

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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October 21, 2016  
Start: 10:09 a.m.  
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HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E:  
CARLOS MENCHACA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Mathieu Eugene  
Daniel Dromm  
Peter A. Koo  
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.

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

Brian Hilburn  
Staff Attorney  
New York Legal Assistance Group

Alexandra Rizio  
Senior Staff Attorney  
Safe Passage Project

Maribel Colome  
Make the Road

Nisha Agarwal  
Commissioner  
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## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Christina Fox  
Social Worker  
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Jessica Coffin-St. Julien  
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Jessica Gorelick  
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**TRANSCRIPTION NOTE:** Timestamps in document for Spanish spoken: 00:06:46 (Menchaca); 01:19:43 (Agarwal); 01:34:56, 01:35:42, 01:36:35, 01:37:45, 01:39:08, 01:40:42, (Quezada); 01:42:04, 02:09:00, (Menchaca); 02:09:43 (Quezada); 02:11:01 (Menchaca); 02:11:12 (Quezada).

[sound check]

[pause]

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: ...to record every word of this hearing, and we're good. Buenos dias.

[gavel]

I am Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration, and before we get started, I just want to acknowledge that we are joined here by Immigration Committee member Peter Koo from Queens. Good morning.

And whether it is by funding, immigration, legal services and limiting the City's cooperation with ICE to keep families together or by creating IDNYC, the largest municipal ID program in the country, largest and most successful, I wanna say, the New York City Council is committed in partnership with the Administration and all our

1  
2 community partners to ensure that immigrant families  
3 remain united and thrive in our city.

4           Of course the success of these  
5 initiatives is directly attributed to the close  
6 collaboration between the Council and the Mayor and  
7 our service providers, but when we think about the  
8 question we're asking today, the question about our  
9 immigrant families with mixed statuses, I can't think  
10 of a better group of people that will take this  
11 daunting task -- that's felt like that, anyway in the  
12 preparation for this hearing -- than us in this room  
13 and in the city.

14           Of course these initiatives are directly  
15 attributed to us, but roughly 37 percent specifically  
16 of the New York City residents are foreign born, and  
17 that's who we're talking about. This is a particular  
18 kind of population of families; this is the face of  
19 the immigration conversation today in our city and  
20 they experience barriers to fully access the vast  
21 cadre of services in the city. And all this points  
22 to my personal commitment in addition to the  
23 services, also to civic participation, to open wide  
24 the doors of government, for our families to take  
25 lead in their communities and usher in not just what

1  
2 services look like, but how they are delivered --  
3 education, health care, workforce development, legal  
4 services. And even when you look at some of the  
5 other immigration hearings we've had around legal  
6 services, we look at all the different courts that  
7 our immigrant families are interacting with --  
8 criminal, housing, immigration courts. When we look  
9 at the cultural institutions that we have our city  
10 that we support with our tax funding; we look at our  
11 police departments to report crimes, asking our  
12 immigrant communities to report crimes, especially  
13 those that hit them at home, like domestic violence,  
14 which is highly prevalent in our immigrant  
15 communities. This seems daunting in so many ways,  
16 but we have to ask this question of ourselves and our  
17 city. And we did a lot of preparation, I wanna say,  
18 to get here; we had conference calls with our CBOs,  
19 some of our residents and our district offices with  
20 all the agencies just to make sure that we're  
21 prepared and that we feel like we are not trying to  
22 get one over the other or catch somebody by surprise;  
23 that is not what we're here to do; we're here to  
24 reveal the real impacts of our work in our city. And  
25 so today the Committee on Immigration will look

1  
2 beyond how the City agencies serve individuals and  
3 explore the unique challenges faced by the immigrant  
4 families, especially those, like I said before, with  
5 different types of immigration status, or perhaps no  
6 lawful status at all.

7           Many working immigrant families live on  
8 household incomes that are inadequate to cover their  
9 basic expenses and secure, stable housing. Give the  
10 significant number of New Yorkers who are immigrants,  
11 the children of immigrants or living in mixed-status  
12 status families, it is no surprise that immigrant  
13 families comprise a large portion of service  
14 population of City agencies, such as the Human  
15 Resources Administration, DYCD, NYCHA; DOE. As a  
16 result, it is imperative that City agencies be  
17 acutely aware of the needs of immigrant families and  
18 tailor their services accordingly. It is also  
19 crucial that agencies work together to support  
20 immigrant families comprehensively.

21           Through this hearing the Committee hopes  
22 to identify common barriers immigrant families face  
23 in accessing existing services and explore possible  
24 new solutions and new services. Some of these  
25 barriers may stem from conflicting agency policies,

1 while others relate to the inability to easily  
2 coordinate or adjust services across multiple  
3 agencies in a timely and respectful manner. Often  
4 these case management services are provided by our  
5 community-based service providers and so today we  
6 hope to learn from them what challenges they  
7 experience, as well as their recommendations for  
8 improvement.  
9

10 Additionally, the City must ensure that  
11 we foster an environment where our immigrant families  
12 are empowered and can play an active role in  
13 coordinating these services. The Committee will  
14 consider ways in which agencies can leverage their  
15 resources and collaborate in order to better support  
16 immigrant families. We will hear from the Mayor's  
17 Office of Immigrant Affairs on its efforts to ensure  
18 that agencies are effectively serving immigrant  
19 families and how they're doing it. Together the City  
20 Council and Mayor's office will consider ways to  
21 enhance interagency communication and coordination  
22 based on testimony and the recommendations provided.  
23 The Committee on Immigration and the Council began  
24 this conversation with advocates some time ago, and  
25 again, when I think about the last three years in



1  
2 partnership, we've come a long way in streamlining so  
3 many of these services and so this is how we begin.

4 **[00:06:46] Spanish.**

5 And with that I would like to thank  
6 everyone for attending this morning's hearing and  
7 would like to remind you to fill out witness slips,  
8 available at the door in the back, if you'd like to  
9 testify. And to provide context for MOIA... Okay,  
10 actually, yeah, we're gonna go right into... Okay.  
11 We're gonna provide context and MOIA Commissioner  
12 Nisha Agarwal's testimony we'll hear from first...  
13 Sorry; I'm reading this wrong here. We will hear  
14 first from a few service providers about their  
15 experiences assisting immigrant families to  
16 coordinate services across agencies to provide  
17 context for our Commissioner's presentation. Thank  
18 you.

19 And so first we're gonna have Mr. Brian  
20 Hilburn from New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)  
21 -- if you can come up here please, thank you;  
22 Alexandra Rizio from the Safe Passage Project and  
23 Maribel Colome from Make the Road, if you can make  
24 your way up.

25 [pause]

1  
2 Thank you. And I'm gonna have you  
3 affirm, and I'm gonna have my legal counsel... Okay.  
4 Great. Are you ready? Wonderful. Brian, we can  
5 start with you. Make sure that the red light is  
6 pressed and bring it close to you.

7 BRIAN HILBURN: Me? Alright. Chair  
8 Menchaca, Council Members and staff, good morning and  
9 thank you for the opportunity to speak with you  
10 today.

11 My name is Brian Hilburn and I am a staff  
12 attorney with LegalHealth, a division of the New York  
13 Legal Assistance Group. LegalHealth, a medical-legal  
14 partnership, partners with 26 hospitals across New  
15 York City and provides free legal services to  
16 patients and trainings to staff.

17 We serve a large number of undocumented  
18 immigrants in mixed-status households; a major  
19 concern is homelessness prevention and housing  
20 stability, which has been linked to a multitude of  
21 health problems.

22 NYCHA residents in mixed immigration  
23 status households are required to pay a greater  
24 percentage of their income in rent than immigrant-  
25 eligible families. Because HUD regulations prohibit

1  
2 undocumented immigrants from receiving federal  
3 housing subsidies, NYCHA calculates rent for these  
4 mixed-status households by prorating the federal  
5 subsidy they would normally receive.

6 As explained in the NYCHA Management  
7 Manual, the rent for a mixed-status family will  
8 always be greater than the Statutory Rent, which is  
9 paid by an immigrant-eligible family, which is 30  
10 percent of household income.

11 Currently, LegalHealth has multiple  
12 mixed-status clients in eviction proceedings because  
13 they cannot afford their NYCHA rent under the formula  
14 used by NYCHA to calculate mixed-status rent. One of  
15 these clients, Alma we'll call her, is an  
16 undocumented mother of an adult, U.S. citizen son,  
17 Alonso, with severe intellectual disabilities. The  
18 sole income for this household is Alonso's  
19 Supplemental Security Income of \$733 per month.  
20 Their mixed-status NYCHA monthly rent is \$533, which  
21 is 73 percent of their household income. This leaves  
22 Alma unable to pay the rent and other living expenses  
23 for her and her son. In addition to Alonso's  
24 disabilities, Alma suffers from End Stage Renal  
25 Disease and receives dialysis three times a week.

1  
2 Due to her illness, caring for Alonso, and her lack  
3 of employment authorization, she has been unable to  
4 work. As a result, Alma repeatedly ends up in  
5 Housing Court. Alma came to LegalHealth looking for  
6 help in her second nonpayment proceeding in Housing  
7 Court in two years. Just one year before she had  
8 received a one-shot grant from HRA to settle a  
9 previous nonpayment proceeding; she will need another  
10 one-shot grant to resolve the current matter.

11 To make matters worse, it appears that  
12 this penalty for living in a mixed-status household  
13 is felt even more harshly by families with very low  
14 income, with even a greater percentage of their  
15 income going towards rent.

16 Given New York City's current efforts to  
17 curb homelessness, this NYCHA policy runs counter to  
18 the City's goal. In many cases, U.S. citizen  
19 children are put at greater risk of homelessness  
20 simply because their parents happen to be  
21 undocumented. While this is at least part due to HUD  
22 policy, there are actions the City could take to  
23 reduce the burden of this penalty. We respectfully  
24 recommend that the City should pay the difference  
25 between the mixed-status prorated rent and the

1  
2 statutory rent. This would allow these families to  
3 pay a cap of 30 percent of their income in rent,  
4 lessening their risk of homelessness and allowing  
5 them to maintain stable housing. New York City is  
6 already paying for many of these families in the form  
7 of one-shot grants through HRA. The City would  
8 likely save money by providing the remainder of their  
9 housing subsidy up front, instead of paying built up  
10 arrears with one-shot grants, taking up valuable  
11 Housing Court resources, and subjecting these  
12 families to the added stress of multiple court  
13 proceedings.

14 Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
15 today. I look forward to working with the City to  
16 ensure that immigrants living in New York City's  
17 public housing system are treated fairly and without  
18 bias.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much  
20 for that testimony.

21 BRIAN HILBURN: You're welcome.

22 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you for the  
23 opportunity to testify today. I am Alexandra Rizio,  
24 and I testify in my capacity as a Senior Staff  
25

1  
2 Attorney at the Safe Passage Project, a proud member  
3 of the ICARE coalition.

4 We are extremely grateful to the City  
5 Council for recognizing that the immigrant children  
6 we represent are New Yorkers who deserve, at the very  
7 least, legal representation so that they can pursue  
8 lives of safety and peace. Our clients, children  
9 from Central America who have entered the U.S.  
10 unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, have fled  
11 unspeakable violence and instability there. They are  
12 from some of the most dangerous so-called "peace-  
13 time" cities in the world, where rates of murder,  
14 torture and sexual assault soar unchecked. But now  
15 that our clients have reunited with family or adult  
16 guardians in New York City, the City Council has  
17 taken the important step of recognizing that they do  
18 deserve legal representation here. Our city is  
19 stronger because of these brave children and because  
20 of your willingness to help them.

21 Aside from their legal needs, our young  
22 clients' biggest challenges are accessing appropriate  
23 mental health care to address the trauma they've  
24 experienced. Many of our clients suffer from post-  
25 traumatic stress disorder, depression and self-harm,

1 among other issues. They also struggle to adjust to  
2 life in the United States.

3 More collaboration between HRA, the  
4 Department of Education, Department of Homeless  
5 Services, and MOIA would be very helpful. Here are  
6 three client examples.

7 Benefits law is extremely complicated,  
8 especially when applying to immigrants in different  
9 legal statuses. A client I'll call Haida had  
10 difficulty getting her daughter to school while  
11 living in a shelter; Haida's 3-year-old daughter  
12 could not attend the school down the street from the  
13 shelter in the Bronx and Haida had to make a long  
14 commute every day to Harlem to drop off and pick up  
15 her child. More collaboration between HRA, the DOE,  
16 DHS, and MOIA could have helped Haida with a more  
17 appropriate school placement for her daughter.

18 A client I'll call Yesenia who is HIV  
19 positive and who recently won asylum, was turned away  
20 from HRA after trying to apply for SNAP benefits.  
21 HRA told Yesenia that she would only be eligible for  
22 SNAP after she had been in the United States for five  
23 years, which is inaccurate. Increased collaboration  
24

1  
2 between HRA, MOIA, DOE, and DHS could have prevented  
3 these clients from experiencing ongoing stress.

4 A client I'll call Keyla is undocumented  
5 and a victim of sexual abuse by someone she lived  
6 with. Her sister is a United States citizen and also  
7 suffered sexual abuse by the same person. The NYPD  
8 refused to take a police statement from Keyla, but  
9 did take a police report from Keyla's U.S. citizen  
10 sister. By refusing to take Keyla's report, the NYPD  
11 unfairly delayed Keyla's ability to earn new non-  
12 immigrant status as a crime victim who was helping  
13 the police. More collaboration among the NYPD,  
14 Family Justice Centers, ACS, and MOIA could have  
15 helped Keyla.

16 Furthermore, I'd like to point out that  
17 public safety is seriously weakened if domestic  
18 violence victims are afraid to report crimes to the  
19 police either because they won't be taken seriously,  
20 as Keyla wasn't, or because they're worried that ACS  
21 might charge crime victims with child neglect for not  
22 shielding their children from seeing the domestic  
23 violence.

24 I would like to note that we are very  
25 impressed with the Family Justice Centers and ACS has



1  
2 also been responsive to the direct needs of our child  
3 clients.

4           Finally, I'd like to share a positive  
5 example of collaboration among agencies. Just  
6 yesterday I took a traumatized young man to the  
7 psychiatric emergency room at an HHC hospital. The  
8 combination of recently becoming homeless and  
9 suffering severe trauma before coming to the United  
10 States proved too much for him. The hospital staff  
11 there assured us that they would make referrals for  
12 him to DHS for housing and to other NYC agencies;  
13 that was a relief and demonstrates the power of  
14 interagency collaboration.

15           The bottom line is that we at Safe  
16 Passage appreciate how much interagency collaboration  
17 already exists. Increased communication or formal  
18 programming by NYC agencies could make our city even  
19 stronger, especially for children whose physical and  
20 mental health care needs are substantial because of  
21 the severe trauma they've experienced. Thank you.

22           CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

23           [pause]

24           MARIBEL COLOME: Good morning. So my  
25 name is Maribel Colome and I am an adult literacy

1  
2 counselor at Make the Road New York; it's an  
3 organization that builds power in Latino and working  
4 class communities to achieve dignity and justice  
5 through community organizing, policy innovation,  
6 education, and legal services. We are based in three  
7 immigrant communities in New York City -- Jackson  
8 Heights, Queens, Bushwick, Brooklyn, and Port  
9 Richmond, Staten Island -- as well as Suffolk County  
10 in Long Island. Make the Road currently has 19,000  
11 dues-paying members who are primarily low-income  
12 immigrants.

13 We would like to thank, first and  
14 foremost, the City Council and the Immigration  
15 Committee in particular for holding this hearing to  
16 address the gaps in services for New York City's  
17 immigrant populations. The City Council has been a  
18 great champion of immigrant communities and has  
19 funded and supported numerous new initiatives over  
20 the past few years to support newly arrived, as well  
21 as long-term residents, immigrants who are struggling  
22 to make ends meet, to support their families and to  
23 live in safe and secure communities. We interact  
24 with immigrants regularly who, despite the existence  
25 of excellent services they are eligible for, struggle

1  
2 to access these services. In many cases this  
3 struggle is due to the complicated nature government  
4 bureaucracy, especially for someone who is new to the  
5 city and who may not have a support network or speak  
6 English. Oftentimes there are additional barriers  
7 due to mental health challenges stemming from an  
8 individual's immigration history.

9           Although Make the Road staff regularly  
10 engage in crucial case management services for  
11 clients and provide emotional support when able, our  
12 clients need and deserve access to trained,  
13 culturally competent and clinically sound individuals  
14 who can address both their mental health needs and  
15 support them in navigating large, bureaucratic  
16 agencies with complex enrollment procedures. For  
17 this reason, Make the Road is recommending that the  
18 City Council invest in a bold new initiative to  
19 address the mental health and case management needs  
20 of immigrant New Yorkers.

21           Our organizers, lawyers, teachers, and  
22 administrative staff spend innumerable hours working  
23 with immigrant community members to act as social  
24 workers by wearing many hats on top of their full-  
25 time jobs. They work with our community members to

1  
2 enroll their children in schools, ensure children are  
3 receiving mandated services that they are entitled  
4 to, have access to food stamps and other benefits, or  
5 just listen while they cry or otherwise express  
6 frustration with the complex challenges that face  
7 them as they navigate new and often unwelcoming  
8 systems. Because trust is built in the context of  
9 the organizing or legal relationship, these staff  
10 members will be the ones called to engage in this  
11 case management type work: phone calls to myriad City  
12 agencies, schools, leaving messages for clients and  
13 agency staff, financial planning with clients, and  
14 providing social services referrals and engaging in  
15 the counseling that they are often not equipped to  
16 do. Our legal team does their best to refer clients  
17 to outside organizations when possible, but finding  
18 culturally competent free services is tough. More  
19 times than not, when we do find available services,  
20 our clients are fearful of following up or going to a  
21 new place because they already have trust and see us  
22 as family.

23 Social workers working in legal service  
24 settings provide a critical component to a holistic  
25 defense. Social workers can play many roles and

1 address many needed faced by our clients. Some of  
2 the most crucial include: providing additional  
3 advocacy (written or in person) in the court system,  
4 provide short-term or long-term counseling or  
5 therapy, sit-in with attorneys for initial intakes or  
6 screenings when necessary, diagnose, treat or serve  
7 as expert witnesses in court, if applicable. They  
8 can also provide support to clients as they navigate  
9 the complex systems of public benefits and connect  
10 clients to survival resources.  
11

12 For example, Make the Road represents  
13 nearly 100 unaccompanied minors; children who  
14 recently arrived in the United States from countries  
15 full of violence. Due to the violence and danger,  
16 these children are escaping; they are at very high  
17 risk for mental health issues, stemming post-  
18 migration to the United States. Many of our young  
19 clients are in dire need of mental health services in  
20 order to help them adjust to life in the U.S. and  
21 cope with the past trauma. Substantial stressors for  
22 minors include post-traumatic stress from home  
23 country violence and abuse, also time spent in  
24 detention centers and immigration proceedings.  
25 Unaccompanied minors may then find themselves

1 resettled in areas where they continue to be exposed  
2 to community violence and economic deprivation.

3 Additionally, prior separation from parents and  
4 caregivers, in many cases prolonged, can lead to  
5 disruptions in forming secure attachments with them.

6 Adding a social work component to this work would  
7 meet a critical need in the holistic defense of an  
8 unaccompanied minor that is currently missing from  
9 our approach.

10  
11 Make the Road as well as adult literacy  
12 programs, and it is crucial for our programs to have  
13 case managers to provide informal counseling and  
14 connect students to other services in order to help  
15 them stay in classes, graduate and continue to excel.  
16 Case managers can also help students with transitions  
17 to higher education and other related training.

18  
19 In the past fiscal year, 539 individuals  
20 who represent over half of Make Road's ESOL classes,  
21 received some kind of case support from me as a  
22 dedicated adult education case manager. After I  
23 delivered an initial orientation in all the classes  
24 about the kind of work that we provide, I know that  
25 this support is very critical in supporting our

1  
2 student retention and in stabilizing families in the  
3 community where we work, but I am also not able to  
4 meet everyone's needs because of the lack of capacity  
5 and the high demand in our communities.

6 We are thrilled to the City and through  
7 the programs by recognizing the need for case  
8 management and the changes and the progress that you  
9 guys have made in funding mental health services.  
10 For example, MOIA's recent DACA education initiative,  
11 including funding for case management support in the  
12 proposal, and for that we're very, very grateful  
13 because we have really used that program and so many  
14 lives have been changed recently. We would like to  
15 see that the City build on that kind of initiative  
16 and offer additional, sustained support across the  
17 board for social work and case management services.  
18 We hope that the City will heed the call to provide  
19 the kind of comprehensive mental health and case  
20 management services that we know will help ensure our  
21 immigrant communities so that they can thrive.

22 Thank you so much for your time today;  
23 that's it.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you all and  
25 I have a couple questions. And again, thank you for

1  
2 your testimony; each of you really kind of carved out  
3 a different area of work and so I appreciate that  
4 focus. And for Brian, I have a question about NYCHA  
5 and just remind me a little bit about, and remind  
6 everybody, to be clear, the 30 percent cap for an  
7 applicant or I should say for housing lease in NYCHA  
8 and the concept -- just remind me about the concept  
9 again; can you just walk us through the idea that you  
10 have, and then also exactly how the penalty works for  
11 an undocumented family?

12 BRIAN HILBURN: Yeah. So normally a  
13 family, who are all immigrant-eligible and are all  
14 citizens or LPRs, or something like that, would be  
15 capped at 30 percent of their household income, and  
16 that's all they pay. But since HUD does not allow  
17 undocumented people to benefit from federal housing  
18 subsidies, they have to prorate part of the subsidy  
19 that the federal government pays to these families  
20 and only have it benefit the citizens or LPRs.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Uhm-hm.

22 BRIAN HILBURN: So it's a complicated  
23 formula, but basically what they do is they take the  
24 full income of the household, get 30 percent of it;  
25 that would be what normal family would pay, then they



1  
2 have what they set as a flat rent, and who sets this,  
3 I'm not sure if it's HUD or NYCHA, but they take the  
4 flat rent and they subtract from it the 30 percent  
5 cap and that difference would be the federal housing  
6 subsidy; then they multiply that by the percentage of  
7 the family that are eligible for the subsidy, and  
8 they subtract that again from the flat rate and that  
9 would be rent of the household. So it's always above  
10 the 30 percent, but it's somewhere below the flat  
11 rent, or the ceiling rent is what it's called.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for  
13 that. So that's how the penalty works... [interpose]

14 BRIAN HILBURN: Right.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: it's a little bit  
16 complicated, but I could see how they arrived at  
17 that, that sense of...

18 BRIAN HILBURN: Right.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: of formula. And  
20 what is your idea...

21 BRIAN HILBURN: Cap... [crosstalk]

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So... to find a way  
23 to cap it at 30 percent.

24 BRIAN HILBURN: Right. So the cap would  
25 be the City contributing money to these families to

1  
2 pay the rest of the subsidy that the federal  
3 government is not paying to the family, because  
4 they're gonna end up in Housing Court anyway and get  
5 one-shot deals (they always do) and will come back  
6 again and again. Some of our families are paying  
7 above a 100 percent of their income, so they're gonna  
8 be there all the time or be back in a shelter where  
9 they were to begin with, and it's just unsustainable  
10 the way it is... [crosstalk]

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Thank you  
12 for that.

13 BRIAN HILBURN: You're welcome.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And I'll just  
15 remind everybody that in this hearing we're really  
16 looking for all and any ideas to kind of think about  
17 how our immigrant families in particular are  
18 experiencing the services and so thank you for  
19 bringing this to light, and we'll definitely follow  
20 up on that.

21 And over to the conversation around SNAP  
22 actually, let's... I wanna get a sense about the SNAP  
23 issue and can you just walk us through that issue  
24 again?

25

1  
2 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Yes. So immigrants in  
3 different statuses, so someone who has say just  
4 arrived and is undocumented and in removal  
5 proceedings for the purposes of benefits, and it  
6 depends on which benefits, so there's a whole host of  
7 explanatory charts that our social workers use to  
8 determine who is eligible for what benefit, but  
9 people who are undocumented with say no application  
10 pending with immigration will be treated differently  
11 for certain benefits than people who have say a  
12 pending asylum application and they will be treated  
13 differently say from someone has an approved asylum  
14 application. So there are obviously myriad benefits  
15 that someone might be eligible for, that a U.S.  
16 citizen might be eligible for, and depending on an  
17 individual's immigration status, certain benefits  
18 will not be available; they may be available, and it  
19 depends a lot on what applications have been filed,  
20 whether someone has won an asylum case, whether they  
21 have their green card yet; those kind of things. So  
22 our client had recently been granted asylum, so she  
23 had an approval from the asylum office, which she  
24 dutifully took with a social worker at her shelter to  
25 an HRA office, and my understanding is that the HRA

1  
2 worker looked at that approval and said, "I see that  
3 you're approved for asylum, but you still don't  
4 qualify for SNAP," which is... [interpose]

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And that was just  
6 wrong; right?

7 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Yeah, that's true.  
8 Correct. Yeah... [crosstalk]

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. So now  
10 we're just looking at training, so this is more a  
11 question about... [crosstalk]

12 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Exactly. Exactly.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: how we get more of  
14 our... [interpose]

15 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: of our government-  
17 basing agents...

18 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Uhm-hm.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: to understand the  
20 full law.

21 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Right. Right.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, got it. And  
23 I thought I had heard that; I just wanted to make  
24 sure to clarify; this is more of a training issue.

25 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Yes.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you; thank  
3 you for clarifying that. And thanks for bringing up  
4 all the other... the school issue; I think we'll  
5 address it later in conversations with the  
6 Administration, Police Department and the good story  
7 about the kinda homeless process that ensued; thank  
8 you for that.

9 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And then I have a  
11 question for Maribel. The question I have is, is  
12 back to... and really this is more just like another  
13 question about training; this is more about training  
14 all staff that you interact with as you come in to  
15 Make the Road a place of trust; you can't do all the...  
16 the capacity... you can't build the whole [sic]  
17 capacity of the City of New York in your  
18 organization, so your interagency conversations, as  
19 you refer people to these agencies, really the kind  
20 of main thrust of your testimony was about training  
21 so that when you kinda hand off somebody there's  
22 competency at the other end; that's essentially the  
23 main point here.

24 MARIBEL COLOME: Yes, it is, but I think  
25 one of our biggest struggles is when we do refer out,

1  
2 whenever we don't have a program or service in-home  
3 and we refer out, like specifically to mental health  
4 services, it's very hard for our attorneys and even  
5 myself to follow up and do that case management  
6 aspect, because of the high volume of clients we  
7 have, and so many times when we refer out, our  
8 clients don't even go, right, because they come back  
9 and they're like, well can we just talk to you again,  
10 like I feel comfortable here; I don't wanna start  
11 again, right; I don't wanna open up with my, you know  
12 issues; I'm scared that it may not be confidential,  
13 and so I think that's one of our biggest issues that  
14 we're facing now is just following up, because we can  
15 refer, but then it's hard, right, to just like follow  
16 up with the client and.. [interpose]

17

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And just... just to  
19 clarify, we're talking about City agency referrals or  
20 to other organizations and other CBOs?

21 MARIBEL COLOME: Both, City agency and..  
22 [interpose]

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Both. Okay.

24 MARIBEL COLOME: yeah, and so training,  
25 also, you know, I'm an adult literacy counselor, an

1  
2 M.S.W., and so I try to provide as much resources to  
3 our staff, but again, like we don't have the capacity  
4 to sort of hold a formal training, so even front desk  
5 reception, when there's a client comes, you know from  
6 outside and comes in and says you know I've just been  
7 beaten from husband, you know I'm going through this  
8 DV or my child just got raped; even reception doesn't  
9 know how to handle those cases and so I feel like if  
10 we were able to have a mental health department or  
11 even more.. you know just trained social workers, then  
12 it would be like a one-stop shop and it would really  
13 help our organization.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for  
15 that. And I think we can explore even further after  
16 this hearing, this concept of the grid of and the  
17 kind of spider web of referral services and how far  
18 we have to go to make sure that everybody has  
19 training; not just City agencies, but our community-  
20 based organizations as well that are supporting  
21 families in the neighborhood or in the borough.  
22 Thank you.

23 MARIBEL COLOME: You're welcome.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you to the  
25 panel.

ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you.

MARIBEL COLOME: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And next I'd like to invite up our Commissioner, Nisha Agarwal, from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

[pause]

NISHA AGARWAL: I do.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

NISHA AGARWAL: Thank you so much Chair Menchaca and the members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Nisha Agarwal and I'm the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

The de Blasio Administration strives to be inclusive of all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status. We cognize that being undocumented can pose significant barriers for New Yorkers in accessing government services and resources to support the health, safety and welfare of all.

Importantly, the well-being of our undocumented neighbors is inextricably bound up with the well-being of New Yorkers who are permanent residents and U.S. citizens. Undocumented New



1  
2 Yorkers are not separate and apart from the rest of  
3 the city's population. To the contrary, mixed-status  
4 families are very common. Our internal estimates  
5 show that nearly 16 percent of children in New York  
6 City, or one in six children, live in a family that  
7 contains at least one undocumented immigrant.

8           Serving mixed-status families effectively  
9 often requires the involvement of multiple agencies  
10 because of the different needs and opportunities of  
11 family members with varying immigration statuses. To  
12 ensure that our sister agencies can effectively  
13 respond to these needs, MOIA works to embed  
14 principles and practices of immigrant inclusion  
15 across City government in all areas -- from outreach  
16 and communications to regulatory actions to the  
17 design of new and existing programs.

18           This effort builds on our long-standing  
19 work with agencies consulting on language access and  
20 expands its scope to develop strategies to ensure  
21 that City government is accessible and inclusive of  
22 immigrant New Yorkers. As an example, MOIA recently  
23 expanded the role of our language access director  
24 position to become our Executive Director of  
25 Immigrant Inclusion, to really lead this effort.

1 Under her leadership (and she's here), we will  
2 continue our work with agencies to develop immigrant  
3 inclusion strategies, including identifying areas  
4 beyond language that create barriers for immigrants  
5 to avail themselves of city services; identifying  
6 tools and resources agencies need to develop and  
7 implement immigrant inclusion strategies; providing  
8 technical assistance to agencies; and sharing  
9 successful immigration inclusion strategies across  
10 agencies. We will also continue to help agencies  
11 with language access, which is of course a key  
12 component of immigrant inclusion. Throughout our  
13 work across City government, we focus on methods to  
14 ensure that all New York City residents can get the  
15 help they need, even if they are undocumented or if  
16 their family members are undocumented.

18 Interagency collaboration to effectively  
19 serve New York City immigrants is not new for the  
20 Administration. MOIA and our sister agencies have  
21 worked closely together on a number of programs and  
22 services, with considerable success. Through  
23 collaborations like the IDNYC program and others,  
24 MOIA has identified a number of best practices that  
25 inform our efforts to serve diverse immigrant

1  
2 populations, including immigrants in mixed-status  
3 families. I am pleased to share some of these best  
4 practices with you today.

5 1. Partner early with relevant agencies,  
6 community leaders and community-based organizations

7 City agencies' effectiveness in serving  
8 immigrant families is enhanced by identifying the  
9 right partners within government and in the community  
10 and collaborating with them. Such partnerships help  
11 inform policy decisions and facilitate stakeholder  
12 engagement and buy-in. Importantly, these  
13 partnerships also help build bridges and strengthen  
14 ties between local government and immigrant  
15 communities. For example, in the Administration's  
16 implementation of IDNYC, we benefited immeasurably  
17 from working closely with the Council and a coalition  
18 of immigrant-rights groups and other advocacy and  
19 service organizations. These partners consulted on  
20 key aspects of the program from the beginning, from  
21 developing a successful outreach strategy to card  
22 design. Similarly, the success of IDNYC is also  
23 attributable to our partnerships with our sister  
24 agencies, with very important contributions from the  
25 NYPD, the Human Resources Administration, NYC Health

1  
2 & Hospitals, the Department of Youth and Community  
3 Development, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene,  
4 the Department of Probation, and really, many more.

5 2. Leverage existing resources and  
6 trusted relationships to reach immigrants

7 Building on the above, reaching New  
8 York's large and diverse immigrant population  
9 requires identifying systems and opportunities and  
10 leveraging these to deliver services. This helps  
11 avoid reinventing the wheel. In addition, immigrants  
12 in mixed-status families can be among the City's most  
13 difficult-to-reach populations, owing in large part  
14 to the longstanding perception, caused by our broken  
15 federal immigration system, that it is dangerous for  
16 them to seek help from the government. Accordingly,  
17 it is imperative to make sue of existing effective  
18 routes for disseminating information and making  
19 contact.

20 The Administration used this strategy  
21 with the interagency task force established in 2014  
22 to address the needs of unaccompanied minors coming  
23 to New York City from Central America and the needs  
24 of their families. One of the primary outcomes of  
25 that task force's work was the first-ever placement

1  
2 of City staff at the federal Immigration Court --  
3 which all newly arriving unaccompanied minors must  
4 pass through -- to connect these young people to  
5 school enrollment, access to health care and more  
6 services provided by DOE, DOHMH, ACS, and other  
7 agencies.

8           We have taken a similar approach with our  
9 ActionNYC immigration legal services program, which  
10 works in trusted sites within the community to  
11 connect immigrants to legal services. One set of  
12 ActionNYC sites is through DOE's Community Schools,  
13 which are public schools paired with a community-  
14 based organization to provide support and connection  
15 to social service, and therefore are ideal partners  
16 for connecting immigrant students and immigrant  
17 families with legal services. Our re-launched  
18 NYCitizenship program also leverages community-based  
19 sites by locating services at public library branches  
20 in immigrant-dense neighborhoods through the City.  
21 In addition, NYCitizenship partners with HRA to reach  
22 the agency's significant roster of immigrant clients,  
23 many of whom are eligible for naturalization and  
24 could access additional benefits upon becoming U.S.  
25 citizens.

## 3. Achieve efficiency to reach scale

To ensure that services can be delivered as broadly as possible, we have seen success with programs that offer flexible levels of engagement with immigrants and mixed-status families. Certain agency clients may require greater direct intervention than others, and individuals and families may need change over time. Being able to provide varying levels of services based on the needs of an individual allows for greater efficiency and scale.

In our ActionNYC legal services program, for example, community navigators provide intake, screening and coordination services, under the supervision of an immigration attorney. Navigators are not attorneys, but they have in-depth training and expertise in service delivery so they can help with preparation of documents and coordination of referrals. Immigration attorneys, under this model, supervise navigators and provide the more intensive legal work.

In addition, we have seen success with our publication of a Document Collection Guide, which was co-produced with the New York Immigration

1 Coalition, because it was designed to be flexible for  
2 use independently by immigrants or in conjunction  
3 with a navigator or attorney.  
4

5 Our partner agencies have had success  
6 with this model as well. In the ActionHealthNYC  
7 program, immigrant patients receive care coordination  
8 services appropriate to their level of need. And in  
9 the recently received RFP for comprehensive services  
10 for immigrant families, DYCD has identified a need  
11 for a high-touch model case management to complement  
12 the existing services available to immigrant New  
13 Yorkers.

14 4. Tailor outreach and marketing in a  
15 linguistically and culturally competent manner

16 In addition to interagency referral  
17 mechanisms and formal partnerships, agencies are  
18 increasingly employing targeted, data-driven  
19 techniques to reach immigrants through outreach and  
20 through the media. MOIA has worked with our  
21 partners, including those in the Council, to develop  
22 a director to assist agencies to expand their  
23 purchases of ethnic and community media advertising.  
24 These ad buys have consistently risen every year  
25 under the de Blasio Administration, and we have seen

1 major successes in campaigns using ethnic media, such  
2 as our recent campaign to educate DACA recipients  
3 about Medicaid eligibility. MOIA has also  
4 coordinated with other agencies to inform the  
5 targeting strategy and messaging and campaigns to  
6 bring services to immigrant families, such as those  
7 related to SNAP and emergency food assistance, health  
8 insurance enrollment, and more.

10 We are applying these best practices for  
11 serving immigrants and immigrant families to our  
12 continuing work in priority areas for MOIA and for  
13 the Administration. Recent examples have included a  
14 partnership between HRA and the Department of Small  
15 Business Services to embed public assistance  
16 enrollment support within Workforce One centers in  
17 order to reach clients, including immigrants who may  
18 be eligible but unenrolled. DYCD is also working  
19 with other agencies to explore opportunities to  
20 connect immigrants and other clients to necessary  
21 services, such as helping individuals receiving HRA  
22 benefits to access adult literacy services and  
23 identifying Beacon or Cornerstone community centers  
24 that may be able to house a DOE adult education  
25 program.



1  
2 Of particular relevance for mixed-status  
3 families in our ongoing work is adult literacy  
4 programming and immigration legal services.

5 In the field of adult literacy, we  
6 understand the need for improved coordination across  
7 the diverse providers that work in this area. We are  
8 committed to working with the providers, City  
9 agencies, CUNY, and the Council to develop a system  
10 for literacy services that more effectively meets the  
11 needs of New York City's adult learners and does so  
12 at scale, relying on the best practices and  
13 principles that I have described today. We will  
14 adopt and adapt the lessons of our successes, such as  
15 the establishment of partnerships and leveraging  
16 existing resources, to ensure that the City's  
17 literacy planning has a strong foundation based in  
18 agencies' and providers' years of experience and  
19 roots in the community.

20 As part of our vision for adult literacy,  
21 we see the We Are New York (WANY) program as a  
22 crucial component of the broader literacy initiative  
23 by providing volunteer-led English language learning  
24 classes that supplement ESOL classes. WANY is  
25 coordinated by MOIA and includes many partnerships

1  
2 with a diverse range of community-based providers and  
3 City agencies, including the Department of Education,  
4 to reach immigrants of all statuses and mixed-status  
5 families. The best practices and principles we have  
6 derived from our work hold true in WANY; the program  
7 provides community members with another literacy  
8 option among the spectrum of varying levels of  
9 services across the city, and it has been able to  
10 reach immigrants in their communities and through  
11 trusted networks. WANY has been successful in  
12 helping English learners practice English and in  
13 empowering them to access city services, with over  
14 2,500 individuals served through 125 classes in the  
15 past year alone, making it an important component in  
16 the City's literacy infrastructure moving forward.

17 In immigration legal services, we are  
18 coordinating closely with HRA's new Office of Civil  
19 Justice to establish referral pathways for complex  
20 immigration cases between ActionNYC service providers  
21 and HRA's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI).  
22 This interagency effort is based on our recognition  
23 of the importance of the principles I've described  
24 today, including the need to create effective  
25

1  
2 partnerships and to connect people across their need  
3 for service.

4 In both of these areas and many others, I  
5 look forward to working with the Council, with our  
6 community partners and our sister agencies. We all  
7 share the important goal of continuing to improve our  
8 ability to serve New York City's immigrants and  
9 mixed-status families so that all New Yorkers,  
10 regardless of their immigration status or their  
11 family members' immigration status, can grow and  
12 thrive together.

13 Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you  
15 Commissioner. And again, I think I have to applaud  
16 the work that MOIA has done. This testimony really  
17 speaks to the work and the commitment of the agency,  
18 but also the kind of deeper understanding of the work  
19 that has to happen not only in the vision of what the  
20 City is trying to achieve, but also in the surprises  
21 that we're getting on a year to year basis, and an  
22 unaccompanied minor crisis is just one example of  
23 what we can't plan for as a city or as a country, but  
24 we respond and so again, I just wanna say thank you  
25 for that work.

1  
2 We've also been joined by Council Member  
3 Danny Dromm from Queens. Thank you so much.

4 And I wanna start out with a few  
5 questions and then hand it over to Council Member, if  
6 he has any questions. But I wanna kinda start big  
7 and then start going in deeper, and there's a kind of  
8 theme that I'm seeing rise already around the concept  
9 of building essential service delivery models that  
10 have cultural competency that we've seen here in so  
11 many ways that are focused with immigrant  
12 communities, that are delivering services, but the  
13 question here is; how do we move away from just  
14 creating robust delivery services as a kind of single  
15 touch point and really engaging in a larger  
16 conversation about opening all the agencies up so  
17 that the cultural competency doesn't just live in  
18 things that MOIA starts, but really looks at all the  
19 agencies that can kind of hum in a new way to respond  
20 to immigrant services. That's the general -- I have  
21 some specific questions about that, but tell me a  
22 little bit about how you think about that as we're  
23 thinking about that as a committee.

24 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah. So you know, I  
25 think tracking, so some extent, the best practices

1  
2 that we've learned from the programs we've worked on,  
3 I think first and foremost it's hearing examples like  
4 the first panel that testified, right, that these are  
5 the things that as service providers or as community  
6 leaders we are hearing in the field that are gaps.  
7 So I think that's first and foremost, is being able  
8 to see across the city what are issues that are  
9 coming up for immigrant communities. When I first  
10 came on board as commissioner, I traveled around the  
11 city and just went to listen to different immigrants  
12 communities -- what are the top concerns that are in  
13 your mind; what are the ways in which City government  
14 has been helpful to you -- and not surprisingly, the  
15 top issues that immigrant families care about are  
16 very similar to what most New Yorkers care about --  
17 jobs, schools, housing -- and being able to then hear  
18 what are the specific barriers that immigrant  
19 families face in those contexts I think is really  
20 important work to do.

21           Secondly, I think bringing our sister  
22 agencies, and I think particularly in the de Blasio  
23 Administration there's a shared sense that we wanna  
24 be serving all New Yorkers, and so really bringing  
25 agencies together with Council to be able to talk

1 through how do we do that; what are the either good  
2 policy initiatives, programmatic practices, other  
3 ways in which we can work together. I think  
4 unaccompanied minors was an incredible example in  
5 which New York City as a whole stuck together to  
6 coordinate -- our agencies came together and said  
7 here are the services we can provide; where's the  
8 best place to provide them; it might not actually be  
9 at our usual sites; it might actually be somewhere  
10 unusual, like the Immigration Court; the City Council  
11 stepped forward in funding legal services, and we had  
12 so many private funders as well who stepped forward  
13 for mental health services. So I think thinking  
14 about this as a shared responsibility, bringing the  
15 right parties to the table and having that  
16 conversation is really important.

17  
18 And then finally I will say thinking  
19 about how we get the message and how we communicate  
20 to immigrant New Yorkers that the City is available  
21 and open to them; I think having folks on the ground,  
22 sort of grassroots organizers and outreach staff,  
23 really important, community ethnic media very  
24 important. It sends an explicit message, which is,  
25 you know, if you're a DACA eligible, you may be

1  
2 eligible for health benefits, but it also sends an  
3 implicit message, especially when you do multilingual  
4 advertising that says we are here to serve all of  
5 you, and I think that's the kind of symbolic value  
6 that so many of our programs and work have done.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. And  
8 again, I wanna highlight your testimony and I think  
9 what we all know, one in six children are coming from  
10 families with at least one undocumented parent and  
11 with that, I think that's the urgency that we're  
12 facing in our city.

13 And so now let's dive in a little bit  
14 deeper on some of the things that have kind of come  
15 up around case management, around interagency  
16 conversations. And because we know that families in  
17 general in New York City are experiencing so many  
18 different needs and barriers to access: 1. how does  
19 an immigrant family -- how do we define an immigrant  
20 family -- in a world where we don't actually want to  
21 define them, IDNYC and the conversations we had with  
22 IDNYC, we didn't wanna label anyone, an immigrant  
23 person in this card -- everyone's a New Yorker -- so  
24 as we kinda strip away some of that identification,  
25 how does MOIA coordinate and see themselves

1  
2 coordinating interagency conversations that we heard  
3 on the first panel about a family going into shelter,  
4 not being able to get into a school in their shelter  
5 neighborhood, and who's responsible for that, and  
6 where does MOIA step in, and where can MOIA step in,  
7 if it's not stepping in right now, to make something  
8 more robust at that level of individual immigrant  
9 family case management?

10 NISHA AGARWAL: Uhm-hm. Yeah, it's a  
11 great question and I think something that we're  
12 learning and doing as we go along. So one of the  
13 things I mentioned is that we expanded the role of  
14 our Executive Director for Language Access Initiative  
15 to really be about immigrant inclusion in general,  
16 and the idea behind that role and that... [interpose]

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: What were you  
18 saying... what initiative?

19 NISHA AGARWAL: For immigrant inclusion...

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Inclusion,  
21 immigrant...

22 NISHA AGARWAL: and the idea here is to  
23 have sort of a person who's in charge of really  
24 thinking about across City government what are the  
25 different ways in which we can support the community



1  
2 but also our sister agencies in embedding immigrant  
3 inclusion. So it could be specific examples, like  
4 this question around NYCHA and housing and it could  
5 be broad questions of you know, access to mental  
6 health services. We need to kind of understand what  
7 some of those gaps might be and then as we did with  
8 unaccompanied minors, as we have done in other  
9 contexts like IDNYC, MOIA can play the role of  
10 convening various stakeholders to understand how do  
11 we solve that problem and we have to do that closely  
12 in coordination with the Council as well, 'cause  
13 you're also hearing what are the challenges in the  
14 community and also will have ideas around the policy  
15 or programmatic interventions. So I think that's the  
16 long-term goal, so our work is really to start... you  
17 know in a city where one out of three individuals are  
18 immigrants, immigrants are in contact with every  
19 facet of city life and we wanna make sure that that  
20 interaction is as seamless as it can be.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And so we're  
22 identifying this as a long-term goal and so how -- I  
23 think you've kind of identified the mechanics of what  
24 should happen; how does that happen; is it a whole  
25 arm for MOIA; does that live in MOIA? How do you see

1  
2 this kind of... is this a whole team of social workers;  
3 is this about training? So go down; get more...

4 [crosstalk]

5 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, yeah...

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: specific with it a  
7 little bit... [crosstalk]

8 NISHA AGARWAL: think though... Maybe I'll  
9 start out by saying, here's my vision of what MOIA  
10 should do; I think if we... [crosstalk]

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That's what I  
12 wanna hear; I wanna hear...

13 NISHA AGARWAL: if we do a fantastic job  
14 of serving immigrants, that's great, but I actually  
15 think that's not our job; our job is to be a partner,  
16 to be a support for everyone else across City  
17 government on this issue, and so I think that's kind  
18 of the vision that I have for MOIA as being a partner  
19 and being sort of support, an adviser, technical  
20 assistant for our sister agencies so that all of us  
21 are doing our work as best as we can with regard to  
22 immigrant communities. It's hard to say what the  
23 exact strategy would be for different issue areas and  
24 for different communities, because I think each issue  
25 is different -- housing is different from health care

1  
2 which is different from educational services. So the  
3 approach that we have taken that's worked well is  
4 sort of, as I mentioned, bringing our partners to the  
5 table as we did in unaccompanied minors -- who are  
6 the right agencies; having them sort of have a  
7 conversation -- these are the services that we  
8 provide; what's the most efficient way of providing  
9 that service. And legal services, we heard  
10 repeatedly from community partners that you need  
11 both, navigation or case management services as much  
12 as you need legal services, so we clustered those two  
13 together. The same will continue to be true for a  
14 range of different issues that we've worked on, is  
15 making sure that you have the right tools and the  
16 right sort of ideas for whatever problem it is that  
17 you're trying to solve. And our role is convening,  
18 consolidating, bringing that information together and  
19 then helping to coordinate to make sure it happens.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. And I think  
21 we're gonna explore a little bit more about that, and  
22 not just the coordination, but the kind of MOIA  
23 mandate for education of all immigrant families in  
24 the city, and again, I think that you're right; it  
25 has multiple ways... you have multiple fronts in this

1  
2 conversation citywide, especially when we have our  
3 immigrant population, our foreign born immigrant  
4 population growing exponentially at numbers, at just  
5 sheer numbers larger than ever before in the history  
6 of the city.

7 I'm gonna hand it over to Council Member  
8 Dromm for questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very  
10 much and thank you; it's good to see you Commissioner  
11 as well... [crosstalk]

12 NISHA AGARWAL: Good to see you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I'm wondering if  
14 you can clarify for me what the different is between  
15 a department and your -- is it an agency -- your  
16 office, let me put it that way. The reason I'm  
17 asking is because I'm thinking, is it... I'm wondering  
18 and I'm gonna wonder aloud; would a department of  
19 immigrant affairs be helpful to coordinating the  
20 activities? So is there a difference in the  
21 structure of how a department is versus your office?

22 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, it's a good  
23 question. I think, in my view, it's actually very  
24 helpful to be within the Mayor's office and to be an  
25 office, because if your vision is to be partner, to

1  
2 be a convener, to be a coordinator, I think we fit in  
3 the right place to be able to do that. I personally  
4 don't have a vision of providing all of the services  
5 for immigrant New Yorkers; I think that's the job of  
6 the City as a whole, and so the role of my office  
7 would really be to help do that coordination and I  
8 think in that case we're structured well for that  
9 purpose and we've seen that with IDNYC and many other  
10 programs. So to me, becoming a department won't  
11 help; it's more having the sort of good will and  
12 collaboration both of the community and of our sister  
13 agencies that's most important and we're lucky to  
14 have that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Do you have a  
16 specific budget line?

17 NISHA AGARWAL: We have a budget line  
18 with the Mayor's office and then we have partnerships  
19 with agencies on programs like IDNYC and things like  
20 that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: And I know that  
22 the Chair here has done a fairly good job in terms of  
23 when the budget comes around of holding hearings on  
24 issues concerned with the budget, but I don't believe  
25 that you have specific oversight over the agency.

1  
2 How would oversight of the agency affect the agency  
3 if it were to become a department?

4 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah. I mean I think  
5 that oversight is helpful, right, like a conversation  
6 like this is very useful to be able to learn what we  
7 need to be doing better and whatnot. I think on the  
8 budget, my advice would be this is really across City  
9 government, right; it's not just MOIA's budget that  
10 matters, it's the budget of so many other agencies  
11 that are providing immigrant services, huge volumes  
12 of immigrant services, and so really being able to  
13 have a broader perspective along those lines I think  
14 is actually very powerful to think about how we're  
15 serving immigrant New Yorkers.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So one of the  
17 issues that does concern me; one of the reasons why  
18 I'm thinking in terms of a department, is because you  
19 know as Chair of the Education Committee now, former  
20 Chair of the Immigration Committee, one of the things  
21 that I had been trying to promote was trying to get  
22 the Department of Education to do some curriculum  
23 around DACA, which they didn't do, and I'm wondering  
24 if the establishment of a department would have in  
25 any way affected our ability to be able to get that

1 curriculum out. I mean DACA basically affected  
2 younger people and then to have met that resistance  
3 in the Department of Education was disconcerting to  
4 me, because they have the closest contact with them,  
5 and since Department of Education is a quasi agency,  
6 it's still not really determined whether it's an  
7 agency or not an agency or an independent group  
8 separate from... basically what they say is that when  
9 they want to, they say that it's a separate entity  
10 from the City and there have been issues with Council  
11 Members who were formerly teachers who had to resign  
12 their teaching positions because you can't hold two  
13 positions, so when they wanted to be an agency, it's  
14 an agency; when they don't want it to be an agency,  
15 it's not an agency, and I think that part of the  
16 reason we can't enforce certain things is because of  
17 that legal problem. Would having another department  
18 help us with that type of issue, particularly as it  
19 relates to immigration?  
20

21 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, it's an  
22 interesting... I don't actually know enough about the  
23 DOE's own structure to speak to that, but I think one  
24 of the things that I see MOIA as having a role in  
25 doing, even as it's currently structured, is actually

1  
2 being able to partner with you to sort of think about  
3 how do we move certain issues with our fellow  
4 agencies, and we've had really good experience  
5 working with the DOE, for example, like I mentioned,  
6 on this community schools initiative and getting  
7 legal services into the community schools. We're now  
8 hosting a number of pop-ups for IDNYC with the  
9 schools, and so I think being able to figure out how  
10 we collaborate across agencies might be helpful in  
11 instances like what you're describing, which sounds  
12 like a really great idea.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Would it be  
14 beneficial if all contracts regarding immigration  
15 went through a single department if there were to be  
16 a Department of Immigration Affairs?

17 NISHA AGARWAL: You know it's a good  
18 question; I would have to think about that. But we  
19 have actually had, for example, all of our  
20 immigration legal contracts -- we work very closely  
21 with HRA and moving them through -- it's been great  
22 to have those legal services contracts consolidated  
23 at HRA. It'll be hard to define what is an  
24 immigration or immigrant-related contract, again,  
25 given that so much of the City touches and interacts



1  
2 with immigrant communities, and so I think creating a  
3 department that has the capacity to do that  
4 procurement may not be necessary if we have the good  
5 partnerships like we do with HRA on legal services  
6 contracts.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: If there were to  
8 be a department -- I'm not giving up yet...

9 NISHA AGARWAL: [laugh]

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: would the Mayor  
11 then have to include it in his preliminary and  
12 executive budgets; how does that work now; is that  
13 part of his budget statement? I don't believe that  
14 it is...

15 NISHA AGARWAL: So the Mayor's Office of  
16 Immigrant Affairs is part of the larger Mayor's  
17 office budget and then we also work very closely with  
18 various agencies on programmatic budgets, so things  
19 like IDNYC, HRA; as the program manager, we're sort  
20 of involved in the budget conversations around that,  
21 legal services, as I mentioned, also working closely  
22 with HRA, so that's sort of how it works now. In the  
23 context of a department, I actually don't know how  
24 that would change things.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Well I'd really  
3 like to explore this idea further with you, 'cause  
4 I'm just curious about whether establishing a  
5 department, in my mind, would help to facilitate this  
6 interagency coordination.

7 NISHA AGARWAL: Great.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So thank you.

9 NISHA AGARWAL: Happy to work with you on  
10 that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Council  
13 Member Dromm. And I just wanna also comment on the  
14 larger theme here in the kind of ever-evolving MOIA  
15 presence in the city with City agencies and the  
16 programs that we are launching in partnership, and  
17 one of those things is budget oversight, and so last  
18 year we made the case, a very compelling case,  
19 directly to the Mayor during the budget conversations  
20 when it was first released and he agreed and we had  
21 for the first ever a budget hearing where MOIA  
22 present budget items that were across, not just your  
23 kind of office and what you're managing across your  
24 particular work, but across agencies, and so we wanna  
25 build on that and we know that that was an effective

1  
2 opportunity to kinda step back and look at how the  
3 City is responding through just dollars to the  
4 community itself and how those different line items  
5 and different agencies are kinda coordinating, just  
6 for budget purposes, so in so many ways I think we're  
7 inching towards that conversation. I don't know for  
8 myself, just to answer that question too, I don't  
9 know if a department would be better; I think maybe  
10 it could, maybe it couldn't, or I should say maybe  
11 MOIA might be better suited. So I don't know the  
12 answer to that question, but I do know that the  
13 coordination question, which is what we're exploring  
14 here today, is probably the main question as we think  
15 about activating every City agency to respond to the  
16 immigrant community because we know that the  
17 immigrant community requires a very particular kind  
18 of cultural competency, and something that both  
19 Council Member Dromm and I are intimately involved in  
20 and thinking about, as openly gay members in the City  
21 Council, is the same conversation with the LGBT  
22 community -- how do you embed cultural competency and  
23 not necessarily create a department for the LGBT  
24 community. Maybe that's a route we wanna take, but I  
25 think the ultimate question is: how does every agency

1 respond to this question about cultural competency.

2 And so maybe one question I have; then I'm gonna hand

3 it over to... or I'll just actually now welcome from

4 Brooklyn, Rafael Espinal, Council Member, and Council

5 Member Mathieu Eugene as well from Brooklyn; thank

6 you for being here today. And so the question is:

7 how do we think about your ever-expanding

8 conversations with agencies through the budget and do

9 we need special immigration-related budget lines for

10 case management in all the different agencies so that

11 they can take on that responsibility so it's not just

12 you, Commissioner, going out and making this happen

13 with your staff, but that we're growing that

14 competency through specific budget lines that we can

15 look at and manage during an executive budget hearing

16 that we'll have again this year, but review together.

17 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, it's a good

18 question. I'm gonna have to think a little bit more

19 about whether a sort of standard budget line for case

20 management is what's needed or more the kind of

21 conversations we've been having around -- here's a

22 specific concern that we have, like with legal

23 services, right; we know that immigration legal

24 resources are so scarce and we also know that there

25

1  
2 are amazing community advocates who can do fantastic  
3 work, so how do we bring together a system that  
4 allows for both case management and legal services to  
5 live together, and that resulted in ActionNYC. So I  
6 think in a similar vein thinking about how we do that  
7 for other issue areas would be something we would  
8 love to talk about, because even early evidence that  
9 we have of how programs like DACA education, which  
10 you mentioned are working, show that it's a very,  
11 very helpful tool, and then how much of that is held  
12 by the City; how much of that is held by community  
13 partners and other partners, service providers. I  
14 think it's actually a strategic planning process that  
15 we need to have to think about the key issue areas  
16 and priority areas that we wanna focus on and then  
17 find out how we solve for those.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. And  
19 Council Members; do you have any questions at this  
20 point? The next question I have is really the --  
21 again, I think we're getting close to a vision about  
22 what we're looking at and how we're gonna build it  
23 together, and so one question I wanna ask is: what  
24 agencies are here right now with you to support you  
25 in this moment?

1  
2 NISHA AGARWAL: Who has my back here? So  
3 we have DYCD **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: DYCD's here.  
5 Great. Thank you and welcome.

6 NISHA AGARWAL: we have HRA here, and I  
7 honestly don't know... [crosstalk]

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: HRA is here.  
9 Thank you for being here... [crosstalk]

10 NISHA AGARWAL: here, and it seems like a  
11 lot of community partners are in the room too, which  
12 I think of as... [crosstalk]

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And community  
14 partners, yeah. [laughter] They got your back.  
15 There you go... [crosstalk]

16 NISHA AGARWAL: **[inaudible]** operators of  
17 our work, so that's been wonderful. But I will say  
18 there's also plenty of agencies that are not in the  
19 room who we've been working so closely with on so  
20 many different initiatives, so aside from bringing  
21 all of City government here, we brought some of our  
22 closest partners.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So and... Okay. And  
24 again, I wanna now just kinda shift over toward the  
25 kinda conversation that was brought up in the first

1  
2 panel about mental health services, and I think this  
3 kind of deserves an opportunity for you to think  
4 about and respond to in some ways that you can right  
5 now and we'll follow up later... [interpose]

6 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: about that world  
8 that we just were invited to...

9 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: and so I wanted to  
11 sort of see if you had any reactions to that...

12 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah. So honestly, even  
13 before taking on this job, the issue of mental health  
14 services particularly for immigrant communities is  
15 something that I've cared about quite a bit and I  
16 think there's a huge need for, and so for that reason  
17 I've actually been really proud to see things like  
18 ThriveNYC and other mental health programs and  
19 initiatives of this administration that the First  
20 Lady has really shown a tremendous amount of  
21 leadership on come forward. And the reason I think  
22 those programs are really exciting is because they  
23 are concerned with the sort of supply of mental  
24 health services kind of in general, but also about  
25 the role of community partners. And so the

1  
2 engagements and roundtables that the First Lady has  
3 done with different immigrant constituencies have  
4 been really powerful, doing some of the sort of  
5 mental health first aid sessions where different  
6 community groups and community members can learn, or  
7 City agency staff can learn, how do you identify how  
8 are you, sort of [sic] on the first lines,  
9 identifying mental health issues; knowing what the  
10 resources are; how to navigate that; that's really a  
11 lot of the work that has been happening and the goal  
12 is to be multilingual. And so I think some of those  
13 initiatives through Thrive are a fantastic starting  
14 point for this broader conversation about how do we  
15 collaborate and how do we ensure there's a spectrum  
16 of services and resources on the ground, all the way  
17 up to the actual sort of formal mental health  
18 services that are available for immigrant  
19 communities. So I've been really happy to see that  
20 and I think that's also an ongoing conversation and  
21 area for partnership.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And I'm gonna hand  
23 it over to Council Member Dromm for another round of  
24 questions, but I do wanna also think about, again,  
25 the current initiatives, I think it's called



1 ThriveNYC and the kinda robust, kinda citywide  
2 presence that that program has; how does MOIA  
3 interact with an agency initiative like that, or  
4 citywide initiative like that and can you give us an  
5 example about what your role is in that and what does  
6 the immigrant community **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

8 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, sure. So as an  
9 example, I think it's all of the sort of best  
10 practices that we had talked about earlier...  
11 [crosstalk]

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And can you  
13 describe what ThriveNYC is for everybody?

14 NISHA AGARWAL: Thrive NYC is a citywide  
15 initiative led by the First Lady to expand and  
16 improve access to mental health services for all New  
17 Yorkers and as an example, recently actually, Deputy  
18 Mayor Buery attended a roundtable with the Sikh  
19 community in Queens around mental health issues, and  
20 that's very consistent with the kind of work that we  
21 have been doing at MOIA, right, to bring community  
22 members to the table to say what are the concern that  
23 you're seeing; what are the resources that you need;  
24 how do we better coordinate services. In the end,  
25 for things like this, you have to go to the community

1  
2 and to really have that conversation, and I think  
3 that's some of what we're seeing with programs like  
4 Thrive.

5 In addition, I think advising on... MOIA  
6 has been involved in suggesting community  
7 organizations and other partners who can receive the  
8 mental health first aid training; we've even been  
9 helping to get the word out about positions, City  
10 outreach and other positions for Thrive and for  
11 mental health programs, so you have multilingual  
12 staff that are staffing these programs. So it's a  
13 good example of the ways in which we can kind of plug  
14 and help connect a citywide program to immigrant  
15 communities in particular; I like to see our office  
16 as a bridge and so that's really the role that we  
17 played with Thrive, it's the role I hope we're  
18 playing with community partners as well and really  
19 wanna be that link.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And how do you  
21 measure success in integrating immigrant communities  
22 to this program right now?

23 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, so we've been... you  
24 know, I think there are certain metrics that Thrive  
25 or any other program would have on its own and then I

1  
2 think for MOIA, we've been trying to figure out  
3 what's the research or the data that we need to start  
4 tracking as an agency on a more macro level to  
5 understand if we're reaching our immigrant inclusion  
6 goals. So with programs like IDNYC we did an  
7 evaluation; with a program like ActionNYC we'd like  
8 to do an evaluation, and then I think what we're  
9 thinking through is how do we do that citywide; what  
10 does a kind of immigrant inclusion strategy look like  
11 and then how do we actually track our progress  
12 towards those goals. I think that's still a work in  
13 progress and would love to talk to you more about  
14 what that might look like.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And this is an  
16 opportunity for us to do this in partnership and so I  
17 really welcome the opportunity to work with you on  
18 that and not only in kind of a press release moment,  
19 but really any kind of consistent conversation  
20 throughout; I think our district offices can play a  
21 big role in helping you kinda point to things in an  
22 evaluation, and I'm glad that that's happening;  
23 that's good thing for us to think about our City  
24 agency capturing information and being able to come  
25

1  
2 back with some data, and so I'm inviting myself to  
3 this table here...

4 NISHA AGARWAL: Yes. [laugh]

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: and it sounds like  
6 you're gonna accept that in... or I'm gonna accept your  
7 invitation... [crosstalk]

8 NISHA AGARWAL: I believe... [sic][laugh]  
9 yes...

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: to that  
11 conversation.

12 NISHA AGARWAL: very happily.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Danny.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you. So let  
15 me just go back to DOE again. Is there coordination  
16 between your office and DOE in regard to ESL classes  
17 for adults?

18 NISHA AGARWAL: We have been talking with  
19 not just DOE, but also DYCD and other programs that  
20 provide adult literacy, and one of the things that  
21 we're starting to think about is how do we coordinate  
22 a spectrum of services around that, some very  
23 community-based programs, like We Are New York, which  
24 we run, to the sort of DOE-located adult education  
25 programs as well. So I think collectively we need a

1  
2 joint, a shared strategy on that and we've started  
3 the conversation but haven't finished it and would  
4 love your thoughts.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So Commissioner,  
6 what I'm hearing you say in a very nice way is that  
7 the coordination hasn't been there in the past and  
8 that you're beginning to look toward that  
9 coordination. I know in the previous administration  
10 they would include what was going on in DOE in terms  
11 of the budget for adult ESL classes as part of the  
12 overall budget toward that, but one of the issues  
13 that we saw was the reduction in DYCD-sponsored adult  
14 ESL classes and then say well we're still doing the  
15 classes with DOE, so it kind of, again, in my mind,  
16 helps to make the case a little bit for the necessary  
17 coordination of the provision of those services so  
18 that, okay right now we're doing fairly well in the  
19 City, but what's the future going to look like, and  
20 oftentimes these adult ESL classes are the first  
21 things to go in budgets, particularly on the  
22 Administration's side, at least in the past, from my  
23 experience, because they know also that the Council's  
24 gonna throw in some money, you know. So maybe you  
25

1  
2 can respond to that and I mean, I have another as  
3 well.

4 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, so I think that's  
5 very helpful and I think it's right that we, on some  
6 of these issues, particularly ones that are shared  
7 across agencies and that affect so many people we  
8 need a coordinated strategy, I'm a big fan of  
9 strategies, and so I think we were successful in  
10 doing that to some extent with legal services; I'd  
11 love to figure out how we do the same thing now with  
12 adult education.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: And so  
14 Commissioner, do you know how much DOE spends on  
15 adult ESL classes; how much comes from the Council  
16 and how much comes from the Administration side?

17 NISHA AGARWAL: I do not; I don't know if  
18 there's others who might know that information off  
19 the top of their head, but we can also.. [interpose]

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I know we have the  
21 DYCD Commissioner here as well, so that may be a  
22 question we'll ask him later on. But I think that's  
23 a very important question and again, it leads me back  
24 to this idea of how do we coordinate all that stuff,  
25

1 whether it's a department or continues to be...

2 [interpose]

3 NISHA AGARWAL: Great.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: an agency like you  
5 have. Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And that's like  
7 the multimillion dollar question I think that we're  
8 trying to hit, and I think we're rich in the vision,  
9 we're rich in... and also kind of celebratory in some  
10 of the things that we've been able to get out as a  
11 team to our communities -- IDNYC and implementation  
12 of some of the laws, like the retainer laws -- and  
13 there's stuff that we're doing right now that are  
14 affecting people in a very, very real way, but I  
15 think there's still a larger question about drilling  
16 down exactly how we're creating a system that can be  
17 clear enough in a world where clarity is the name of  
18 the game here in a community that is lacking in trust  
19 of government itself and not necessarily responding  
20 through CBOs only that are consistently struggling to  
21 get funding, but really thinking about how the strong  
22 arm of government itself, our agencies. The people  
23 that we talk to and try to talk to anyway, getting  
24 them on the phone, getting DOE on the phone, for  
25

1  
2 example, has been difficult for some of our families  
3 that you're gonna hear from, are in CBOs; the NYCHA  
4 question, I mean these are all City agencies that we  
5 have the opportunity to and so I'm gonna give you  
6 another opportunity to figure out how you can drill  
7 down in what accountability we can inject into this  
8 conversation about immigrant families facing a multi  
9 set of barriers, very unique to immigrant  
10 communities, the language or trust or previous  
11 interactions, and what MOIA can do to make that a  
12 reality and just more clear.

13 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, absolutely. I mean  
14 one thing that occurred to me is worth mentioning;  
15 we... one of the things we did with language access,  
16 for example, was now, if individuals don't get  
17 language services that they're entitled to, they can  
18 submit a complaint through the 311 system, to be able  
19 to share that information; that complaint then gets  
20 routed both to MOIA and to the Mayor's Office of  
21 Operations and to the agency that's involved for  
22 resolution. And I think those are sort of very  
23 individual level forms of accountability that I think  
24 are very helpful and very important. Similarly,  
25 we'll have service providers, community organization



1  
2 leaders who can call us up and we'll sometimes help  
3 navigate things that may be sort of one off; concerns  
4 or problems in terms of navigation, so I do wanna  
5 offer MOIA as that kind of resource for being able to  
6 help navigate. Then there are some things that I  
7 think are broader policy or programmatic barriers  
8 that may exist, and that's what I think we need to  
9 work on to sort of develop a shared strategy. So we  
10 think about it in both terms, sort of at the  
11 individual level how to help navigate and then also  
12 on the systemic level.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. And  
14 again, in that successful example, it just reminds  
15 us, and this is something that I think we can work  
16 together, and this Committee and this Council and  
17 with you as we get closer to budget season, is  
18 thinking about how we actually define this, and  
19 especially with the DYCD contract, that really is  
20 about developing capacity at the community level;  
21 that if that is the direction we're going in, and  
22 again, we can think about it together; if that's the  
23 direction we're going in, then maybe we really think  
24 about baselining this as a commitment, just like we  
25 baseline other things in our city infrastructure that

1  
2 says we are dedicating dollars every year to train  
3 people in our communities to bring more access to  
4 agency services, so maybe it doesn't come from the  
5 agencies themselves and it's about training people on  
6 the ground in our communities and making a commitment  
7 and rather than a kinda Council or administration by  
8 administration, and ultimately that's what we're  
9 thinking about; how do we cement it into the fabric  
10 of our City agencies and our year to year funding  
11 that is just never a good idea for such high priority  
12 with a population that's growing so big. [background  
13 comment] Absolutely.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So he has me  
15 thinking along those lines. I mean it is possible  
16 that the next mayor could just eliminate your office;  
17 am I right...? [crosstalk]

18 NISHA AGARWAL: No, we're in the Charter,  
19 so we'd have... [crosstalk]

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: You're in the  
21 Charter?

22 NISHA AGARWAL: We're in the Charter, so  
23 we're a little bit more sticky than that.

24

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So being in the  
3 Charter, it's required for your office to be in  
4 existence? [background comment] Okay.

5 NISHA AGARWAL: Thank you [inaudible]...  
6 [crosstalk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: But I'll follow  
8 up; [laugh, background comment] not that I'm  
9 advocating to that, but I just don't wanna ever see  
10 that the needs of our immigrant communities are, you  
11 know, overlooked.

12 NISHA AGARWAL: Right.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: But Council  
14 Member Dromm's absolutely right in thinking about  
15 how... and the ultimate question is how do we protect  
16 the infrastructure we're building today in a way that  
17 maintains its ability to not be a kind of whimsical  
18 decision [background comment] by a new leader that  
19 comes in to New York City. So... [interpose,  
20 background comment] oh and other agencies, so how  
21 does MOIA embed itself into other agencies and keep  
22 that going? And I think that's... that's the question...  
23 [crosstalk]

24 NISHA AGARWAL: That... it's a good  
25 question and I sort of held my team at MOIA... I have a

1  
2 picture on my desk of a girl sitting in front of a  
3 sign that says, **[01:19:43 Spanish]**, and so I think  
4 the question is really, how do we build programs that  
5 are embedded so that they're institutionalized,  
6 right? Will IDNYC go away in the future? It will be  
7 hard when we have more than 900,000 people across  
8 this program, so how do we work together to create  
9 the sort of programs that are sweated into how the  
10 City works and we just take for granted that this is  
11 what we do; that's also very much my vision.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well thank you and  
13 we wanna hear from some of the other folks, and I  
14 hope that all the agencies... oh and we have another  
15 question; sorry 'bout that, Council Member Mathieu  
16 Eugene.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you, thank  
18 you very much Mr. Chair. I've got only one or two  
19 questions. Commissioner, thank you very much for  
20 your testimony, and I want to also take the  
21 opportunity to thank each one and all of you here  
22 present today, because you know the issues of  
23 immigration are very important issues for many  
24 families in our supportive, great City of New York  
25 and we've gotta make sure that we do everything that

1  
2 we can do for the immigrant people to receive the  
3 services that they deserve, and I commend you,  
4 Commissioner, and all of you, for the job that you  
5 are doing in helping the immigrant families.

6 Commissioner, in your testimony you say  
7 that City agencies' effectiveness in serving  
8 immigrant families is enhanced by identifying the  
9 right partners within government and the community  
10 and collaborating with them. What are the elements  
11 that you use to identify those partners; what can  
12 make you say that this is the right partner you know  
13 I've gotta work with [sic], based on what exactly...?  
14 [crosstalk]

15 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah... absolutely. So we  
16 do a number of things; some of it... when I started,  
17 for example, we did a listening tour of immigrant  
18 communities and met with a broad range of groups to  
19 sort of hear what the concerns are; we also have an  
20 outreach team that each organizer has a turf that  
21 they're responsible for where they are responsible  
22 for building relationships with safe [sic] leaders,  
23 community leaders, all of the sort of important  
24 people in that community. We also use data, so we'll  
25 look at, you know what are neighborhoods or the

1  
2 places that we have gone to for outreach or for a  
3 workshop; what are the places we've missed; who are  
4 the partners that we can work with there, and of  
5 course we work very closely with Council Member  
6 offices as well to bring services and programs into  
7 the neighborhoods. So I think our goal is to have as  
8 many partnerships and as good a sense of the  
9 landscape of who are our partners in the immigrant  
10 community, [bell] but that we also welcome new groups  
11 who have said, you know, we don't have a  
12 relationship; we'd like to build a relationship with  
13 you, and that's some work that we've been doing as  
14 well.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Could you give us  
16 one or two examples of collaboration between your  
17 office and those organizations? Just some detail...  
18 [crosstalk]

19 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, absolutely.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: how you  
21 collaborate, doing what exac... please...? [crosstalk]

22 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, so uhm a couple;  
23 one example I can share is just a program that we've  
24 worked on very closely called ActionNYC, which  
25 provides legal services. So we brought legal

1  
2 providers, community-based providers; a range of  
3 different groups to the table initially to help  
4 design the program, and now a number of different  
5 providers are actually delivering those services in  
6 the community, and so that's sort of one way in which  
7 community was there at the beginning and continues to  
8 be a sort of partner, and they are constantly  
9 providing us feedback on what's working and what  
10 isn't working so that we can adapt the program.

11 Another example is actually our team  
12 helping to coordinate town halls with different  
13 immigrant communities that maybe have not always been  
14 connected to the City. So with Council Member Dromm  
15 and others we did a Himalayan town hall that was very  
16 successful; it filled an entire auditorium in a  
17 school in Jackson Heights, and the idea was to bring  
18 this community forward to share their thoughts and we  
19 brought many agency partners as well to kind of share  
20 what services they provide. So we wanna do more of  
21 that sort of thing so that you're really building  
22 partnerships, not just for the folks we've always had  
23 partnerships with, but also with new communities.

24

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: And that's good,  
3 but how do you evaluate the effectiveness of the  
4 collaboration; does it work... [crosstalk]

5 NISHA AGARWAL: Uh...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: how do you know  
7 if it works; do you have a way to evaluate, to  
8 quantify the result of the collaboration?

9 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, so there's a sort  
10 of first evaluation that we've done; we did a pretty  
11 comprehensive independent evaluation of IDNYC, to  
12 understand sort of how is the collaboration, but the  
13 program; how has it been working, in terms of our  
14 partnerships with different groups, both at the  
15 agency level and community partners, and that was  
16 incredibly helpful, both in telling us that the  
17 early... one of the recommendations, in fact, of the  
18 report was that early collaboration with community  
19 partners was one of the reasons why IDNYC was as  
20 successful as it was; it also gave us feedback, which  
21 is that there is some information that either a  
22 community wants more information or it's confusing.  
23 For example, some of the changes in our cultural  
24 benefits package may have been confusing to some  
25 community members. So that's the kind of feedback



1 through formal evaluations that we get that helps us  
2 understand both what we're doing well and where we  
3 need to make improvements.  
4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Sometimes we  
6 already had people who had good intent to help  
7 people, organizations, but we know also that in terms  
8 of immigration services there are wonderful,  
9 wonderful organizations helping, even for many years,  
10 that exactly what they are known to do, what they  
11 know to do and what they have been doing; they know  
12 what they are doing... [interpose]

13 NISHA AGARWAL: Right.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: they have been  
15 doing and they know their limits also; they know  
16 their weakness and their strength also...

17 NISHA AGARWAL: Right.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: but before you  
19 start the collaboration, start collaborating with  
20 them, do you evaluate or ask them, you know what  
21 exactly they'll need..

22 NISHA AGARWAL: Uhm-hm.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: to perform a  
24 better job to better serve the immigrants, or do you  
25 just come and say you know guys you've gotta do that;

1  
2 you've gotta do this? So because you've gotta  
3 understand that the organizations, they are skilled  
4 people; they know what they're doing, but some of the  
5 times they may need something, you know some  
6 resources, some asset or something. Do you have a  
7 conversation, communication with them to identify or  
8 to ask them exactly, guys; what do you need; what do  
9 you believe you need to do a better job?

10 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, absolutely. And we  
11 sort of do that from the outset, actually going to  
12 communities with the explicit purpose of sort of  
13 listening -- what are the needs; what are the, you  
14 know, sort of the resources that are in the  
15 community; what are the resources that you feel are  
16 needed in the community. Actually happy to share  
17 with you the results of that evaluation, if you will,  
18 that we did from the beginning to help guide what  
19 this office would do sort of from the very start of  
20 the administration. And then we are in ongoing  
21 conversation with community partners all across the  
22 city; that's our job as an office and if we're not  
23 doing that, we're actually failing in our job, so we  
24 take it very seriously that we're having very, very  
25 active conversations with community partners.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very  
3 much Commissioner. Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

4 NISHA AGARWAL: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We have a few  
6 follow ups. Council Member Dromm.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I'm not giving up  
8 yet.

9 NISHA AGARWAL: [laughter]

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So thanks to our  
11 wonderful counsel, Indiana Porta: 1. according to the  
12 Charter, MOIA has the power and duty to advise and  
13 assist the Mayor and the Council in developing and  
14 implementing policies designed to assist immigrants  
15 and other foreign language speakers in the city;  
16 2. to enhance the accessibility of city services to  
17 immigrants and foreign language speakers by  
18 establishing programs to inform and educate immigrant  
19 and foreign language speakers for such services;  
20 3. manage a citywide list of translators and  
21 interpreters to facilitate communication between City  
22 agencies and foreign language speakers; 4. to perform  
23 analysis and make recommendations concerning  
24 immigrant affairs; and 5. perform such other duties  
25 and functions as may be appropriate to pursue the

1 policies set forth in Subdivision A of this section.

2 But it could be that a future mayor will say that's

3 one person; right? What's your staff... how many do

4 you have on staff now, Commissioner?

5  
6 NISHA AGARWAL: So we have, to the  
7 Mayor's office, a head count of seven and then we  
8 have a number of different partnerships for our  
9 outreach staff and others with other agencies, so the  
10 number of actual folks that are hosted at MOIA is 40  
11 or 50.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Is what?

13 NISHA AGARWAL: Forty or 50, but our  
14 actual head count is seven.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Is that a historic  
16 high?

17 NISHA AGARWAL: I think it's consistent  
18 with what's been before.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: But at any point  
20 in time that could be interpreted just to mean one  
21 person, and if I'm not mistaken -- I was on the  
22 Veterans Committee as well, and I think that the  
23 language concerning, when it was not a department,  
24 was very similar to the language here for that  
25 committee and now it's a department. So I'm gonna go

1  
2 back and do a little more research on this, 'cause as  
3 I said, I was wondering aloud, but it does concern me  
4 that in the future it could be reduced to just one  
5 person.

6 NISHA AGARWAL: Uhm-hm.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Okay, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Council  
9 Member Dromm. And this is something that this  
10 committee will follow up on and analyze together with  
11 a bigger vision about how to really make this a  
12 robust conversation. And really, just kinda looking  
13 at some of the other messages about some of the other  
14 areas, and one that we didn't touch on, but I know  
15 HRA is in the room, and thinking about the homeless  
16 crisis right now; I'm thinking a lot about our  
17 immigrant communities that are engaging into the  
18 shelter system in some way, and is there anything  
19 that you can talk to us a little bit about MOIA's  
20 involvement in the shelter -- do you ever expand  
21 [sic] any shelter conversations in our communities,  
22 specifically to immigrant families, both on the,  
23 again, emergency shelter; talk to us a little bit  
24 about some of those barriers that you're seeing, and  
25 then also the domestic violence shelters and funding

1  
2 streams that bring them into existence and just give  
3 us a little bit of a snapshot about what you're  
4 doing; how you're thinking about it, and how we're  
5 addressing those barriers.

6 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah, absolutely. So I'm  
7 happy to start and then, you know if HRA wants to add  
8 on the broader issue of homelessness and the work  
9 that's underway; that would be great.

10 So one of the areas that we've been  
11 working on is just been thinking through with sort of  
12 helping to troubleshoot with Department of Homeless  
13 Services on issues where immigration status, for  
14 example, may come up and they have questions about  
15 how to navigate for particular families or other  
16 sorts of challenges. So I think that's where MOIA's  
17 role as a sort of expert on the immigration side is  
18 very useful. You know we're not program  
19 administrators who know how to deliver housing or run  
20 shelters, but we can at least advise if there are  
21 policy questions that come up, so that's one  
22 important way we've been doing that work.

23 The other is really reaching the homeless  
24 community, and particularly immigrant homeless  
25 individuals to access the services that we have

1  
2 available, so we've worked very closely with DHS on  
3 doing IDNYC pop-ups and enrollments and doing  
4 outreach and educational work there as well to make  
5 sure that all individuals that are accessing the DHS  
6 system have access to the services that we're  
7 providing, but also that we're doing that kind of  
8 where they are, and in partnership with sort of the  
9 needs that they may have -- specific documentation  
10 gathering, help that they might need; I think that's  
11 really the ways in which we've been trying to plug  
12 in.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And that's... you're  
14 saying you're sending your teams to shelters to  
15 engage when an immigrant family does what; they call  
16 311 or they're engaging in DHS vers... [crosstalk]

17 NISHA AGARWAL: And often it's actually  
18 DHS staff who will say this is a particular issue or  
19 case that we're grappling with; do you have advice  
20 for us; we're delighted to take calls like that;  
21 sometimes it'll be from partners in the field who  
22 will say this is a challenge one of our clients is  
23 facing, and then separately it will be our outreach  
24 team of IDNYC staff who will go affirmatively to  
25 working with DHS facilities and others to enroll

1  
2 people in programs, provide educational workshops;  
3 things like that.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Are you measuring  
5 the amount of calls that are coming in or the amount  
6 of requests that are coming in over time...?

7 [interpose]

8 NISHA AGARWAL: We... We do, we track those  
9 data; I don't have them in front of me, but I can  
10 follow up with you with information.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: It would be great  
12 to look at together...

13 NISHA AGARWAL: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: and just thinking  
15 about a future conversation on that specific question  
16 would be good.

17 NISHA AGARWAL: Absolutely.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. Thank you...

19 NISHA AGARWAL: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: for your testimony  
21 today.

22 NISHA AGARWAL: Oh great, thank you.

23 [background comment]

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And again, I'm  
25 trusting that agencies are staying for the rest of



1  
2 the conversation to, or with the service providers  
3 and affected folks.

4 So we're gonna have a panel here that  
5 includes Andrea Saenz from the Brooklyn Defender  
6 Services; Rafael Quezada; Christina Fox, social  
7 worker from NICE; Howard Shih, Asian American  
8 Federation; [background comments] and Joy Ziegeweid  
9 from Sanctuary for Families.

10 [pause]

11 Thank you so much for being here. And I  
12 know there's some translators as well, so let's get  
13 some extra chairs, if we can, for the rest of the  
14 panel. [background comment]

15 [pause]

16 [background comments]

17 [pause]

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [01:34:43]

19 **Spanish.**

20 [pause]

21 RAFAEL QUEZADA: [01:34:56] **Spanish**

22 CHRISTINA FOX: Greetings Council

23 Members. My name is Rafael Quezada. I am from  
24 Ecuador and a member of the organization NICE. I  
25 emigrated from Ecuador in 1986 and received my

1  
2 residency through amnesty under Ronald Regan. I have  
3 come here to share my lived experience when I was  
4 detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcements  
5 (ICE) in February of this year.

6 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[01:35:42] Spanish**

7 CHRISTINA FOX: ICE banged on my door at  
8 five in the morning and upon entering, cornered me in  
9 my room where I was staying. There were eight to ten  
10 agents positioned throughout my building and in the  
11 street -- to arrest one person -- and they were  
12 armed. They took me to Varick Street to process me  
13 and then to Hudson County Correctional Facility in  
14 New Jersey. Hudson is a private detention center and  
15 they are doing a lot of business.

16 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[01:36:35] Spanish**

17 CHRISTINA FOX: In detention there were  
18 very dangerous and ugly things; there were drugs,  
19 aggression and fights and during my time there a  
20 woman even committed suicide. There was no order  
21 amongst the guards, they treated us very badly and  
22 disciplined us in violent ways; for example, they  
23 would use excessive force and sometimes would not  
24 allow us to leave our cells for the wrongdoing of one  
25 or two people. The conditions were very bad; for

1  
2 example, the bathrooms in each cell flooded and there  
3 was about a foot and a half of dirty water for  
4 several days until it was repaired.

5 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[01:37:45] Spanish**

6 CHRISTINA FOX: I asked for help from the  
7 Ecuadorian Consulate and realized I already had  
8 representation from Julie Dona at Legal Aid Society;  
9 she came to visit me to listen to what I had  
10 experienced. She explained the process and details  
11 of my criminal case and helped me resolve my charges.  
12 In the end, it was because of a clerical error that  
13 ICE became involved in my case and initiated the  
14 process of deportation. My lawyer Julie is a very  
15 good person and her and her team helped me a lot;  
16 they helped me speak with my family, they're very  
17 special, number one kind of people; they saved me.

18 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[01:39:08] Spanish**

19 CHRISTINA FOX: When I got out of  
20 detention, I had lost my apartment and all of my  
21 belongings -- my television and electronics, jewelry,  
22 clothes, etc. There was no help for me and I lived  
23 in the street for a month. My lawyer Julie and The  
24 Legal Aid Society helped me by connecting me to a  
25 social worker who helped me a lot finding shelter,

1  
2 food stamps and other help for homeless people. My  
3 social workers also sent me to the Workforce One  
4 office to find work, but at the end I was not able to  
5 connect with any work and they told me they could not  
6 give any more attention to my case. As a NICE  
7 member, I could count on the support of the staff in  
8 regards to my experience, as well as the help they  
9 provide to day laborers around jobs and the problems  
10 we face daily, like discrimination, wage theft and  
11 others.

12 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[01:40:42] Spanish**

13 CHRISTINA FOX: I call on competent  
14 authorities to do something about the testimonies  
15 being shared by people here today. When I was in  
16 detention, I shared in community with immigrants from  
17 many countries and there were many different  
18 immigration cases. Please let it be known that us  
19 immigrants should not be seen as criminals. Please  
20 see us as human beings with feelings and treat us  
21 without brutality at the hands of police and other  
22 authorities.

23 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[01:41:43] Spanish**

24 CHRISTINA FOX: Thank you for taking my  
25 testimony here today, Council Members and I hope that

1  
2 you take in account and take measures to address the  
3 things being said here today and for immigrants in  
4 New York.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: **[01:42:04] Spanish**

6 ANDREA SAENZ: Good morning. My name is  
7 Andrea Saenz; I'm the Supervising Attorney at  
8 Brooklyn Defender Services where I direct the New  
9 York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) team.

10 As this committee knows, NYIFUP is a  
11 groundbreaking program funded by the Council to  
12 provide representation to detained New Yorkers facing  
13 deportation and the loss of their families and lives  
14 here who cannot afford an attorney, and we do that  
15 along with our partners at The Bronx Defenders and  
16 The Legal Aid Society, and Mr. Quezada was a NYIFUP  
17 client of The Legal Aid Society. NYIFUP saves lives  
18 and strengthens communities, and I list some of our  
19 accomplishments in my testimony.

20 Critical to our success are the in-house  
21 social workers who round our legal teams, providing  
22 emotional support and connecting our clients and  
23 their family members with necessary city and  
24 nonprofit services. As other providers have shared,  
25 our social workers and attorneys can encounter real

1  
2 challenges in connecting NYIFUP clients to services  
3 and the problems that we face often include dealing  
4 with our clients' less common immigration statuses,  
5 their detention status or lack of the most common  
6 forms of ID, sometimes even beyond what the wonderful  
7 muni ID program can handle.

8           So I'll briefly tell you about a client  
9 of mine, Daniel, who is a gay man from Jamaica who  
10 experienced serious past persecution and violence as  
11 a result of who he is. We fought his case while he  
12 was detained in ICE custody and won it, because  
13 Daniel had a single fraud conviction. He was barred  
14 from asylum, and instead won a related form of  
15 protection under the Convention Against Torture,  
16 which entitled him to work authorization and several  
17 forms of benefits. Once released, he struggled to  
18 access everything he's eligible for because agencies  
19 were very unfamiliar with that form of status and  
20 what his paperwork looked like. Our amazing NYIFUP  
21 social worker connected him with navigators and  
22 helped him access health care through Essential Plan  
23 and Safety Net assistance; it took a lot of calls and  
24 appointments to make that happen. He's finally more  
25

1  
2 secure, he's pursuing job training and becoming a  
3 productive member of this community.

4 We recommend that the Council help us  
5 work with City agencies, such as HRA and MOIA, to  
6 establish an immigrant and family support task force  
7 or meeting space that could include coordination of  
8 service providers to help identify point people we  
9 can talk to with expertise in immigration issues,  
10 space for providers to educate agencies about our  
11 clients' sometimes lesser understood immigration  
12 statuses, types of alternative ID and paperwork that  
13 they may have coming out of court or detention, and  
14 discussion of how we could improve our ability to  
15 show immigration courts and officers that our clients  
16 would likely be eligible for services if released  
17 from detention, 'cause that type of showing can be  
18 critical to getting them released on bond or winning  
19 their cases and back with their family.

20 On a more general note, we hope you'll  
21 continue your support for NYIFUP's mission and  
22 continue to support the inclusion of social work as  
23 an integral part of our high quality legal services,  
24 and I thank you so much for your support and your  
25 time.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We got that and  
3 you have that support here, 100 percent. Thank you.

4 JOY ZIEGEWEID: Good morning. My name is  
5 Joy Ziegeweid and I'm a staff attorney with Sanctuary  
6 for Families' Immigration Intervention Project, the  
7 nation's largest immigration legal practice for  
8 domestic violence and trafficking victims. Our  
9 thanks to you, Council Member Menchaca, and the  
10 Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to  
11 testify today. We appreciate New York City's deep  
12 commitment to protecting our community's most  
13 disenfranchised neighbors: immigrant abuse victims  
14 and their families. Hearings like this are further  
15 evidence that the City Council is working proactively  
16 to ensure that the complex needs of immigrant  
17 families are met.

18 We are particularly grateful to the City  
19 Council for its robust, multifaceted support of  
20 Sanctuary's holistic services to immigrant and mixed-  
21 status families via several Council initiatives.  
22 With a holistic service portfolio reaching many  
23 thousands of immigrant families every year, we can  
24 strongly attest to the critical importance of  
25 comprehensive support to help those families navigate



1  
2 the complex, often bewildering array of service  
3 providers and City agencies with which they must  
4 interact.

5           Yet City agencies and nonprofit service  
6 providers can better work together to ensure that  
7 immigrant families receive the help they need. The  
8 lack of collaboration or insufficient collaboration  
9 between City agencies is particularly acutely felt by  
10 our youngest clients, immigrant children without  
11 permanent immigration status; they are in our public  
12 schools, receive medical care at our city hospitals  
13 and are interviewed by the Administration for  
14 Children's Services, and yet despite numerous touch  
15 points with City agencies, many are never informed of  
16 their eligibility for permanent immigration status  
17 and then they age out of options when they turn 21.  
18 Guidance counselors sometimes tell graduating seniors  
19 without social security numbers that there's nothing  
20 they can do to help; some youth have received DACA  
21 but remain eligible for other forms of relief that  
22 would provide permanent protection from removal, as  
23 well as eligibility for federal financial aid, yet  
24 they do not know that they are eligible.

1  
2 I think of Jose, who arrived in the  
3 United States from the Dominican Republic when he was  
4 6 years old. His father abused his mother as well as  
5 Jose and his siblings. ACS began its involvement  
6 with the family in 2005, when Jose was 9. Over the  
7 years, there were at least five police reports  
8 detailing his father's abuse. Yet Jose was only  
9 referred to Sanctuary by his GED program this year  
10 when he was two months shy of his 21st birthday.  
11 Jose and his family spent 15 years in the United  
12 States interacting with ACS, the NYPD and the  
13 Department of Education, yet no one evaluated them  
14 for their eligibility for immigration relief. It is  
15 imperative that we change this status quo -- our city  
16 can and should do better.

17 When families of mixed immigration status  
18 are connected to Sanctuary's comprehensive services,  
19 they are able to draw upon their strengths and build  
20 additional skills to heal from and prevent violence  
21 in the future. New York City sets a national example  
22 in its efforts to ensure that the complex,  
23 multifaceted needs of at-risk immigrant abuse victims  
24 and their families are met. Comprehensive, holistic  
25 services work -- we know that. We also know that we

1  
2 can always do better. We welcome more expansive,  
3 thoughtfully coordinated collaborations between  
4 nonprofit organizations like Sanctuary and City  
5 agencies such as the Department of Homeless Services  
6 and the Department of Education. Stationing  
7 representatives of these agencies at the City's  
8 Family Justice Centers is just one possible remedy.  
9 Only when we all work together can we proudly say  
10 that we truly transform lives. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for your  
12 testimony.

13 HOWARD SHIH: Thank you to Chair Menchaca  
14 and to the rest of the Committee for inviting us to  
15 testify at this hearing. My name is Howard Shih; I'm  
16 the research and policy director at the Asian  
17 American Federation. And as you are well aware,  
18 Asian Americans are the fastest growing part of the  
19 community in New York City, yet even by the City's  
20 own numbers from the Center for Economic Opportunity,  
21 one in four Asians are living in poverty in the city,  
22 and that's higher than for blacks and Hispanics.

23 Part of the challenge is that a lot of  
24 Asians aren't aware of services or aren't taking  
25 advantage of the services that are available to them.

1  
2 When we look at that benefit coverage within the  
3 Asian community, only 31 percent of Asians that are  
4 in households that meet the income eligibility for  
5 SNAP benefits are actually receiving benefits, and  
6 this compares to a 52 percent coverage rate for all  
7 residents in New York City, all residents that are in  
8 eligible households. So there is a significant gap  
9 in terms of how Asians are accessing services, so  
10 we're really happy that the City Council and also the  
11 Administration is looking at efforts to try to  
12 improve the ability for, particularly the Asian  
13 community, to find out about services and connecting  
14 them with the different services that are available.

15 You know when we talk to our member  
16 agencies, a lot of them are discovering people come  
17 in for one particular benefits and are completely  
18 unaware of the whole range of benefits that are  
19 available to them, and so that initial contact is a  
20 key to sort of opening up the opportunities that are  
21 available to the Asian community.

22 So we ask that the City Council take a  
23 look at three broad areas when they're considering  
24 this multi-agency approach to delivering services to  
25 the immigrant community.

1  
2 First, we need to really improve the  
3 communications and build networks, particularly if  
4 you look at the nonprofit groups that are operating  
5 within the Asian community, a lot of them aren't  
6 aware of all of the benefits and services that  
7 agencies provide; they may be aware of certain  
8 things, but there is no comprehensive approach, so we  
9 ask that we consider some sort of formalized training  
10 for agency staff at the nonprofits so that they be  
11 better able to advocate on behalf of immigrant  
12 communities.

13 I think every time there's a change in  
14 policy that information is slow to trickle out to the  
15 nonprofit staff, so the City might be doing something  
16 incredible, but sometimes it's not being said to the  
17 people on the ground in the nonprofit community.

18 Second is the lack of a mechanism for  
19 City agencies to share information about people who  
20 are in need, residents in need. So for example,  
21 someone who needs food stamps or someone who needs  
22 ACS services or somebody who needs housing services,  
23 they have to go to each of these individual agencies  
24 separately and they also have to submit documentation  
25 over and over again, so there's like no ability to

1 transfer documents or transfer information about  
2 residents that are in need within the agencies. So  
3 you know, for example, you know, the nonprofits, they  
4 have HHS Accelerator, they have places where they can  
5 dump all the documents they need to share with the  
6 different agencies and they don't have to repeatedly  
7 do the same thing over and over again. So that would  
8 be one way of trying to increase multi-agency  
9 support, to look at how we can lessen the burden on  
10 the clients.

12 The second area to look at is the  
13 availability of cultural and language expertise. We  
14 need to make sure that the agencies have that  
15 expertise within the staff, so when people come in  
16 through the door we may have a great way of bringing  
17 together people and identifying services that they  
18 need, but if the ability to deliver those services in  
19 a culturally and linguistic manner aren't available,  
20 you know it's that next step; we need to make sure  
21 that that is in place.

22 We also have to look and make sure that  
23 nonprofits -- no matter what happens, they're gonna  
24 continue to serve that role as the initial resource  
25 of information for members of the community; they've

1 developed a lot of trust within the community,  
2 they've got deep roots in neighborhoods, and so no  
3 matter how the City creates a new process, the  
4 initial contact is gonna remain the nonprofits, so we  
5 have to ensure that the role and the work of these  
6 nonprofits are not usurped by any City agency and we  
7 need to make sure that the resources are available  
8 for nonprofits to be able to maintain that role of  
9 being the communicator and the initial contact for a  
10 lot of individuals.

12 We also ask, what's the potential for the  
13 City Council to invest in various one-stop-shops for  
14 nonprofits that serve in-language and to expand their  
15 capacity to be able to serve new immigrants?

16 And finally, we would hope to reconsider  
17 the City's language access policy. You know right  
18 now there are six languages that are sort of required  
19 by executive order and I know a lot of agencies  
20 individually are taking on the burden of adding  
21 additional languages to support, but you know, having  
22 a comprehensive relook at what languages are  
23 supported; perhaps looking at concentrations in  
24 neighborhoods that have particular languages that are  
25 never gonna reach citywide status, but are important

1  
2 for particular neighborhoods. For example, in the  
3 Nepali community in Woodside, they are other examples  
4 across the city where there are specific Asian  
5 languages that are dominant in a particular  
6 neighborhood but are never gonna be getting the  
7 language support and translation services that are  
8 available to the top six.

9           And the third area is to build a  
10 mechanism for oversight and accountability. I think  
11 Council Members, part of the Committee have also  
12 mentioned thinking about different ways to ensure  
13 that the bureaucratic culture is changed within the  
14 agencies. While the directors of the agencies are  
15 responsive to our recommendations, sometimes there is  
16 not enough trickle-down to the frontline staff; even  
17 though, for example, HRA has instituted new  
18 trainings, we still occasionally hear from our member  
19 agencies that there are challenges in terms of  
20 getting language services in a timely and effective  
21 manner to clients that are looking for services.

22           And finally, what is the mechanism for  
23 oversight and accountability; who is going to be  
24 ultimately responsible and take a leadership and  
25 champion the cause of multi-agency support, and it



1  
2 sounds like there's a lot of discussion that you've  
3 had already with MOIA about taking on that particular  
4 role. So you now we wanna make sure that there are  
5 mechanisms in place that, you know, when leaders come  
6 and go that the culture of the bureaucracies are  
7 changed so that more services are available.

8 So thank you for inviting us to testify.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for  
10 testifying and in general, thank you all for  
11 recommendations. The recommendations that we're  
12 hearing I think are all in line in the ultimate  
13 conversation we're having about the complexity of our  
14 immigrant families interacting with our City agencies  
15 and our community-based organizations and the  
16 partnerships that we need both on the ground, but  
17 also from the top down and from the ground up.

18 I have a few questions that I want to  
19 focus on, just to help us get a better sense about  
20 what's happening. Can you give us an example of the  
21 -- and this is really for you, Mr. Shih, specifically  
22 on the lack of mechanism to share information to  
23 residents about food stamps, ACS services and  
24 housing; is there one example that kinda talks a  
25 little bit about what's not happening, from your

1  
2 perspective, and really specifically, the Asian  
3 community, the growing API community in the city,  
4 that can just give us a little bit more of an  
5 illustration, from your perspective, about where that  
6 mechanism kind of falls apart on the ground? Is  
7 there one example that kinda shows that?

8           HOWARD SHIH: In terms of how services  
9 aren't being delivered or in terms of how... or the  
10 lack of communication between agencies...? [crosstalk]

11           CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Lack... I mean I  
12 think you've really focused on lack of communication,  
13 so is... just 'cause I think we need to bring this back  
14 to the agencies and say look, this is where it broke  
15 down...

16           HOWARD SHIH: Right.

17           CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: and I'm hearing  
18 things are breaking down, great; we all know that;  
19 can you give me a little bit more of a context about  
20 where things are breaking down for you, specifically  
21 for the Asian community, that you serve?

22           HOWARD SHIH: Right. So I think one of  
23 the challenges is that overall agencies are... there  
24 isn't a formal mechanism for individual nonprofits to  
25 learn about these new initiatives and new policies

1  
2 and I think one of the challenges is that they are  
3 under-staffed and a lot of them are new immigrants  
4 themselves, so they haven't had that formal process  
5 of being plugged into the City as well. So the  
6 Federation gets [sic]... [crosstalk]

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And so let me just  
8 clarify; you're talking about staff at the CBOs...  
9 [crosstalk]

10 HOWARD SHIH: Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: or at the CBO?

12 HOWARD SHIH: Yeah, staff at the CBO.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay.

14 HOWARD SHIH: So what we at the  
15 Federation have tried to do is create opportunities  
16 for HRA to come speak to the staff at the CBOs and,  
17 you know, other organizations. So there needs to be  
18 sort of a more... it's kind of a two-way street, so the  
19 agencies need to be proactive, but the CBOs  
20 themselves also have to take some initiative in sort  
21 of building the relationships and not entirely rely  
22 on the Federation every time that there is a problem.  
23 So what we wanna try to do is avoid last-minute  
24 emergencies that have to be taken into account. So  
25 let me think about a specific example; I think in

1 terms of... For example, IDNYC initially didn't have an  
2 Asian language center; there were several in the  
3 Hispanic community, so what we had to do was try to  
4 figure out where to have some of those pop-up shops  
5 appear, and so working... it would've been much better  
6 of we had an upfront initial Asian community center  
7 that was publicized rather than, you know, coming  
8 into the process later on and developing, using the  
9 pop-up shops to sort of remedy the situation. And I  
10 think there are other occasions where Asian CBOs are  
11 not necessarily competitive for some of the bigger  
12 contracts, so for example, the ActionNYC program, I  
13 believe there's only one... [crosstalk]

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right.

15 HOWARD SHIH: Asian...

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right.

17 HOWARD SHIH: organization that is  
18 participating in that process.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And that's another  
20 kind of conversation that I think we're all trying to  
21 have on multiple fronts -- ActionNYC -- really every  
22 immigration-related contract in regard to the  
23 communities that are affected, we're seeing that same  
24 consistent issue, especially with the Asian community  
25

1  
2 and the capacity for nonprofits to be able to take on  
3 certain things -- adult education too and thinking  
4 about how to build capacity in communities that don't  
5 have robust community organizations to take on an  
6 adult literacy contract, for example, and how do you  
7 build that bridge when you bring in another provider  
8 that might not have any cultural competency in that  
9 community partner up. And so I think these are the  
10 questions that we're trying to unravel here so that  
11 we can, one, think about it during the budget  
12 process, but two, we're in the middle of spending  
13 down \$12 million dollars of adult education funding  
14 right now and we're working with our agencies like  
15 DYCD and MOIA and HRA and others to figure out how do  
16 we go into places where we're not in right now, and  
17 so anyway, I think you've kind of made that point  
18 clear and it's something that I think we all know,  
19 but thank you for that.

20 And really, this is a question for the  
21 whole panel, and if one of you can just speak to  
22 this. The question that I asked the Commissioner  
23 earlier was about this relationship with CBOs and  
24 where do we place roles and responsibilities with our  
25 CBOs and if we are gonna go in that direction, how do

1 we cement it into the system, and it's gonna be an  
2 important thing for us to be able to measure that  
3 success as well and so I think you're pointing to it  
4 on training, so HRA coming in and training and  
5 agencies coming in, like ThriveNYC, have all of you  
6 been briefed on ThriveNYC and how to get mental  
7 health services into your communities? Have any of  
8 you gotten City agencies to come in and talk to you a  
9 little bit about that? No? so this is an  
10 opportunity here to figure out how we make that an  
11 automatic gesture, an automatic opportunity for all  
12 agencies to go out and say okay, we know our  
13 immigrant community CBOs, we rely on them for so much  
14 already; we're just gonna embed it into our  
15 relationship with how we do what we do and fund it  
16 adequately so you have all the information. 'Cause  
17 again, we're trying to figure out whether we build  
18 out... I mean there's a conversation about the  
19 department of Immigrant Affairs and so I think that  
20 may or may not be a good idea; the real opportunity  
21 here is how do we build sustainability and getting  
22 services into these communities with our CBOs on the  
23 ground in partnership? I don't know if anybody wants  
24  
25

1  
2 to just respond to that. Okay. [background  
3 comments]

4 HOWARD SHIH: Okay. So I'll... [background  
5 comments] I'll go last.

6 ANDREA SAENZ: Go... no, go ahead.

7 HOWARD SHIH: No, go... [background  
8 comments] Alright. Alright. Everybody's being  
9 differential. But I think in terms of ThriveNYC,  
10 we've had conversations with Deputy Mayor Buery and  
11 the First Lady in terms of the program, but again,  
12 one of the challenges is that ThriveNYC is designed  
13 for larger organizations and so the Asian community I  
14 don't think has had a lot of groups of pie for  
15 different fundings that have arrived through  
16 ThriveNYC, so that's one of the challenges, again, is  
17 that we have to figure out how to... [crosstalk]

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. I just  
19 wanna repeat that, in the context of this hearing..

20 HOWARD SHIH: Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: in order for us to  
22 serve our immigrant families better, we need to  
23 rethink our contracts, especially the ThriveNYC, for  
24 example, or adult education contracts or other  
25 contracts that we have in the City that can benefit

1  
2 our immigrant communities and just rethink how we do  
3 contracting with smaller CBOs...

4 HOWARD SHIH: Right.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: that are gonna be  
6 small, especially for emerging immigrant populations  
7 that are even further separated from City government  
8 period. That's the kind of main point.

9 HOWARD SHIH: Yeah, because...

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay.

11 HOWARD SHIH: because when... you can  
12 connect everybody together, but if the services  
13 aren't in place, then that doesn't help anybody in  
14 the long run.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Any other comments  
16 here on that co... [interpose]

17 ANDREA SAENZ: I didn't have specific...

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay.

19 ANDREA SAENZ: criticism as to that  
20 issue, and it may be because you know BDS is a large  
21 organization that has a lot of City contracts and so  
22 as far as I can tell that the City's been very  
23 successful in letting us know what's going on or  
24 having, you know, enrollment or events and things of  
25 that nature, so I think that we've been successful on



1 that front. But I will say though that our  
2 immigration practice in some ways is a little bit of  
3 a hybrid [sic]; we're part of BDS and we're also part  
4 of coalitions with smaller immigration organizations  
5 providing those services and that I think we're all  
6 trying, both on the City level and on the coalition  
7 level, to build networks among smaller immigration  
8 organizations, whether that's trying to bid for  
9 contracts as a coalition or just, you know, having  
10 space to like say what else are people doing to, you  
11 know, share resources and to share what we're able to  
12 bring into the communities.

14 JOY ZIEGEWEID: And to your point about  
15 how to sort of build sustainability and really cement  
16 relationships between CBOs and City agencies, you  
17 know I'm not speaking now to kind of the smaller CBO  
18 point, but you know I can certainly see a role for  
19 CBOs, whether larger or smaller, to be partners with  
20 all of the City agencies that, as Commissioner  
21 Agarwal was saying earlier, are the partners of MOIA,  
22 where we need to create that immigrant-specific  
23 capacity everywhere, and I could see, for example,  
24 you know when speaking of the Department of  
25 Education, and I could see an organization like

1  
2 Sanctuary for Families might be a partner with the  
3 Department of Education, with school officials in  
4 providing training in being a referral resource. So  
5 that's one possibility that I could see.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for  
7 that.

8 CHRISTINA FOX: And if I may add, as a  
9 smaller CBO, and kind of how we actually came into  
10 contact with this initiative, is really as a worker  
11 center and as a community center, where members like  
12 Rafael come and feel uncomfortable after an  
13 experience like this and being able to... you know, we  
14 are aware of the initiative when it was starting, but  
15 to actually see it in practice and be able to make  
16 those referral connections, those points of  
17 communications when this does come across, to have  
18 those very strong links that we know exactly who to  
19 call and today I think we can do that a lot better,  
20 now having interacted with the initiative. In  
21 addition to even having received, you know, being  
22 able to depend on Legal Aid Society for that has been  
23 very important on many different levels, but also  
24 having received on slight occasions from even BDS,  
25 referrals for OSHA, for clients that they've had, to

1  
2 bring them back in through the job center and the  
3 worker center and be able to kinda collaborate on  
4 that level.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And again, I think  
6 on just something like NYIFUP, a new program that  
7 we've been able to create in partnership with the  
8 community asking for municipally funded legal  
9 services where we can't do this on the federal level  
10 but we can do it as a city, and just in three years I  
11 think we're seeing here the effect of how one  
12 particular kind of legal service intervention really  
13 changes lives and Rafael is one of the stories. And  
14 I guess what I wanna ask Rafael: **[02:09:00] Spanish**

15 RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[02:09:43] Spanish**

16 CHRISTINA FOX: Just abridged. Really  
17 kind of acknowledging the needs of our community,  
18 specifically, like in the grain on the ground, but  
19 the needs are so high and I think kind of suggesting  
20 that these folks do not get connected to these  
21 services; they don't have access to these services or  
22 they're ineligible for these services, but even more  
23 so, the need being there and it not being addressed,  
24 and so I think that's something we see on a day to  
25 day basis.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: **[02:11:01] Spanish**

RAFAEL QUEZADA: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, thank you.

We have one more panel, and we wanna bring up

Jessica... Jessica Coffrin... [crosstalk]

RAFAEL QUEZADA: **[02:11:12] Spanish**

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Gracias...

[background comments] from Masa; [background  
comments] Lorilei Williams from Legal Services NYC;  
and then Jessica Gorelick from Human Rights First.

[background comments]

Thank you all for being here. We can  
start on my right.

JESSICA COFFRIN-ST. JULIEN: Okay. Can  
you hear me? Okay. So my name is Jessica Coffrin-  
St. Julian; I'm the Deputy Director at Masa. Masa is  
a nonprofit organization that partners with Mexican  
and Latino children, youth and families, primarily in  
the South Bronx, to develop strong learners and  
leaders who fully contribute to the broader  
community. We have over 10 years of experience  
working in this community, and while our programs are  
primarily educational in nature, we do recognize that  
for kids to be academically successful their families

1  
2 need to be as stable as possible, so we also provide  
3 wraparound services and referrals as needed. The  
4 overwhelming majority of parents we serve are  
5 undocumented.

6 Over the years we've definitely seen many  
7 families struggle to navigate the complex bureaucracy  
8 of City agencies, especially DOE, HRA and the  
9 municipal hospital system. We recognize the  
10 importance of interagency coordination and we really  
11 appreciate the Committee's willingness to open up a  
12 dialogue about this issue. However, we've really  
13 found that the barriers families face in accessing  
14 services tend to relate to linguistic and cultural  
15 competency, whether within or across agencies.

16 So particularly at DOE schools and  
17 offices, as well as at HRA-operated benefits centers,  
18 we have really seen a lack of awareness of and, quite  
19 frankly, a lack of patience for the linguistic  
20 diversity and the varied education backgrounds of our  
21 families, so I think context is really important  
22 here. Over a quarter of the families we served in  
23 the last year speak an indigenous language as their  
24 primary language -- the most commonly represented  
25 languages are Mixteco, Nahautl and then Tlapaneco as

1 kind of a distant third, as well as Mam and Garifuna  
2 are represented. So among parents born abroad, 17  
3 percent of our parents have a second-grad education  
4 or less in their country of origin; 41 percent have a  
5 primary school education or less, so up to sixth  
6 grade in Mexico. So many parents in our community  
7 are dealing with limited literacy skills in Spanish;  
8 navigating City systems in Spanish is a challenge,  
9 much less in English. So I think it's really  
10 important for City agencies to understand this  
11 context to effectively serve these parents and their  
12 children -- kids who are really quite vulnerable,  
13 living in poverty, often attending low-performing  
14 schools.

16 So nonetheless, we often see parents  
17 struggle with language access at various City  
18 offices. There does appear to be a lack of  
19 caseworkers who speak Spanish fluently.

20 Adoption of interpretation hotlines in  
21 schools and other institutions also seems to be a  
22 challenge; it's great the resource is available, but  
23 we really don't see it used very frequently. And a  
24 particularly kind of like egregious example, a Masa  
25 parent actually called me a couple weeks ago from a

1  
2 municipal hospital asking me to interpret during a  
3 meeting with an oncologist, which apparently the  
4 doctor did not know how to access the interpretation  
5 hotline.

6  
7           So in addition, we've also found that the  
8 understandably and necessarily bureaucratic nature of  
9 City systems -- especially I feel like we see it a  
10 lot with the benefits recertification process and the  
11 special education evaluation process -- it's just  
12 particularly daunting for parents with limited  
13 literacy in Spanish. So while providing paperwork in  
14 Spanish is helpful and I feel like that happens  
15 pretty consistently, parents with limited literacy  
16 are often overwhelmed and confused by the paperwork  
17 they get. In our experience, these parents are more  
18 likely to make mistakes in completing their  
19 paperwork, more likely to have communication  
20 breakdowns with their caseworkers, and more likely to  
21 miss appointments, which in turn puts their kids at  
22 risk of having their benefits cut off, which could  
23 mean like you have a kid who's not getting their  
24 SNAP, a family that's not getting cash assistance  
25 that's like really living on the edge.

1  
2           So there's a very long example here of  
3 one parent's experience this year; I'm gonna skip it  
4 to be mindful of the time limit, but I encourage you  
5 to review it.

6           So moving on, most notable, if most  
7 difficult to tackle, is the issue of cultural  
8 competence. From the moment parents walk in the door  
9 of a City agency, they are often made to feel  
10 degraded, dehumanized or defensive. There just seems  
11 to be very little awareness citywide of the realities  
12 many immigrant families face, so that's no viable  
13 pathway to citizenship for many parents; in many  
14 cases, limited formal education in one's primary  
15 language, and in some cases, navigating Spanish as a  
16 second language and English as a third.

17           So we really do see families reluctant to  
18 go to City agencies for tasks like re-budgeting SNAP  
19 cases or cash assistance interviewed because of  
20 previous negative experiences. This just has to get  
21 better. On-the-ground staff have to be offered more  
22 and better professional development opportunities to  
23 expose them to the rich cultural and linguistic  
24 diversity within New York City's immigrant  
25 communities.



1  
2 And as a final point, I think it goes  
3 without saying that on-the-ground staff at City  
4 agencies, especially caseworkers, are under enormous  
5 pressure to serve clients efficiently; we've seen  
6 caseworkers decline to repeat instructions or  
7 explanations, likely because of the need to deal with  
8 a caseload that can just feel completely  
9 overwhelming. However, the reality is that some  
10 families need not only more cultural awareness or  
11 linguistic capacity -- which is very important -- but  
12 they also need more time and the system does not seem  
13 to be designed to accommodate this reality.

14 So I'll end there. Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for that  
16 strong testimony, and we will read the rest of it; I  
17 know there's a lot more. Thank you.

18 JESSICA GORELICK: My name is Jessica  
19 Gorelick and I am the Social Worker in the Refugee  
20 Representation Program at Human Rights First, and I  
21 submit these comments on behalf of Human Rights  
22 First, and thank the City Council for the opportunity  
23 to testify.

24 The Refugee Representation Program  
25 provides legal services and social services to

1 families and individuals that have fled persecution  
2 in their home countries and are applying for asylum  
3 here in the United States.

4  
5 Immigrant families face an array of  
6 unique difficulties when arriving to New York City.  
7 Those who fled from violence and trauma in their home  
8 countries to seek shelter and protection here in the  
9 United States are among the most vulnerable within  
10 the immigrant community. Housing is often the most  
11 urgent need for such families. In an ideal world,  
12 asylum-seeking families would have a dedicated city  
13 shelter. Having a specific shelter for these  
14 families would allow for the development of staff  
15 training from a trauma-informed approach to support  
16 these families and their psychosocial needs. A  
17 shelter for refugee families could also provide funds  
18 for basic needs items. Additionally, families with  
19 cases in the U.S. immigration system could develop a  
20 community of support for one another in such an  
21 environment. While I do hope that we are in a place  
22 to develop such a program in the near future, I make  
23 this appeal understanding that the Department of  
24 Homeless Services (DHS) is currently dealing with a  
25 homelessness crisis and understand that such a

1  
2 program could not happen overnight. I would like to  
3 propose some potential first steps that might help us  
4 start to address the needs of this population.

5 It would be a wonderful first effort, if  
6 shelter staff throughout New York City could receive  
7 training around the unique needs of asylum-seeking  
8 families. This could potentially start with an  
9 effort to train supervisors through one-day training.  
10 This could include information regarding the legal  
11 process of applying for asylum, along with the array  
12 of social services related struggles these families  
13 face and how to address them. Additionally, if  
14 shelters could provide a small amount of funding for  
15 these families to purchase basic needs items like  
16 food, hygiene and cleaning supplies that would help  
17 fill some of the gaps regarding their needs.

18 The Mayor has made wonderful efforts to  
19 improve access to affordable housing for all New York  
20 City residents; however, access to stable housing  
21 continues to be an issue for many. According to the  
22 Coalition for the Homeless, there were 15,501  
23 homeless families with 23,929 homeless children  
24 living in city shelters as of August 2016. There are  
25 no exact figures regarding the number of asylum-

1 seeking families in shelter in New York City. We can  
2 narratively share that at Human Rights First we  
3 typically have approximately ten families living  
4 within the shelter system at any given time. Unlike  
5 in many other parts of the country, these families  
6 are fortunate in that there are no immigration  
7 requirements for individuals to be placed in shelter.  
8

9           Unfortunately, asylum-seeking families  
10 find themselves homeless within the first months in  
11 New York City all too often. When families arrive,  
12 they often find temporary housing with family or  
13 friends. Many believe they will be able to find work  
14 quickly and rent their own apartment. However, these  
15 families soon discover that they must wait months, if  
16 not far longer, to access work authorization. They  
17 are not eligible for social safety net programs like  
18 the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program  
19 (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families  
20 (TANF). They have no income and cannot help with  
21 paying rent, bills or buying food. It is not  
22 uncommon in this high stress situation for old  
23 conflicts to reemerge as these families wear out  
24 their welcome. Many of these families have faced  
25 unspeakable trauma in their home countries and

1  
2 struggle with the emotional aftermath of these  
3 experiences, impacting the dynamics and environment  
4 for hosts. Additionally, there are often logistical  
5 issues when housed with family or friends. Many who  
6 have been living in New York City for years are still  
7 struggling financially and already have difficulty  
8 providing adequately for their families, let alone  
9 for those who have recently arrived. There are also  
10 issues when housed with family or friends living in  
11 apartments that do not allow for additional tenants.  
12 Many are forced to leave these homes because their  
13 presence could put those hosting them at risk for  
14 eviction. These dynamics lend and lead to  
15 homelessness for many asylum-seeking families.

16           When asylum-seeking families are placed  
17 in shelter, they are often at a loss for how to  
18 survive. These families are typically new to New  
19 York City and already overwhelmed as they are  
20 unfamiliar with the language and culture. Case  
21 managers at shelters are frequently unaware of what  
22 it means to be an asylum applicant and often refer  
23 individuals to apply for SNAP and TANF, neither of  
24 which they're eligible for. They often tell them to  
25 go find a job, even though they are not eligible to

1 work. They are often unaware of the fact that  
2 individuals with pending asylum applications are  
3 Permanent Residents Under the Color of Law (PRUCOL)  
4 and eligible to apply for health insurance, so they  
5 fail to inform them of the availability of that  
6 benefit. These families are frequently disoriented  
7 and unaware of their rights. They struggle with  
8 access to basic needs items and are confused on how  
9 to access educational, medial, legal, and mental  
10 health services for which they are eligible. Many  
11 shelters do not have adequate cooking facilities and  
12 parents are unable to make children the food to which  
13 they are accustomed, something that can help create a  
14 sense of safety and consistency for children in such  
15 an unstable environment. They are not provided with  
16 hygiene items or cleaning supplies to maintain their  
17 living quarters. Shelter staff is often unsure of  
18 how to support asylum-seeking families because they  
19 are unaware of what it means to be an asylum seeker.

21 Within the past year, Human Rights First,  
22 the Feerick Center for Social Justice, and Safe  
23 Passage Project saw wonderful improvements through  
24 collaboration with staff from Prevention Assistance  
25 and Temporary Housing (PATH), DHS and the Human

1  
2 Resources Administration (HRA). We worked to discuss  
3 the unique needs of asylum-seeking families and  
4 frequent roadblocks they face when seeking shelter  
5 through PATH. We began to develop a protocol for  
6 these families and have been able to resolve  
7 eligibility issues for a number of families through  
8 collaboration with PATH's Legal Unit. It has been  
9 fantastic to see the interest that City agencies have  
10 in supporting asylum-seeking families and helping  
11 them in their time of need.

12           Considering the wonderful improvements we  
13 saw in our collaborations with PATH, DHS and HRA, we  
14 believe that these preliminary steps toward our long-  
15 term goal of an asylum-seeking family-specific  
16 shelter would make a great difference for our clients  
17 facing homelessness right now. After being trained,  
18 shelter staff would understand the legal processes  
19 these families are facing. They could become  
20 supportive allies to our clients and help them access  
21 health insurance when qualified, along with  
22 developing a referral list of resources for which  
23 these individuals are eligible. Parents could learn  
24 about educational protections like the McKinney Vento  
25 Act to make sure their children are enrolled in

1 school. They can also receive support to ensure they  
2 have access to healthy foods and are properly clothed  
3 for the weather -- improving their ability to create  
4 a safe and stable environment for their children in a  
5 chaotic situation. This awareness would also help  
6 empower clients who are often frightened and confused  
7 as they adapt to their new lives in New York City.  
8 If shelter staff were provided proper training around  
9 these needs and given some adequate funding for basic  
10 needs items for clients, they would be empowered to  
11 provide support to these families as they  
12 acculturate. When shelter staff become aware of the  
13 rights of asylum-seeking families, the individuals  
14 living within those shelters are more likely to  
15 become aware of their rights too.

17 The New York City Council has made  
18 incredible efforts to offer immigration legal support  
19 to unaccompanied minors and has shown great interest  
20 in supporting families who are fleeing their home  
21 countries and seeking safe haven here in New York  
22 City. Through coordinating efforts with DHS and  
23 shelters within the City's system, we can help these  
24 families have a smoother transition to adapting to  
25 life in New York City. This will ultimately be



1  
2 beneficial to the larger community as these families  
3 will become more capable of contributing to and  
4 improving their communities, ultimately strengthening  
5 the fabric of our city of immigrants.

6 We are grateful to the New York City  
7 Council and this Committee on Immigration for the  
8 opportunity to testify about working to coordinate  
9 multi-agency support for immigrant and asylum-seeking  
10 families and we look forward to further discussion on  
11 this topic. Thank you so much.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

13 LORILEI WILLIAMS: Good morning. Thank  
14 you for the opportunity to testify. My name is  
15 Lorilei Williams; I am the Immigration Director of  
16 Staten Island Legal Services, which is a part of  
17 Legal Service NYC. Legal Services NYC (LSNY) is the  
18 largest civil legal service provider in the country.  
19 We serve 80,000 New Yorkers in a wide range of civil  
20 legal services every year, which gives us I think a  
21 unique perspective on the services, because we  
22 represent people in housing cases, in employment  
23 discrimination, and pretty much everything that you  
24 can think of.

1  
2 I'm gonna stray a little bit from my  
3 testimony just because everyone's been so incredibly  
4 eloquent; I think of a lot it's already been said  
5 before. I do wanna emphasize a couple of things  
6 though.

7 We know immigrants are not aware of what  
8 they're eligible for when it comes to city services  
9 that might be available. We also know that a lot of  
10 CBOs are not aware of all of the possibilities that  
11 could be available to their clients, so there's huge  
12 gaps in services right there, connections that can be  
13 made.

14 Additionally, there are huge issues with  
15 how to even enroll in the first place; the things as  
16 simple as Medicaid. Most people know what PRUCOL is;  
17 most people know who can be eligible for PRUCOL, and  
18 I have a telling story; it was earlier this year, one  
19 of my clients, he suffered a stroke; he was a U  
20 nonimmigrant, had the status already, very clearly  
21 eligible for Medicaid, and on top of that, he had a  
22 pending application for lawful permanent residence.  
23 Despite that, there was no proper interpretation  
24 given to the family, the hospital failed to assist  
25 him with Medicaid enrollment and unfortunately he

1  
2 passed away and his widow and his son are left with  
3 this really horrible and stressful situation, because  
4 now they're being charged \$20, 30, 40,000 dollars for  
5 things that could have been addressed from the get go  
6 because we had been advocating since week one of his  
7 hospitalization that he needed to be under Medicaid.

8           That also emphasizes the needs that we  
9 have in the Staten Island community, in particular.  
10 I don't think you get representatives from Staten  
11 Island at many meetings; I'm hoping that we will be  
12 able to appear more often, but it's interesting,  
13 because our immigrants suffer I think in a way that  
14 is very different and unique to Staten Island. One,  
15 we have approximately 100,000, probably more, foreign  
16 born immigrants residing in Staten Island. Just  
17 talking about nonprofit legal services alone, as far  
18 as immigration is concerned, there are three  
19 attorneys to serve 100,000 foreign born immigrants on  
20 Staten Island and I'd like you to take a second to  
21 think about that number, 'cause it's an alarming  
22 number, and as a director who also has to manage an  
23 active caseload, it's really overwhelming for us. So  
24 if that's what it's like for dedicate immigration  
25 legal services, just imagine how bad it is when it

1  
2 comes to social services for immigrants who may speak  
3 other languages; come from other different cultural  
4 backgrounds, and what's really alarming too is that  
5 it's one of the fastest growing immigrant populations  
6 in the city, because it's one of the very few places  
7 where people might actually be able to find housing  
8 they could somewhat afford.

9           On top of that, a lot of agencies that  
10 might provide services that could benefit Staten  
11 Islanders don't actually have offices in Staten  
12 Island, and our public transportation -- I don't know  
13 if you've ever been to Staten Island -- is really  
14 atrocious; there's one train that goes from north to  
15 south and all of the buses lead to the ferry. So if  
16 you have to go east/west or some type of diagonal,  
17 you're not gonna get there anytime soon. I know for  
18 a fact -- I was trying to help someone get from the  
19 west shore to the east shore -- two hours on bus to  
20 make that commute. So one of the services, for  
21 example, for the Special Exit and Prevention  
22 Supplement Program (SEPs) which is a type of housing  
23 benefit that can be available to some types of  
24 immigrants, if you were to apply for that, you have  
25 to go to Brooklyn to sign up, to go in person to do

1  
2 what you need to do, so that means you could be  
3 taking multiple buses, you could be taking multiple  
4 trains; you can be taking a boat, I mean it's this  
5 huge ordeal and we're thinking about working  
6 immigrants, I mean these are people who have jobs  
7 where if they don't show up they don't get paid or  
8 they might lose their job; they are family providers,  
9 if they have young children, where are the children  
10 gonna be while they do this? It's a really, really  
11 alarming situation that needs to be emphasized and  
12 everything that the City Council does; Staten Island  
13 should not be the forgotten borough, in practice.

14           The other thing that I would like to  
15 emphasize is that in Staten Island we also suffer a  
16 lot more, in my opinion, discrimination and language  
17 access issues because it is a predominantly white  
18 community and a lot of people who are born and raised  
19 in Staten Island stay in Staten Island, so the  
20 integration of the immigrant communities is not  
21 there, and the social stigmas that separate immigrant  
22 communities from the regular community, or from the  
23 American-born community I should say, is really,  
24 really strong on Staten Island.

25

1  
2 As far as moving forward with this issue,  
3 we definitely support increased education and  
4 outreach for immigrant communities for CBOs and for  
5 the agencies themselves to deal with their own  
6 frontline staff competency issues.

7 We also think it would be a great idea to  
8 have something that would be like a one-stop-shop, so  
9 if you cannot make the MTA create better services on  
10 Staten Island, at least make the services available  
11 in a more condensed, comprehensive location so that  
12 they can go, fill out everything they need for every  
13 possible benefit that they could be eligible for and  
14 then take it from there, so they don't have to go all  
15 the way to Brooklyn for four different services on  
16 four different days.

17 I also ask that if we start talking about  
18 funding to allocate to CBOs in order to support this  
19 initiative, I think it's really important that the  
20 metrics be very realistic, and that the metrics be  
21 created with a lot of the input from the community.  
22 For example, just from the legal service provider  
23 side, our organization, or at least my program  
24 specifically, is funded by IOI through the  
25 Discretionary Fund, and all we can report is one

1 participant; one outcome, which is crazy because if I  
2 represent someone who's eligible for Special  
3 Immigrant Juvenile Status, asylum, TEA [sic], and in  
4 removal proceedings, work-wise that feels like five  
5 cases, but numerically it only counts as one. So  
6 that's just an example of how there is a disconnect  
7 between funding and how we report funding and the  
8 actual real work that we're doing on the ground.

10 The other thing that I would also  
11 emphasize is that legal service providers, there  
12 needs to be more funding for them, because I don't  
13 think that we're gonna be able to change the  
14 eligibility requirements for a lot of these services,  
15 so that means that a lot of people need some type of  
16 status in order to qualify for a lot of different  
17 benefits, but there's also thousands and thousands  
18 and thousands of immigrants who are being bounced  
19 around from legal service provider to legal service  
20 provider because their case is not a priority because  
21 they might not be in removal proceedings. So you  
22 heard today from organizations that do great work  
23 when it comes to removal defense work, but what about  
24 all of these other -- we're seeing lots of recent  
25 arrivals from Eastern Europe, for example, who may be

1  
2 LGBTQ and they go to all the different organizations  
3 and there's no capacity to help them. And so without  
4 that help, how do they put that foot forward in order  
5 to be eligible for additional city services?

6 Those are most of my thoughts and thank  
7 you very much for talking about this issue and we  
8 look forward to working with the City closely moving  
9 forward.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well again, thank  
11 you all for your testimony, your recommendations. I  
12 think just to start and really honor your kind of  
13 specific geographic response to this question about  
14 immigrant families getting services, I think Staten  
15 Island -- not a place I represent myself, but as the  
16 Immigration Chair I need to think about as well, and  
17 so thank you for that context and we'll be working  
18 with our Council Members in Staten Island  
19 specifically to think about how we can drive that  
20 point home that won't require a kind of Brooklyn stop  
21 for their services and so know that that we wrote  
22 that down and we're gonna follow up with you on that  
23 front.

24 I think what's important too is -- I just  
25 wanna underscore some of the testimony that you all



1  
2 gave in this particular panel -- it troubles me when  
3 I -- and I've heard it before, clearly, this is not  
4 the first time, but it's an important thing to  
5 underscore, that from the moment parents walk into  
6 the door of City agencies they are often made to feel  
7 degraded, dehumanized or defensive; security guards  
8 in buildings are aggressive and frustrated because  
9 people can't speak English, and so this just  
10 highlights this kind of thought that I have about the  
11 ever-evolving conversation around adult education and  
12 bringing English to communities that want them,  
13 people want to speak English and they need those  
14 classes in their neighborhood so they can engage that  
15 process from wherever they are; some of them don't  
16 even speak some of the languages that we have in our  
17 communities, like some of the Mexican -- Mixteco, for  
18 example -- and there are several stages before  
19 getting to English and this is something that our  
20 agencies are listening to right now and all of that  
21 is about coordination of services, thinking about  
22 geography in a big way, bringing the English classes  
23 to people in Staten Island, rather than forcing them  
24 to come to a CUNY class in Manhattan. These are the  
25 things that are important and at this point I'm gonna

1  
2 ask: what agencies are still here representing the  
3 City; we have DYCD, [background comments] HRA,  
4 [background comments] MOIA... [background comments]  
5 awesome, thank you for being here. So thank you for  
6 listening to this last panel and this kind of final  
7 statement that I'm making here, but thank you for  
8 that. We need to keep hearing that over and over  
9 again until it goes away, and so thank you for that  
10 kind of testimony.

11           On the shelter conversations, I mean  
12 these are all things that I think we need to get into  
13 the weeds on and a lot of this is focused on  
14 training, very particular people that you've  
15 highlighted here, on how to just make that system  
16 work better, and that was a consistent conversation  
17 that we heard in this hearing, but in our  
18 conversations with the CBOs and in a conversation  
19 with the City agencies, how do we bring that training  
20 into places that we have already identified? We've  
21 done half the work already; let's just bring that  
22 training to them. Thank you for that testimony.

23           And I'm gonna close this out -- do we  
24 have any -- so I'm gonna close this out by saying  
25 this: this is... specifically for this particular

1 session of City Council and this committee, this is  
2 the first time we've built a committee hearing like  
3 this where we have a broad question about how are  
4 immigrant families interacting with our City agencies  
5 for services and how we can do a better job of doing  
6 that, and this is just part of -- this could only  
7 happen in the great partnership that we have with our  
8 City agencies, and so I just wanna make sure that as  
9 we have in so many ways identified the problems and  
10 the concerns, there is so much confidence that I have  
11 in this greater team to be able to address some of  
12 these issues, and so we wanna be held accountable in  
13 this conversation to make sure that now that we've  
14 identified, we can come up with some specific ways to  
15 do some short-term work but also, really rethink the  
16 vision, and the vision that I wanna leave with here  
17 today is that when we think about immigrants and the  
18 face of our immigrants in New York City, we're  
19 talking about families here; we're not talking about  
20 the kind of faces that we might see in the news and  
21 from some of our presidential election conversations  
22 about immigrants; we're talking about families, we're  
23 talking about families in our communities that are  
24 just trying to engage in a dignified, human approach  
25

1 to any place that is now welcoming them, and there's  
2 not other city like New York City that has and embeds  
3 itself into that commitment for immigrants being  
4 welcomed. And while the face of immigrant is the  
5 family, the face of government is... and continues to  
6 evolve in different spaces, and again, I just have to  
7 point to the federal elections right now, where we  
8 see a lot of rhetoric that creates a lot of stigma  
9 that empowers people in our own agencies to take on  
10 this degrading and just inappropriate response to our  
11 immigrants in our communities; we have to get a hold  
12 of that and control that and change that, and so this  
13 is for all the agencies. This face of government is  
14 not just the elected officials; it's not just the  
15 Mayor saying welcome; it's not just me just as a  
16 Council Member saying welcome; it's the frontline  
17 staff of the CBOs; it's the frontline staff of all  
18 our agencies and it's the frontline staff in my  
19 district office; all of us have to maintain that  
20 commitment and get the proper training to be able to  
21 do that, and sometimes that's all it is is training,  
22 so training has been a big, big thing here. And then  
23 finally, on the multiple agencies, I think that  
24 there's a real opportunity here to just take a couple  
25

1  
2 of these pieces and on a monthly basis really measure  
3 our impact -- everywhere, from the NYPD to the NYCHA  
4 case that we heard to DOE and the shelter systems,  
5 working with families that are moving through the  
6 city and our legal services, both in Staten Island,  
7 but in general, and so I think we have a lot of  
8 opportunities here. And this was not a hearing to  
9 make anyone feel like they are on the line; we are  
10 all on the line on this one and so I really.. my main  
11 kind of call to action here is that we take this, we  
12 digest it and we keep working forward, and as we get  
13 closer to the budget hearings, some of these  
14 questions are gonna be a budget question and I'm  
15 looking forward to working with all the agencies in  
16 this room to figure out where budget can solve this  
17 and where just coordination can solve the rest of the  
18 work that we have to do.

19 I wanna thank my staff -- Adriana Garcia  
20 and our counsel on the Immigration Committee, Indiana  
21 Porta, and all the Council Members that were here  
22 today, and thank you all for joining in this  
23 conversation and we look forward to coming back to  
24 the table about this and showing some real effects  
25 and change that we've made thanks to this

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

conversation. So thank you for all your good work.  
And we are now adjourned. Thank you.

[gavel]

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 November 15, 2016