in a forced marriage and so
20 the work that Dania has done has really helped shape
21 and elevate the needs of Muslim women in particular
22 and Muslim immigrant women in particular, young
23 Muslim undocumented women, and so I'd love, Dania,
24 for you to just expand on how it's been providing
25 refuge and safety to undocumented women and if you

2 could speak to the sort of age bracket of survivors
3 who are undocumented and how else Asiyah has built in
4 services to accommodate undocumented survivors.

5 DANIA DARWISH: Absolutely. Council Member
6 Hanif, it's been so nice to be on this panel with
7 you. I've seen you do community-based work and to see
8 you do community-based work from that point to now
9 being a City Council Member, I'm so incredibly proud
10 of you and honored to be on this panel with you
11 today. The client that we had just yesterday, we
12 picked her up from a major hospital, I picked her up
13 myself. I'm the Executive Director, and I'm balancing
14 between budgets and making sure that clients are
15 okay, but we don't have a social worker on staff that
16 I can pay yet at night to do the work where they can
17 pick up a hospital worker themselves and I cannot
18 reasonably be okay with knowing that there's someone
19 who is undocumented who is an immigrant in our city
20 who's been beaten by 5 different family members and
21 is now in the emergency department, knowing that that
22 exists, I cannot reasonably be able to sleep at night
23 from this so I'm the one doing that and so this is
24 why City Council funding is so critical for us
25 because, personally, I'm incredibly burnt out from

2 this work. The client that we picked up that's
3 undocumented, she will now be able to access food.
4 She's not eligible for food stamps, but we have a
5 full food pantry here at the Asiyah Women's Center.
6 She came with just the clothes on her back that were
7 very dirty and that her husband did not let her go
8 into a laundry mat and clean herself and so we were
9 able to give her clothing. We helped her obtain an
10 order of protection against him and the entire
11 family. We got her connected to a therapist. We have
12 volunteers who volunteer as like a buddy system who
13 become their friends and we have this job referral
14 program. As you know, a lot of undocumented folks
15 cannot, they don't have a Social Security card number
16 and they don't have a way to make money on the books
17 so we have an extensive job referral network program
18 where we've reached out to many businesses that will
19 pay undocumented workers off the books, and so she
20 will have a few interviews lined up by next week,
21 but, as I said, on Valentine's Day alone 47 clients
22 came to us. On the day of love where people are
23 supposed to be celebrating love, 47 clients came to
24 us, 5 from major hospitals, emergency departments
25 across the city, and from places like Safe Horizons

2 and from places like the Family Justice Center
3 referring clients to us. With regards to the ages
4 that we serve, we have people that are not even born
5 yet that we're serving at the Asiyah Women's Center.
6 Since I've opened up the shelter, I have been in the
7 Labor and Delivery Unit, and I've watched 5 different
8 women give birth. One gave birth to twins. We've had
9 women who are 75 walk in our shelter. I had this one
10 client, she walked in and she thanked me. She was
11 like this is the first place I have been able to feel
12 safe in years, and she started to call me mom. That,
13 as like a 29-year-old, was something that was just so
14 humbling, and it's very clear that immigrant women
15 are falling through the cracks. There's a lot of
16 discourse and bureaucracy and programs where English
17 language this and that, but where's the shelter,
18 where's the place where undocumented women can go to
19 in their time of need and so this is what our center
20 serves and we need to expand our programming and
21 services so that no woman is on our waitlist and that
22 every woman has a place to go at her greatest time of
23 need.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Dania.

25 Thanks for doing the work that cannot be solved with

2 legislation alone nor expansion in budgets in our
3 communities of leading the cultural revolution, the
4 cultural torch to destigmatize the conversations
5 around domestic violence. As someone who's been in
6 the anti-DV world, it is up to us to be having these
7 conversations with our communities and so just thank
8 you for the work that you're doing, and I really,
9 really hope and encourage that you rest when you can.

10 Dmitri, I would love to connect with you
11 as a followup. Thank you for your work and,
12 especially at this time, would really love for this
13 Committee to work with you around supporting
14 Ukrainian refugees in the city.

15 DMITRI DANIEL GLINSKI: Thank you. I am
16 also looking forward too. Let's connect. Absolutely.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Appreciate it. No more
18 questions for this panel.

19 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
20 Chair, and I see that we have one final panelist
21 present so I'm going to welcome Mon Yuck Yu to
22 testify next. You may begin as soon as the Sergeant
23 cues you.

24 SERGEANT HOPE: Time starts now.

2 MON YUCK YU: Good evening. My name is Mon
3 Yuck Yu, Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff
4 at the Academy of Medical and Public Health Services,
5 or AMPS. Thank you, Chair Hanif, for the opportunity
6 to testify. AMPS is a not-for-profit healthcare
7 organization in Sunset Park that helps to bridge the
8 health equity gap among communities of color by
9 providing free clinical screenings and bilingual
10 mental health therapy integrated with individualized
11 health education (INAUDIBLE) services to immigrant
12 populations in New York City free of cost and
13 regardless of immigration status, working primarily
14 with undocumented immigrants who suffer high risk of
15 chronic infectious and behavioral health issues due
16 to lack of health insurance status and particularly
17 with the Latino and Asian communities in Sunset Park.
18 During the pandemic, our work has become more
19 important than ever, reaching over 400,000 people
20 through our outreach and education efforts. Our
21 community health workers offer interpretation in
22 Spanish, Arabic, and 3 Chinese dialects to help
23 community members navigate our healthcare and social
24 assistance systems. Every month, we're holding in-
25 language workshops and distributing thousands of

2 pieces of literature to community members through our
3 canvassing and weekly food distribution events and
4 posting at over 700 businesses. Now we're fielding
5 COVID-19 vaccine vans and visiting schools throughout
6 the community to conduct COVID-19 vaccine education.
7 Our calls for assistance have tripled throughout the
8 past 2 years. We have a waiting list of nearly 50
9 individuals seeking support for our free mental
10 health services, which in part has been supported but
11 which we cannot meet by current funding levels
12 because of the cost of hiring therapists. Finally,
13 we're also offering preventative health screenings on
14 a regular basis (INAUDIBLE) by social support. We
15 would like to thank the City Council for supporting
16 us with an Immigrant Mental Health Initiative in the
17 past, and we would like to ask for continued and
18 enhanced funding for the Immigrant Health Initiative
19 as well as for a new initiative, AAPI Community
20 Support Initiative, to help support our work in
21 COVID-19 recovery and continued healthcare support
22 for our communities. Cuts to funding during the
23 pandemic have been detrimental, and, while demand
24 services have tripled..

25 SERGEANT HOPE: Time expired.

2 MON YUCK YU: (INAUDIBLE) are stretched
3 thin. What has been a mental stressor in the past has
4 now been exacerbated, especially with our mental
5 health communities, with our Asian communities where
6 there is a 339 percent spike in anti-Asian hate
7 crimes. We have a waiting list of nearly 50
8 individuals for mental health services, which we
9 cannot sustain, especially because of the lack of
10 therapists who are willing to work at a part-time
11 level with not-for-profit organizations where our
12 salary levels may not be able to be competitive
13 enough against other healthcare institutions that
14 might be offering more. Currently, we are only able
15 to sustain 2 mental health therapists on a part-time
16 level in order to meet the growing need that we see.
17 We are here for our communities, and we ask that you
18 help to continue to make our work possible, and we
19 really appreciate the support from the City Council
20 over the past years and hope that we can continue to
21 work together to offer on-the-ground, culturally
22 competent services during this challenging time.
23 Thank you.

24 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you so
25 much for your testimony. Chair, any questions?

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Mon Yuck.

3 Could you share how many therapists would be the
4 ideal number?

5 MON YUCK YU: Ideally, we would like to
6 see 2 full-time therapists at the very least at our
7 organization. Right now, we are only able to offer
8 part-time therapy due to the limited amount of
9 funding that we have, and we're also working on
10 coordinating a therapy fund program so that we can
11 bring on board additional therapists while giving our
12 community members an option to access other
13 therapists outside of our network. However, this
14 doesn't allow us to streamline our services as well.
15 It also means that the therapists that we bring on
16 board might not necessarily be consistent to offer a
17 regular stream of services to continue our work in
18 the community. They likely will be temporary
19 contractors until we can find more permanent staff to
20 join our team. The ideal for us would be to have a
21 regular number of mental health therapists,
22 particularly, again, full-time therapists who could
23 be on staff, and ideally, if we could have 3
24 therapists, 3 or 4 therapists, that would definitely
25 be able to help us meet the demand.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Are the 2 part-timers
3 right now bilingual in another language?

4 MON YUCK YU: They are bilingual, yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you just share a
6 little bit more about the demographics of who is
7 receiving these services?

8 MON YUCK YU: We primarily serve community
9 members in Sunset Park, many of them are Spanish
10 speaking and Chinese speaking. Currently, the
11 therapists that we have on board are Mandarin
12 speaking so if we were able to bring on board another
13 therapist that was also Mandarin and Cantonese
14 speaking, that would be the most ideal. We have
15 spoken with a number of other community organizations
16 that have also struggled to find therapists. There
17 simply is a shortage of therapists available who are
18 willing to work at the non-profit level. Many of them
19 hold private practice, and, especially for bilingual
20 speakers, that's even more rare.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I appreciate you for
22 sharing that. I had a conversation earlier just on
23 mental health within the Bangladeshi community, and
24 particularly among Bangladeshi women, and a report
25 was produced by Sapna NYC, and one of the things that

2 is a big concern as we call for more therapists and
3 mental health service providers is just the need for
4 our community to step into these professions and to
5 even destigmatize the mental health sector as a
6 career choice. Is there work that your organization
7 is doing to lead on this kind of cultural
8 destigmatization of mental health and creating a sort
9 of pipeline to encourage first generation Mandarin
10 speakers, Spanish speakers to pursue these careers?

11 MON YUCK YU: We have held mental health
12 workshops where we talked about mental health as a
13 wellness concept as opposed to something that we
14 should be stigmatizing. We're also really trying to
15 integrate mental health conversations into a number
16 of our other programs including our health screening
17 programs as well as our ESL classes and other types
18 of workshops so perhaps it's not just about a themed
19 arts and crafts workshop that we might hold, we do
20 also integrate mental health concepts into some of
21 these workshops. We've also worked with a local high
22 school to hold a drumming percussion class or
23 elective as a part of the high school curriculum,
24 and, through the drumming classes, while the
25 curriculum is not about mental health, we do

2 integrate mental health conversations in there using
3 drumming as a way for them to really think about how
4 music plays a role in our own wellness and bring in
5 that destigmatization and encourage them to seek help
6 as necessary.

7 The other thing that we're doing right
8 now is a project with Target Margin Theater in Sunset
9 Park where we're organizing a story-telling workshop
10 between various different groups of Arabic, Spanish,
11 Chinese, and English speakers and giving them space
12 facilitated through an artist facilitator and mental
13 health therapist to share mental health challenges
14 and their personal immigration experiences and
15 creating an audio piece or spoken word piece
16 integrated with the Theater's programming to be
17 released in the summer that would really allow the
18 community to both stand in solidarity with what our
19 communities have experienced over the past couple of
20 years but also to understand the mental health
21 challenges the community has faced and to really
22 destigmatize what we think about mental health
23 challenge.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for
25 expanding on this because I think it's so critical

2 for us to acknowledge that within our communities,
3 there have been indigenous practices of therapy and
4 our own forms of therapy that are beyond just talk
5 therapy, which is so westernized, and so it is
6 essential for us to be using art forms and other
7 cultural projects to really look at mental health
8 approaches as one that should be community oriented
9 and community led instead of only just one-on-one
10 with a practitioner or a specialist so really, really
11 glad to hear this from you, Mon Yuck.

12 No more questions for this panel. Thank
13 you so much.

14 MON YUCK YU: Thank you so much.

15 HARBANI AHUJA, MODERATOR: Thank you,
16 Chair. At this time, we've concluded public
17 testimony. If we have inadvertently missed anyone
18 that would like to testify that has yet to be called,
19 please use the Zoom raise hand function now, and we
20 will call on you in the order in which you've raised
21 your hands. I'll wait a brief moment.

22 Not seeing any hands, I'm going to turn
23 it back to the Chair for her closing remarks.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I actually just have
3 one more question for Mon Yuck on mental health. Has
4 there been an effort, Mon Yuck if you're still there.

5 MON YUCK YU: I'm still here.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Awesome. Has there
7 been enough effort to do larger community-wide
8 trainings for a peer-to-peer approach on how to be an
9 upstander and to support de-escalation when we're
10 seeing incidences occur within our households, among
11 parents and siblings and spouses, I think the peer-
12 to-peer approach is just equally important within our
13 communities? Would love to hear a little bit more
14 about that if that's being offered.

15 MON YUCK YU: Sure. I'll actually talk
16 about that in 2 different contexts. Number one, the
17 DOHMH actually has a youth mental health first aid
18 training program that they're launching citywide
19 across the TRIE communities. We're one of the
20 organizations that are working on promoting this in
21 the Sunset Park area, which is one of the TRIE
22 neighborhoods. That would, for one, allow youth in
23 the neighborhood to be trained in these types of de-
24 escalation strategies and also serve as ambassadors
25 in their own community to train or to educate other

2 youth. There is a similar program for adults as well.
3 We were also previously a training site. Now we work
4 with the DOHMH to also offer some of these adult
5 mental health first aid workshops.

6 On kind of the de-escalation, upstander,
7 bystander, and intervention piece, there is also a
8 piece of this that we're working with through the
9 Asian Community Support Grant and in collaboration
10 with organizations like the Asian American Federation
11 and Nonviolent Peaceforce where we're working on
12 coordinating workshops for volunteers to become
13 upstanders but also for community members to become
14 upstanders and bystanders in the area.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really
16 wonderful to hear. I'll be following up and would
17 love to be invited for when these events take place.
18 Thank you so much.

19 MON YUCK YU: Absolutely.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That was the final
21 question.

22 This has been an incredible day. I am
23 just really inspired and encouraged by the work that
24 you all are doing. Thank you, thank you, thank you
25 for your radical care. It's care and it's a deep love

2 and it's a deep sense of commitment and urgency to
3 the city we love so it really showed, and I
4 appreciate your patience with me going through all
5 the questions, and, really, I'm just inspired and
6 encouraged by the trajectory of the work in the city
7 as we continue to ensure and hold the administration
8 accountable to efficiently, equitably delivering to
9 immigrants citywide and not just delivering services
10 and a budget and legislative priorities but also joy.
11 Our immigrant communities deserve joy at this time,
12 and that's really the root of my work as Council
13 Member and also as the Chair of the Committee so it
14 was really powerful to hear testimonies that included
15 these moments of joy for our immigrant neighbors, and
16 I encourage in the upcoming hearings also because I
17 know how serious they are and how painful the stories
18 of our neighbors are that we uplift side-by-side the
19 joyful moments and the celebrations that you all are
20 building into your work. Thank you for that. I've
21 learned so much, and this has been a big learning
22 curve for me as I step into this role and just to
23 learn more about the extensiveness of language access
24 across organizations to the ways in which we're
25 providing mental health services and destigmatizing

2 mental health to all of the incredible ways we are
3 providing legal services, the worker cooperatives led
4 by women, just so much is happening, and I really
5 hope you take time to thank yourselves as we move in
6 this big fight for a just budget for communities, a
7 deserving investment in our communities.

8 Lastly, I'll just say for the folks who
9 testified today, all of the incredible people and
10 fighters, I do hope you take time for community and
11 self-care and rest. I hope you get to eat something.
12 I know we've been on for a very long time. Thank you,
13 thank you for making this such an incredible Monday.
14 Thank you to the Committee staff. Thank you to my
15 team for a real incredibly powerful, powerful budget
16 hearing. Thank you.

17 With that, I'm going to gavel out.

18 [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 7, 2022