

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON HOSPITALS

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April 16, 2024  
Start: 10:35 a.m.  
Recess: 5:06 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Alexa Avilés  
Chairperson

Mercedes Narcisse  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Erik D. Bottcher
- Gale A. Brewer
- Carmen N. De La Rosa
- Shahana K. Hanif
- Rita C. Joseph
- Shekar Krishnan
- Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
- Jennifer Gutiérrez
- Kristy Marmorato
- Francisco P. Moya
- Vickie Paladino
- Carlina Rivera

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

Adama Bah  
Afrikana

Patrice Lawrence  
The UndocuBlack Network

Djibrill Dioui  
African Bureau for Immigration Social Affairs

Corine Ombongo-Golden  
Africa is Everywhere

Dr. Baldé Abdoulaye  
Futa Islamic Center

Manuel Castro  
Commissioner at Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
Affairs

Molly Schaeffer  
Director of Asylum Seeker Operations

Tom Tortorici  
Executive Director of Legal and Support  
Initiative at Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Aissata M.B. Camara  
Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Strategic  
Initiatives and Chief of Staff at Mayor's Office  
for International Affairs

Senator Cordell Cleare

Amaha Kassa  
African Communities Together, ACT

Abdoul Gadiri  
African Communities Together, ACT

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

Fatoumata Batouly Diallo  
African Communities Together, ACT

Maimouna Dieye  
African Communities Together, ACT

Nneka Okpara  
Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative

Dr. Seydi Sarr  
African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs

Fatimatou Balde  
African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs

Diallo Fatimata  
African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs

Mamadou Toupe  
African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs

Aamdadou Diallo

Abdourahame Diallo

Julio Herrera  
The Black Institute

Mamadou Bello Bah

Mamadou Diallo

Melissa Johnson  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration, BAJI

Sandra Dieudonné  
Catholic Charities

Lauren Wyatt  
Catholic Charities

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

Sebastien Vante  
Safe Horizon

Jennifer Jarrell  
Covenant House

Souleiman Ba  
Covenant House

Jamie Powlovich  
Coalition for Homeless Youth

Henry Love  
Win Inc.

Rex Chen  
Legal Services NYC

Monica Tulchinsky  
NYLAG Legal Health Department

Ellinor Rutkey  
The Door Legal Services Center

Abdulmajeed Ishag  
Legal Aid Society (accompanied by Deborah Lee)

Siedu Hamaidu  
La Colmena

Syed Ahmed (Mahdi)  
Halal food Standards Alliance of America

Sergio Uzurin  
NYC ICE Watch

Mariel Acosta  
Bushwick City Farm

Melissa Johnson on behalf of Moira Shoush  
BAJI

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

Thaerou Barry

Olivya Veazey

Mbacke Thiam

Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

Tanesha Grant

Parents Supporting Parents New York

Taina B. Wagnac

New York Immigration Coalition



1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION WITH COMMITTEE ON HOSPITALS 7

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and  
3 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for  
4 the Committees on Hospitals and Immigration. At this  
5 time, we ask that you silence all cell phones and  
6 electronic devices. Once again, please silence all  
7 cell phones and electronic devices. If you have  
8 testimony you wish to submit for the record, you may  
9 do so via email at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Once  
10 again, that is [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). If you  
11 require translation services, we have Arabic,  
12 Bambara, French, Fulani, Haitian-Creole, and Wolof  
13 that will be available in the rotunda. We thank you  
14 for your cooperation. Chairs, we are ready to begin.

15 [gavel]

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: This hearing is  
17 being called to order. Good morning everyone. I am  
18 Council Member Alexa Avilés, Chair of the Committee  
19 on Immigration. Thank you for attending today's  
20 joint hearing of the Committees on Immigration and  
21 Hospitals. I'd like to begin by thanking my co-  
22 chair, Council Member Mercedes Narcisse, Chair of the  
23 Committee on Hospitals for co-chairing this very  
24 important hearing. I would also like to thank  
25 everyone joining us today and those who are attending

2 remotely, including our Council colleagues, impacted  
3 people, representatives from the Administration, the  
4 public, service providers, stakeholders, advocates,  
5 so many. We've been joined today by Council  
6 colleagues, Council Member Stevens, Council Member  
7 Moya on Zoom, Council Member Hudson, Council Member  
8 Marmorato, and Public Advocate Jumaane Williams.  
9 Today, the Committee will be conducting an oversight  
10 regarding the experiences of Black immigrant  
11 newcomers in New York City. This topic is of the  
12 utmost importance to me and to the Committee on  
13 Immigration. Black immigrants have long contributed  
14 to New York City's storied cultural history and  
15 economy. Throughout the United States the arrival of  
16 new immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean and  
17 elsewhere has bolstered the Black population's  
18 growth. 764,000 Black immigrants live in New York  
19 State, comprising nearly four percent of the state's  
20 population. It is incumbent on New York City to  
21 acclimate its newest immigrant residents to their new  
22 role, facilitate pathways to work authorization, and  
23 connect immigrants with culturally appropriate  
24 resources so they can ultimately thrive in their  
25 neighborhoods as fully-integrated community members.

2 Over the past two years, Black immigrant newcomers  
3 have faced especially stark barriers in accessing  
4 city services. Those needing information translated  
5 and interpreted in language predominantly spoken in  
6 West African countries, including Wolof, Arabic,  
7 Bambara, Fulani, and French among others have  
8 reported difficulty communicating with migrant  
9 shelter staff and obtaining information from City  
10 agencies. Public reporting has demonstrated that the  
11 30-, 60-day rules disproportionately evicted African  
12 immigrants with newcomers from Mauritania and Senegal  
13 being the most likely to receive eviction notices.  
14 Black immigrants are disproportionately subject to  
15 immigration detention near the US/Mexico before  
16 traveling to New York City, and many hail from  
17 countries that lack temporary protected status  
18 designations, and as a result, they require intensive  
19 immigration legal services involving full legal  
20 representation. Many Muslim newcomers have raised  
21 concerns about cultural competency in the migrant  
22 shelter system from the demand for Halal food to the  
23 incompatibility of congregate settings with their  
24 faith practice. I would like to extend a special  
25 welcome and express my deepest gratitude to the panel

2 of advocates and people who will open today's  
3 hearing. These individuals have welcomed Black  
4 immigrant newcomers in neighborhoods across New York  
5 City and we look forward to hearing about their  
6 dogged efforts in their communities as well as their  
7 perspectives on ways the City can do so much better  
8 in embracing Black immigrant newcomers as the new New  
9 Yorkers they are. Mutual aid groups and mosques have  
10 been unsung heroes during this time, providing  
11 dignity through culturally appropriate meals, safe  
12 places to sleep, free ESL classes, among so many  
13 other needs. These entities are providing these  
14 supports largely unfunded by the government with  
15 support coming from the surrounding community of New  
16 Yorkers, many who are struggling themselves. I want  
17 to express my deepest gratitude to all of you who  
18 have gone above and beyond and who have exemplified  
19 what a welcoming New York City looks like, what  
20 dignity looks like. While we recognize the sacrifice  
21 of the work you have done, you should not be  
22 singularly bearing the burden of our city government.  
23 We must be creative in funding a service delivery  
24 that follows people and their needs. After today,  
25 the government cannot claim it did not know of the

2 gaps and their profound impacts on people. I will  
3 attest we have known and asked why hasn't getting  
4 stuff done, and a city of yes fully reached newly-  
5 arrived Black people. We see the same patterns of  
6 disinvestment, anti-Black media narratives, and  
7 disproportionate negative impacts in US-born Black  
8 communities as we do with Black new arrivals. We can  
9 and must make different choices. At the heart of  
10 this hearing is a need for data on the needs of  
11 immigrant New Yorkers residing in our city. We all  
12 know that it is impossible to make policy and conduct  
13 oversight without the appropriate data, and knowing  
14 the needs of New York City residents helps policy  
15 makers and elected officials tailor the City's  
16 programming and service delivery. That is why the  
17 Committee on Immigration will be hearing Introduction  
18 84 and Introduction 85, both sponsored by Council  
19 Member Carlina Rivera which would respectively  
20 require the Administration to develop and implement  
21 workforce and health surveys of newly-arrived  
22 migrants and asylum-seekers. These bills would also  
23 require the Administration to recommend policies and  
24 investments to support the wellbeing and success of  
25 immigrant newcomers. The Committee will also be

2 hearing Introduction 739 sponsored by Deputy Speaker

3 Ayala in relation to the reports on the response of

4 asylum-seeker arrivals and requiring the use of

5 budget codes for funding associated with the response

6 to asylum-seeker arrivals. We look forward to

7 hearing the Administration's positions on these bills

8 and working with the Administration on a long-term

9 forward-thinking approach to welcoming immigrant New

10 Yorkers to our neighborhoods and communities.

11 Finally, the Committee on Immigration will also be

12 hearing Resolution 340, sponsored by Council Member

13 Carlina Rivera, calling on the U.S. Citizen and

14 Immigration Services to eliminate filing fees for

15 humanitarian benefit applications and subsequent

16 employment authorization applications, and calling on

17 Congress and the President to move significant

18 funding from USCIS to cover the funding loss by

19 eliminating filing fees. Even as the Committee on

20 Immigration seeks ways for the City to do better in

21 welcoming immigrant New Yorkers, the Council has been

22 clear that the Federal Government must play a leading

23 role in making it possible for immigrants to build

24 full lives in our cities and provide for their

25 families. Rather than requiring immigrant New Yorkers

2 to pay exorbitant application fees when many of them  
3 are already struggling to make ends meet, the Federal  
4 Government should meaningfully resource USCIS and  
5 reassert its commitment to humanitarian forms of  
6 immigration relief and protection. I would like to  
7 thank all the committee staff for their work on this  
8 hearing, including Nicole Cata [sp?], Rebecca Barilla  
9 [sp?], Nia Hyatt [sp?], Florentine Cabor [sp?]. I  
10 would also like to thank my staff, Chief of Staff  
11 Edward Cerna [sp?], Christina Botego [sp?], Amaraci  
12 Angadi [sp?], and Emma Terran [sp?], and everyone  
13 working in the background to make this hearing run  
14 smoothly. Lastly, I would like to thank the  
15 representatives from the Mayor's Office in Immigrant  
16 Affairs, and the Office of Asylum-seeker Operations  
17 who are present today to testify before the Council.  
18 Okay, we'd like to recognize the Office of  
19 International Affairs, and unfortunately, I am  
20 extremely disappointed to know that representatives  
21 from New York Health + Hospitals and New York City  
22 Emergency Management are not here. I understand that  
23 Dr. Long is the only person authorized from H+H to  
24 testify before this body, and tomorrow he will be  
25 attending another very important hearing. Given this

2 constraint, I would like H+H to seriously consider  
3 how it can meaningfully staff these hearings,  
4 especially since it continues to take on larger and  
5 larger pieces of New York City's work. They should  
6 be present. And now, I will turn it over to my co-  
7 chair, Council Member Mercedes Narcisse.

8 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Good morning. I am  
9 Council Member Mercedes Narcisse, Chair of Hospitals  
10 Committee. Thank you to Chair Avilés and the  
11 Immigration Committee staff for holding this  
12 incredible important hearing. I'm grateful for this  
13 opportunity to learn more about the experiences of  
14 Black immigrants in our city and to determine new  
15 pathways to ensure that new arrivals are receiving  
16 the support that they so richly deserve. As of last  
17 December, New York City was delivering care to 68,000  
18 new arrivals, with the number of newcomers continuing  
19 to rise steadily. We-- our recent data shows that we  
20 are welcoming an accelerating number of people from  
21 Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea, and Haiti, and many  
22 other folks of the beautifully diverse African and  
23 Caribbean diasporas. I cannot emphasize enough that  
24 when we say Black immigrants, we do not refer to a  
25 monolith with a singular shared experience. These

2 new arrivals represent a diverse array of religions,  
3 languages, foods, traditions, and customs. It seems  
4 obvious that we must therefore tailor our response to  
5 each individual's unique needs, whether it be  
6 language access, healthcare, dietary restrictions,  
7 religious observance, or any other support they may  
8 require. Furthermore, we must create spaces which  
9 allow our newcomers to thrive by offering  
10 opportunities that will tap into the unique skillsets  
11 to contribute to our city. We heard it outside.  
12 They're not looking for a handout. They're looking  
13 for opportunity. Every day, we usher in doctors,  
14 construction workers, engineers, nurses, and teachers  
15 and so on. Every person who is arriving has something  
16 valuable to contribute, and it is severe detriment to  
17 our city to allow the skillset to be under-utilized.  
18 People need to work. As we have observed the recent  
19 political unrest unfold in Haiti with heavy hearts--  
20 I am from Haiti-- it becomes apparent that we must  
21 discuss our City's response to accommodating black  
22 immigrants. It is crucial that we understand the  
23 shortcomings of our current procedures to generate  
24 new ideas and foster new community connections to  
25 improve our process of providing aid and shelter to

2 those fleeing violence and persecution. This is  
3 personal to me. We are committed to ensuring that  
4 Black immigrants are uplifted, respected, and  
5 supported as a city that has a long and vita history  
6 of welcoming in newcomers and helping them create new  
7 roots in this country. We are determined to provide  
8 each and every person a safe and dignified avenue  
9 towards starting the next chapter of their lives  
10 here. Before I conclude, I want to thank all the  
11 Committee staff, advocates, community members who  
12 have contributed so much of their hard work and  
13 dedication to this issue, especially to those in the  
14 community whose work uplifts the voices of those who  
15 are being ignored and left behind by our current  
16 system. All welcome. That's what we usually say. I  
17 extend my thanks to all of you for joining us today  
18 to take your time. Usually when we make the call,  
19 it's a few. Today, as a Black person, I'm very  
20 impressed that you know today it was a call to action  
21 and you show up. Don't stop showing up. You have to  
22 show up. You cannot be invisible. You are visible.  
23 You mean something for not only the City of New York.  
24 You mean something. You mean a lot to the US and the  
25 world in general, and you know it my brothers and

2 sisters, my [inaudible] continent [inaudible]. You  
3 mean a lot. So I want to thank you to my Chief of  
4 Staff, to my Deputy Chief of Staff, to my scheduler,  
5 to my Deputy Director of Constituent Services, to all  
6 my community engagement-- we've been trying our very  
7 best, but I know my colleagues, and I'm so proud to  
8 sit here with Avilés that understand the City of New  
9 York immigration need to be addressed for all of us.  
10 Now, I would like to recognize my colleague De La  
11 Rosa, Gutiérrez, Joseph, and Paladino. Now, I will  
12 turn it back to Chair Avilés. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
14 Chair. And next we are going to hear from Public  
15 Advocate Jumaane Williams.

16 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so  
17 much. Peace and blessings; love and light to  
18 everyone. My name's Jumaane Williams. I'm the Public  
19 Advocate of the City of New York. Thank you, Chair  
20 Avilés and Chair Narcisse, members of the Committee  
21 on Immigration and Hospitals for holding this  
22 important hearing, for allowing me to share my  
23 statement. I'm speaking as a son of Black  
24 immigrants. In particular, Chair Avilés, thank you  
25 for seeing the importance and prioritizing Black

2 immigrants in this Committee in a way that hasn't  
3 been done. Thank you so much for that. And I just  
4 wanted to shout out-- I know we spoke a lot about the  
5 advocates, so shout out to all of them, but I want to  
6 shout out someone for decades who's been doing this  
7 work and has been a Godmother to many of us on Black  
8 issues and Bertha Lewis from the Black Institute.

9 Thank you for all of the work that you've been doing  
10 for so long. New York City has been responding to an  
11 influx of migrants to the City since 2022. Migrants  
12 are arriving from all over the world. They come from  
13 different cultures, practices, and proactive various  
14 traditions, and speak a multitude of languages. This  
15 is nothing new for a city like New York. The City  
16 has done a great deal in responding to this influx.  
17 Yet resource allocation could be more equitable than  
18 it is now, particularly for Black migrants coming  
19 from Caribbean and African countries. I want to make  
20 sure we lift up Sudan, Congo, and Haiti in  
21 particular, that is often left out of the news, as  
22 well as many other nations in Africa. Black  
23 migrants-- and Caribbean. Black migrants have shared  
24 their experiences facing racism and anti-blackness  
25 within a system that historically deports, detains,

2 and confines Black migrants at a higher rate than any  
3 other racial or ethnic group. These are realities  
4 the City has to grapple with and in order to make any  
5 progress we must hear directly from those living  
6 these realities. From local to the federal level, my  
7 office and I have been calling for greater resource  
8 allocation for Black migrants and this hearing is a  
9 great starting point. At this juncture, the City  
10 should be well aware that migrants coming from all  
11 over the world, they all speak a wide variety of  
12 languages. As mentioned, this is not a monolith. As  
13 a result, the city resources should also be in  
14 language as much as possible, or creating  
15 infrastructure for the communities that are working  
16 with them to help with that. Black migrants,  
17 particularly feel the impacts of language barriers,  
18 especially if they do not speak English or Spanish.  
19 They are more likely to speak a langue like Arabic,  
20 French, Haitian-Creole, Wolof, Mandinka, or Fula, and  
21 city resources and information in those languages are  
22 more difficult to come by. Language accessibility is  
23 a lifeline for immigrants and opens doors to legal  
24 services, housing, economic emolument, and other  
25 opportunities. Just at the press conference, myself

2 and Council Member Hudson were telling folks that  
3 they can get medical assistance at emergency rooms,  
4 particularly in City hospitals, something they did  
5 not know which might be because of a language access.

6 Language accessibility is a lifeline for housing,  
7 economic and development of opportunities. With a  
8 preliminary survey of languages that Black migrants  
9 speak with many CBOs already having data on the city  
10 should increase this language capacity accordingly.

11 Another crucial point of discussion I wish to lift up  
12 is the impact of housing and shelter on Black  
13 migrants, with the city's ongoing 30- and 60-day  
14 notices to evict migrant shelter residents which  
15 disproportionately affect African migrants. We may  
16 see and hear instances of migrants sheltering in  
17 store fronts and extreme congregate settings because  
18 they have nowhere else to go. We are witnessing  
19 unaccompanied youth at the whims of the shelter  
20 system, some of whom are categorized as adults if  
21 they are over the age of 18, despite attending NYC  
22 DOE high schools. With these shelter notices, some  
23 have to decide between attending school or reapplying  
24 for shelter placement, which is not a same-day  
25 guarantee. These experiences reflect a number of

2 oversights in the City's response, and my hope is  
3 that Administration is made aware of the situation  
4 and commits to ramping up case management for these  
5 unaccompanied migrant youths. Many of these migrants  
6 are navigating entirely new city, culture, language  
7 and systems after which may have a long and harrowing  
8 journey just to get here. On top of all that, they  
9 may face increased scrutiny, xenophobia, and racism  
10 just by nature of being a Black immigrant. The city  
11 among the existing and future resources provided  
12 [inaudible] must ensure that at a minimum there's  
13 equity of resources above all else. I want to remind  
14 folks that applying for asylum is a legal way to be  
15 in this city, and I also push for the Whitehouse to  
16 do more and Governor Hochul to do more, because they  
17 are not. New York City cannot handle this by  
18 themselves. I do know there's a gargantuan effort,  
19 and some of those efforts I just want to thank the  
20 City for trying, but even while awaiting for  
21 resources, we do have to make sure things are applied  
22 equitably and humanely, and we have some work to do  
23 in those two categories. Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

25 I just would like to let everyone know, in Council

2 decorum while you're in the chamber, please refrain  
3 from clapping. What we do is this. If you are in  
4 agreement, we would love to see your hands, but  
5 please refrain from clapping. Thank you so much.

6 And next, will be me reading a statement on behalf of  
7 Council Member Carlina Rivera. "Good morning. We  
8 are in an era of global displacement and the number  
9 of individuals and families seeking asylum in the  
10 United States has risen significantly in recent  
11 years. Two years ago almost to the day on April  
12 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the first bus of individuals from war-  
13 torn and politically unstable countries arrived in  
14 Washington, D.C. from Texas. In the following days,  
15 many of those individuals found their way to New York  
16 City, and since then the five boroughs have welcomed  
17 more than 182,000 individuals seeking asylum.

18 Immigration is core to the identity of the United  
19 States, and as these families exercise the right to  
20 be here, per our national policies, New York City  
21 policies can be improved to meet the needs of the  
22 influx of migration. In response, our office has  
23 worked with advocates across workforce and healthcare  
24 sectors to respond to the needs of the new residents.  
25 At today's hearing, two of my bills will be heard to

2 require the development and administration of  
3 healthcare and economic-related surveys to foster  
4 opportunity and wellbeing. Over the last two years,  
5 the New York City Health + Hospitals has completed  
6 over 100,000 visits for individuals seeking asylum.  
7 Our public hospital system has stepped up to welcome  
8 our newest neighbors, screenings individuals for  
9 communicable diseases, administering over 60,000  
10 vaccines, and delivering over 600 babies. A  
11 comprehensive survey and collection of anonymized  
12 data will help the public care system respond and  
13 adapt for a changing landscape of needs. On the  
14 economic front, New York City's population has shrunk  
15 by nearly 500,000 people since 2020. An individual  
16 seeking asylum have a variety of skills to contribute  
17 to our workforce. By collecting information on the  
18 economic challenges and opportunities for asylum-  
19 seekers, we can better assist the newest New Yorkers  
20 to integrate into our workforce through training and  
21 facilitating connections to open roles. In addition  
22 to implementing policies at the local level, city  
23 leaders must continue to marshal efforts to urge the  
24 Federal Government to provide New York City with  
25 financial support and get individuals seeking asylum

2 employment authorization, language support, and  
3 vocational training." And on behalf of Council  
4 Member Carlina Rivera, thank you. And we wish her and  
5 her family well as she is having a baby. Blessing to  
6 Council Member Rivera and her family. Next, we'd  
7 like to recognize we've been joined by Selvena  
8 Brooks-Powers. And where are we on the-- here we  
9 are. Okay, now, we are going to hear from a pre-  
10 panel that we are-- thank you again for being here,  
11 and I guess we will turn it over to Council staff.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning  
13 everyone. We'll first hear from a pre-panel. We  
14 have Adama Bah, Katrice Lawrence, Corine Ombongo-  
15 Golden, and Baldé Abdoulaye. And I haven't called  
16 your name and you're seated at the table, please just  
17 state your name for the record as you being your  
18 remarks. But we'll start with Adama Bah whenever  
19 you're ready.

20 ADAMA BAH: Good morning Chair Avilés and  
21 members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is  
22 Adama Bah, and I'm the Executive Director of  
23 Afrikana. Afrikana is a nonprofit organization  
24 supporting Harlem and Bronx communities and recent  
25 migrants to New York City. We specifically focus on

2 Black and Arab communities who face significant  
3 barriers to accessing services, including but not  
4 limited to legal, workforce, and benefit assistance.

5 Before I begin, I would like to thank City Council  
6 and Committee on Immigration for your support and  
7 commitment to holding New York City accountable to  
8 treating migrants with dignity, respect, and  
9 humanity. For the past 18 years I've been advocating  
10 for immigration reform, and I'm here today to ask  
11 City Council to increase their efforts to hold the  
12 Mayor's Office accountable for Black migrants by  
13 ensuring that our upcoming city budget reflects that  
14 equitable resources and services are provided to  
15 organizations that serve Black migrants, develop and  
16 implement sustainable workforce training programs,  
17 collaborate with Black-led immigration rights  
18 organizations for language access, advocate for work  
19 authorization for all migrants, and address the  
20 inequities in health wellbeing of Black migrant  
21 women, children and families, especially in maternal  
22 healthcare. Today, there are over 60,000 migrants in  
23 NYC from many countries included, not limited,  
24 Mauritania, Senegal, Burundi, Guinea, and Chad. They  
25 are entering the United States and are in our cities

2 with our brothers and sisters from across many  
3 countries in Latin America. Black migrants are faced  
4 with compound discrimination due to stereotypes  
5 attributed to them because of their documentation  
6 status and their identity. Black migrants have  
7 reported verbal and physical abuse due to the color  
8 of their skin. Racism begins at the border for them,  
9 and unfortunately I have witnesses firsthand and the  
10 City's' response anti-Black racism is continued in  
11 New York City. It starts with beginning access to  
12 shelter. Churchill [sic] reported just over two  
13 months ago New York focus [sic] that Black migrants  
14 received the highest and second shared highest of  
15 notice to vacate shelter. Secondly, the City has  
16 failed to provide adequate language interpretation or  
17 translation which is critical for Black migrants to  
18 navigate services, communicate support staff, and  
19 understand the notices given to them regarding their  
20 shelter. Please know that Google Translate and  
21 Language Line is never sufficient and is not  
22 acceptable. The City should hire native speakers of  
23 most spoken languages among Black migrants to provide  
24 adequate language interpretation and translation  
25 service. The lack of cultural responses does not end

2 with its insufficient language access. Black  
3 migrants have the same goals of education and  
4 workforce, contributing to their community and  
5 building self-sufficient life like every other  
6 immigrant. However, Black migrants face a lack of  
7 available workforce training which is more readily  
8 available for Spanish-speaking migrants. Black women  
9 migrants face added cultural-inappropriate health and  
10 mental healthcare. For example, many Black migrant  
11 for reasons unrelated to their belief do not use  
12 tampons, yet Black migrant women are continually  
13 being offered tampons. To fill in the gaps in  
14 services, supported organizations like Afrikana must  
15 expand our services. Black migrants rely on  
16 organizations like ABISA, Haitian Bridge [sic]  
17 Alliance, Afrikana, and DocuBlack, Africa is  
18 Everywhere, Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, and  
19 ACT, and GYO for direct services and support with no  
20 funding. We are providing case management, language  
21 support. We are also making sure Black migrants are  
22 safely transported to shelter. Therefore, Avilés and  
23 members of the Committee of Immigration, I call on  
24 you to hold the Mayor's Office accountable to New  
25 York City's constitution and protect and promote the

2 dignity and respect for Black migrants and all  
3 migrants in New York City. Thank you for your  
4 ongoing partnership and support.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. We will  
6 go through everyone's testimony and then open  
7 questions and Council Members can ask the panel  
8 questions.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You can go ahead and  
10 when you're ready.

11 PATRICE LAWRENCE: My name is Patrice  
12 Lawrence and I serve as the Executive Director of the  
13 UndocuBlack Network, a 501C3 organization and a  
14 multigenerational network of currently and formerly  
15 undocumented people. I am a part of the community I  
16 serve. I am testifying today about my experience,  
17 our experience with newly-arrived Black migrants from  
18 a community perspective as well as an organizational  
19 perspective. As the number of migrants arriving has  
20 risen in New York City, we've watched the posture of  
21 elected officials change from welcoming to spewing  
22 anti-immigrant dog whistles. Ensuring that policies  
23 that would have migrants detained rather than  
24 sheltered in habitable and dignified spaces, as well  
25 as access to safety net resources is a key priority

2 for UndocuBlack Network, UBN, and should be for  
3 anyone who believes in justice and free treatment,  
4 fair treatment for all. The public buy-in is  
5 essential for this to work well. However, the City  
6 needs to be mindful of the language that they use to  
7 describe migrants. Expanding access to services for  
8 long-term residents also needs to be done hand-in-  
9 hand with resources for the migrants. This will help  
10 with some of the rhetoric that has been used to  
11 describe Black migrants and to pit them against the  
12 communities that they come from, as well as the new  
13 ones that they're inhabiting. We do not need to  
14 remove the right to shelter. We do not need to  
15 remove the right to shelter. We do not need to  
16 remove the right to shelter. We do need to contract  
17 with culturally-competent contractors and community-  
18 based organizations, and if it needs to take time,  
19 consult with immigrant organizations so that you will  
20 know the best ways to move forward, and you will see  
21 success. We need a welcoming atmosphere for migrants  
22 entering New York City by bus or by plane. At the  
23 airports, the instructions are confusing even for the  
24 average traveler. Many newly-arrived Black migrants  
25 have ended to take Ubers that we have facilitated

2 access to. This is costly. Airports needs signage,  
3 people, access to metro cards or a pass that does not  
4 require credit cards so that the migrants can sue the  
5 subway system, moving away from cash should not be  
6 fully implemented. Our collaboration is primarily  
7 with Adama Bah of Afrikana. I testified I have  
8 witnessed Adama welcome migrants at Port Authority in  
9 the dark hours of the morning for over two years with  
10 a warm smile and food and care. She still does it  
11 now. It is not lost on us that the beginning of  
12 these buses came out of spite and hate for  
13 immigrants. We hope it is not lost on you either.  
14 But what was meant for evil has been turned for good.  
15 We support Adama Bah's expanding team as well as  
16 Doctor Seydi who heads up ABISA, and we have directly  
17 financially supported both of their work. I know  
18 these women and their respective networks and  
19 organizations. With our help we have seen and  
20 witnessed medical clinics that they have set up at  
21 times in parking lot in Harlem and we've seen the  
22 glow of the faces in individuals as they have been  
23 treated with dignity. Additionally, we have seen  
24 legal services. They provided legal consultations,  
25 assistance for immigration and paperwork, medical

2 support, medical screenings, vaccinations, referrals  
3 to healthcare providers who are culturally-competent  
4 to ensure the health and wellbeing of migrants,  
5 housing solutions to make sure that they have-- that  
6 the Black migrants who enter the City have secure,  
7 safe, affordable housing for migrants, as well as  
8 additional health and wellness programs. Connecting  
9 Black migrants to a local network of competent  
10 service providers to ease their experience of getting  
11 social services is very, very necessary and must be  
12 done in all of the languages that they speak. It is  
13 my hope that any surveys and reports to be conducted  
14 in the future, as I understand, is in front of this  
15 committee, for the migrant population in New York be  
16 conducted in a way that ensures participation of  
17 Black migrant communities. This may mean and is not  
18 limited to conducting the survey instruments in  
19 multiple languages, including the participation of  
20 community-based organizations, and the findings must  
21 not result in punitive measures. Too often in this  
22 city's past and present we have seen them resort to  
23 police. Please don't make that mistake here. Lastly,  
24 we know that federal policy impacts people  
25 everywhere, and we also know that without proper

2 implementation that gap will fall flat and fail.

3 There has been temporary protected status that has

4 been instituted for several people for Black

5 countries, and we fight for it to continue to happen

6 for additional countries. We need the City's help

7 and funding to make sure that these are successful.

8 We have seen firsthand that without proper funding

9 and implementation and because of the systemic bias

10 and racism within the system, USCIS may not process

11 people at a time that they're supposed to or even

12 accept their applications. Therefore, Black migrants

13 need more help and assistance. Our organizations--

14 my organization is willing to do that work. But we

15 cannot do it-- but we cannot do it without the proper

16 funding and with people who support us. We also find

17 it really hard to work in an environment where Black

18 migrants are often ostracized and demonized. This

19 must stop. Language matters. As a Black immigrant

20 myself from the country of Jamaica, it is really,

21 really important that some of what I experienced,

22 some of what my family experienced, and some of what

23 we see even now not be duplicated. The people

24 outside are here in their numbers by the thousands

25 and they're here to show you that they belong, and

2 that they are here and that they should not be  
3 erased. Please listen to them. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Patrice.  
5 Before we go to our next speaker, we need to make an  
6 announcement regarding the interpretation equipment.

7 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking other language]

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. And  
9 before we move to the next panelist, I want to  
10 recognize the 16 students from MS890 Brooklyn, New  
11 York up there. We see you. Thank you for being  
12 here. You're always welcome in the People's House.  
13 Next, we will move on to the next panelist.

14 DJIBRILL DIOUI: Hello everyone. My name  
15 is Djibrill. I'm here for represent the African  
16 community and the African Bureau Immigration Social  
17 Affairs. We want to make the testimony about the  
18 situation of migrants. When we arrive in USA we  
19 encounter a number of difficulties. First of all,  
20 under our [inaudible] situation, we don't think it's  
21 alright that we can't use a shelter address because  
22 only African migrants can stay for a month in the  
23 shelter. I have been [inaudible], but we could not  
24 be comfortable, because there was no bed, no toilets,  
25 no clothing, and the situation of food is much more

2 complicated. And I want to say also the situation of  
3 work permits, we want the waiting period for work  
4 permit to be reduced so that we can meet our needs  
5 for housing, food, medical care, so that we can pay  
6 for a lawyer to support our cases. And I think that  
7 this will contribute to the profile of New York State  
8 and the USA, and I really give to thank of Doctor  
9 Seydi Sarr, and ABISA team for a big job, and give a  
10 real thank for Adama Bah, Afrikana. [speaking French]

11 UNIDENTIFIED: It was a big joy to be  
12 here.

13 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can you move the  
15 microphone closer to both of you so we can hear your  
16 voices. Thank you.

17 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. He want to  
18 continue in French, and I'm going to interpret for  
19 him.

20 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

21 UNIDENTIFIED: To explain to the  
22 situation of immigration to United States is very  
23 difficult for immigration to be here.

24 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

2 UNIDENTIFIED: Because we have a lot of  
3 difficulty to find a shelter and to find a proper  
4 attorneys to defend our cases.

5 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

6 UNIDENTIFIED: We also notice that only  
7 Black immigrants are being rejected from the passes  
8 from subway station from all the transportation.

9 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

10 UNIDENTIFIED: We are not here to ask for  
11 anything. We just here to fight and work properly.

12 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

13 UNIDENTIFIED: When we are home in our  
14 own country we heard that United States is a country  
15 of right, human right.

16 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

17 UNIDENTIFIED: We cross-- before we  
18 arrive here in United States, we cross a lot of  
19 country to arrive here safely just to have a job and  
20 to have a proper life. We don't ask for anything  
21 else.

22 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

23 UNIDENTIFIED: And we want to give a huge  
24 thank you to all the association that are here to  
25

2 help Black immigrants to establish properly in this  
3 country.

4 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French]

5 UNIDENTIFIED: Particularly Doctor Sadie  
6 Saur [sp?], Adama Bah, Afrikana, ABISA, and  
7 [inaudible] Islamic Community.

8 DJIBRILL DIOUI: [speaking French] Thank  
9 you so much.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you so much for your  
11 attention.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Merci. Next, we'd  
13 like to recognize we've been joined by Council Member  
14 Hanif and Council Member Botcher. Corine, you would  
15 like to be next?

16 CORINE OMBONGO-GOLDEN: Hi, City Council  
17 Member. Thank you for having me. My name is Corine  
18 Ombongo-Golden and I am a resident of the Bronx. I'm  
19 a tenant organizer in the Bronx. I'm African. I am  
20 from the Congo. If you know, the Congo is at war.  
21 My dad is from the Congo. My mother is from  
22 Ethiopia. Today, I'm going to speak to the need of  
23 New York's new community, our African brother and  
24 sister. I will speak in one of the language today  
25 that I use to help our brother and sister learn the

2 truth about their reality as migrant in New York  
3 City. The language is called Lingala. Some of you  
4 guys know the Lion King. Okay. Here we go. This is  
5 what I tell my brother from the Congo. [speaking  
6 Lingala] New York City [speaking Lingala] because  
7 nobody speak my language here, obviously. Here  
8 there's a lot of trouble in this city. You need to  
9 leave New York City. They will not help you. I  
10 spoke in Lingala to my Congolese brother. He was  
11 stuck at [inaudible] in Brooklyn with no one to  
12 understand him and no way to get an ID or case  
13 management. Now, he's in [inaudible] safe, working,  
14 and part of the community. Africa has 54 countries.  
15 They are around 3,000 language spoken on the  
16 continent. Black African are not slave, but have  
17 been unfree due to the [inaudible] and capitalist  
18 exploitation. Our lives are sacrificed for the rest  
19 of the developed world. I'm the grassroot. I am not  
20 a nonprofit worker. I do not work for the City. I  
21 am here to tell the truth. Everyone today will hear  
22 our truth. I came to volunteer with the founder of  
23 Africa is Everywhere and BAMFA [sic]. It is a pan-  
24 African feminist initiative. The [inaudible] to help  
25 our brother and sister in Brooklyn. They were at

2 Jefferson [sic], Stockton [sic], [inaudible] men who  
3 did not have case management, sleep on coat without  
4 anything. They need to get the job. No good  
5 healthcare or housing. We do not have enough African  
6 direct service organization. We demand help in  
7 Brooklyn and Queens. We have donated time and money  
8 to African mothers expecting, organizing clothing  
9 drive, transportation, and food for medical services  
10 as mutual aid. We have translated for health or  
11 [inaudible] medical procedure. We couldn't  
12 [inaudible] necessary antibiotic in a city like New  
13 York. So one of the mother had to buy antibiotic in  
14 Columbia to help our brother who suffered from a  
15 third burn degree. We have seen asylum case be  
16 poorly completed, being denied asylum [inaudible]  
17 have no-- have the chance to do their application.  
18 This is negligence. This is unacceptable. This is  
19 shameful time in New York history. This city is not  
20 friendly for all people. It is anti-African and  
21 xenophobic. [inaudible]. We came to share this  
22 testimony to let you all know in this Council you all  
23 are responsible for this pain and suffering that will  
24 affect us for generation to come. But you also can  
25 change this for better. [inaudible] New York City

2 should at least live up to the standard it project to  
3 the world. [inaudible] he has shown our community.  
4 African deserve dignity and respect. We are not  
5 animal. This country has [inaudible]. You have  
6 ability to receive all of our immigrant, all of our  
7 community. Why it's going to be done only to the  
8 African? Is it because it's embedded protocol of  
9 racists [sic] and xenophobe [sic] in the city, and I  
10 want all my fellow African to know what it is that  
11 they will face if they come in New York City. Thank  
12 you.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Corine.  
14 Doctor Baldé?

15 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: [inaudible] The  
16 name of God we begin. In the name [sic] of God we  
17 end. We [inaudible] say thank you to our Chair.  
18 Thank you to all of you. I'm here to testify about  
19 Black immigrant. I'm Baldé Abdoulaye, Dr. Baldé. I'm  
20 founding member of Futa Islamic Center in the Bronx,  
21 founding member in [inaudible] Manhattan, right close  
22 here. There's several of them. I'm no activist. I'm  
23 just member of the community. I try to help as much  
24 I can, but I'm telling you in the bottom of my heart,  
25 since these brothers start coming I have broken

2 heart, because if we see human being when you-- you  
3 may be without food. You lose your dignity. Have to  
4 eat. You have to find space to stay. If not, to  
5 save your dignity is very difficult. My center have  
6 been holding more than 300 to 500 people. This last  
7 Ramadan, first day of Ramadan, we have more than  
8 1,000 people who come to break their fast. This day,  
9 I have only one cup of water, one cup. I recall  
10 throughout the houses, we say whatever you have there  
11 left to please bring here. I'm telling you, I go back  
12 to my house like midnight. I have nothing to eat  
13 until next day. Next day, I been the phone. I call  
14 interfaith, old friends, and community leaders,  
15 organizations, ask for help. For five of them answer  
16 me. New York Interfaith, Gambian Youth organization,  
17 and one of my friend, you know, Debbie Almontaser and  
18 her husband. They [inaudible] friends like Muna  
19 [sic] organization. Those people answer me.  
20 Interfaith have been providing like 200 meals a day.  
21 Muna, 300 meals a day. Debbie Almontaser, 200 meals  
22 a day. 100 [inaudible] the Ramadan fast very good.  
23 Don't forget in Ramadan we eat two times. We eat  
24 breakfast and then like four o'clock we have to eat  
25 something. We have like 300 [inaudible] people who

2 are in the shelters day all around there to find  
3 something to eat. We thanks God. God help. We  
4 finish Ramadan. What I'm asking all these people I'm  
5 telling you who come here, every one of them are  
6 treasure [sic] from their family. The only thing we  
7 ask of the city, when our Chairman went to my center,  
8 we went to the Senegali Center. She find those  
9 people. She ask me what I can help with. They said  
10 we ask your help jut to help these people to get  
11 work. They can support themselves, support them  
12 family without migrating to any shelter. Since then,  
13 she stand by her feet to everything. That's why she  
14 called this meeting today. All my thanks to her and  
15 her staff. We have to recognize the [inaudible].  
16 When she went to my center, see all these people, I  
17 see the tear from her eye. I see the tear from her  
18 eye, but I say God is the provider. [inaudible] be  
19 thanks to God for everything he have been done. But  
20 what I'm asking you before you give a feast to  
21 somebody every day, help him to how to find the fish.  
22 Help him how to find-- how to fish. The only thing  
23 we ask, to get these people training. Get them a  
24 job. Get them a paper to work. That's going to  
25 help ourselves, going to help several family, because

2 I'm telling you my family, my family, father and  
3 mother. We have 250 people in the family. We're  
4 [inaudible] not enough for them. At least I have to  
5 send 2-3,000 in order to each one get something. And  
6 that's [inaudible] from you guys. We don't ask too  
7 many, but we ask the minimum, the minimum. Thus,  
8 minimum is to help everyone get a way to work. Thank  
9 you very much. May God bless you all.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
11 you all to the panelists. Thank you, Doctor Baldé.  
12 I would like to open it up for Council colleagues to  
13 ask questions to the panelists. I can turn it over  
14 to-- anybody want to-- Council Member Joseph?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Good morning all.  
16 Thank you for being here. Thank you for your  
17 service. I wanted to find out, out of all of the  
18 families, have any school training have been offered,  
19 any school placement for young children, because I do  
20 see a lot of moms?

21 ADAMA BAH: Unfortunately, no. So, at our  
22 office at every Friday, we have organizations that  
23 come to enroll them in school. When they go to  
24 enroll their children in school, they're offered the  
25 language line, and often times the language line is

2 not the appropriate language, so they're not  
3 understanding. They're asking for certain  
4 documentation that they do not have. So when they  
5 come to our office, we ensuring that all the  
6 documents needed to enroll the children in school,  
7 they have. They are asking them for proof of  
8 address, but it's been a challenge, especially for  
9 the Black women with their children, single moms who  
10 are here even to get to the destination of schools,  
11 and then 60 days after we've helped them with  
12 everything, they're moved.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: they're moved  
14 around, correct. I know for asylum-seekers there are  
15 special rules in New York City Public Schools that  
16 documents are not necessary.

17 ADAMA BAH: it has not been helpful,  
18 because unfortunately, we have cases where they are  
19 asking for documentation.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And just like  
21 [inaudible] law, they're supposed to be able to  
22 enroll in school with no documents because they are  
23 fleeing conflict. It's not like you're coming in.  
24 So I want to make sure that we're helpful and we're  
25

2 supporting you on that aspect in terms of getting  
3 Strategic Response Group enrolled. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: public Advocate  
5 Williams?

6 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so  
7 much, and thank you for all your testimony. I did  
8 want to just recognize my staff. I don't know if  
9 she's here, Fabiola Mendieta [sp?] who has been doing  
10 amazing work. She's been on the ground with Adama  
11 from the beginning. Thank you all so much. And as  
12 he rest in peace, I did want to lift up Carl Lipscomb  
13 who was doing amazing work with BAJI and others when  
14 it came to undocumented and Black immigrations. May  
15 he rest in peace and thank him for all of his work,  
16 and Life of Hope, ATC, Haitian Women for Haitian  
17 Refugees, and HOPE who's here doing a lot of work for  
18 the Haitian community in my former district and  
19 across the city. Two things that really stuck with  
20 me. One, Imam, you said all we're doing is asking  
21 for the minimum, and it's unfortunate how much  
22 particularly Black people in general have to fight  
23 for just for the bear minimum of humanity, and so I'm  
24 sorry that that's the struggle we have. And sister,  
25 I'm sorry I don't know your name, but you lifted up

2 that New York should light-- some version of should  
3 show what it projects to-- show what it is it  
4 projects to the world. I would say that to the  
5 country as well, and I'm sorry as folks have learned  
6 by experience, that what they heard about New York  
7 City and the country is not exactly what they  
8 expected, and we're going to try to work hard to see  
9 if we can correct that. I did want to know, and this  
10 is open to anyone, what has been the experience  
11 trying to set up some kind of infrastructure with the  
12 City? You shouldn't have to, but I do know that  
13 nonprofits and mutual aid groups often fill in the  
14 gap when government is failing. So what has it been  
15 like to try to set up some kind of infrastructure  
16 that you can provide the systems that's been lacking?

17 PATRICE LAWRENCE: I'll start from the  
18 nonprofit side, and then go to Adama. I would say  
19 that for several of the-- even the folks that we've  
20 approached for funding, their line right off the bat  
21 is that they do not support direct service, and that  
22 they're not supporting direct services.

23 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: This is-- I'm  
24 sorry, I just want to be clear. This is when you ask  
25 the government about funding?

2 PATRICE LAWRENCE: This isn't government,  
3 this is foundations.

4 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Got you, okay.

5 PATRICE LAWRENCE: This isn't government.  
6 This is foundations. For the government, I'll let  
7 Adama talk more. I have found that some of the  
8 requirements have been quite onerous on like what you  
9 need to provide in order to get the funding, and who  
10 has gotten the funding is not necessarily people that  
11 are providing for Black immigrants, and she can talk  
12 more about what that has meant and how some of the  
13 organizations that have gotten funded for immigrants  
14 have sent Black immigrants back to her door in  
15 Harlem. And I'll say, like, for the foundations  
16 part, they say that they don't give money to direct  
17 services, and this is not something ta they're going  
18 to do, and it's been a lot of excuses, and not a lot  
19 of help.

20 ADAMA BAH: For Black migrants, when it  
21 comes to social services, there's none. We are  
22 creating that on the ground. We're trying to build  
23 the infrastructure and trying to advise the City on  
24 how to do that, but we have not been welcomed. They  
25 started to be open to our suggestions. Examples at

2 IDNYC right now, it's only Friday's. It's not  
3 realistic. It doesn't make sense. But instead of  
4 pushing back, we're realizing just pivot around the  
5 system that's not working. It's what we always do as  
6 Black immigrants, Black community. We pivot around  
7 what's not working in our community. But there's  
8 been a challenge. We do not get any city funding.  
9 We rely on grassroot organizations like ABISA and  
10 UndocuBlack to support us.

11 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Which agency  
12 have you been most in conversation with?

13 ADAMA BAH: right now it's just IDNYC.

14 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: I see. And  
15 when you say that they had been welcoming in the  
16 beginning, now they're not, are you talking about  
17 other agencies or just IDNYC? What are the other  
18 agencies?

19 ADAMA BAH: I think language access is  
20 the biggest one. We keep telling them the language  
21 line is not working, but they keep telling us it's  
22 working. After hours there's no language line.

23 ABISA's here. Djibrill is here. I call them to  
24 translate many times. There's many people in this  
25 audience right now that I have to call afterhours to

2 translate for migrants, and they're constantly  
3 calling and telling the staff members speak to Adama,  
4 she's on the phone. Every staffer in the HERRC and  
5 the shelter system know my name and know that I'm  
6 translating when they call me.

7 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Have you-- and  
8 you tried to get money for translation services as  
9 well?

10 ADAMA BAH: we have not been offered any.  
11 We're working with Refugee Translation Project right  
12 now. We're currently hiring asylum-seekers to  
13 translate, to go with asylum-seekers in certain  
14 spaces, but we have not gotten any funding. We're  
15 really relying on UndocuBlack fundraising to support  
16 that initiative.

17 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Have you-- has  
18 anybody requested funding for language access?

19 ADAMA BAH: we have. Refugee Translation  
20 has. Other orgs have also.

21 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: And what were  
22 you told?

23 ADAMA BAH: From what I understand  
24 they're working on it.

2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Okay, thank  
3 you. And I do know applying for funding is  
4 particularly onerous for everybody. There's some  
5 spaces where we should help with particularly the  
6 back office stuff, and the way to apply for people  
7 who never applied particularly in a crisis situation.  
8 So we're going to try-- I'm sure everyone is  
9 listening to try to work with the City to try to help  
10 get through that application process even if there's  
11 some emergency funding particularly around  
12 translation services that we probably can't provide  
13 as a city, but we know that many groups can. SO  
14 thank you for sharing your story.

15 ADAMA BAH: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Next,  
17 Chair Narcisse.

18 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: I just want to say  
19 thank you for being here. Thank you for being  
20 advocates. Thank you for standing the ground for our  
21 brothers and sisters that are coming from Black  
22 immigrants, especially from African nation. The  
23 language access, one of the thing that we know for  
24 sure, if you cannot speak a language, you're not  
25 going to get anything done. You cannot get your kids

2 to school because they can't give you a paper. You  
3 don't know. You cannot get, you know, even explain  
4 in your-- if you feel something. I know that,  
5 because I speak Creole and French when I came to the  
6 US and I know how difficult, how challenging that can  
7 be. So, my question to you-- we know that the  
8 calling when you trying to get translators it's  
9 almost impossible. I'm hearing it a lot. So, in your  
10 capacity, in this space where you function as an  
11 organization, how many dialect that you encounter  
12 that you can help the City of New York?

13 ADAMA BAH: At our office it's currently  
14 16 different languages that are spoken among the  
15 whole staff, but the focus has just been on West  
16 African, and there's a lot of East Africans coming  
17 with a wave of Haitians coming, and we need to be  
18 mindful of those languages. There are unique  
19 dialects that are also coming that I've never heard  
20 of that I'm learning now about. People from  
21 Madagascar are coming. You have people-- Burundi are  
22 coming, people from countries that are not common to  
23 us. So the language access has been truly, truly a  
24 challenge, especially if you don't understand. Pular

2 from Guinea and Pular in Mauritania, Pular in Senegal  
3 is very different.

4 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you, because  
5 we have to push for language access, because I have  
6 seen it. People are telling me even to stay in the  
7 shelter, to wherever in the HERRC they cannot stay,  
8 because when they ask them to reapply they're not  
9 getting it, and so thank you for continuing the work.

10 ADAMA BAH: I do want to add on one  
11 thing. There is a significant amount of people who  
12 are illiterate, so written does not work. We have  
13 been sending voice clips to the migrants explaining  
14 to them what their rights are and to understand  
15 what's going on. So it's not just written. We need  
16 vocals.

17 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you.

18 CORINE OMBONGO-GOLDEN: May I intervene  
19 for that? Because I actually taught literacy class  
20 in Brooklyn in the library of Bushwick, and we have--  
21 you know, in Africa, unfortunately for us, learning  
22 how to read and write is a privilege, and a lot of  
23 our brother and sister to not know how to read and  
24 write, so we only speak the-- we say native language.  
25 Like I said, I'm from the Congo, so I was speaking

2 only in Congolese. One of the many Congolese  
3 language that I speak with my fellow brother and  
4 sister to help them out. So the language barrier is  
5 tremendous. We at Brooklyn, we were-- we are faced  
6 with that predicament, and we had taught-- and we  
7 actually have like six [sic] class, because we had  
8 the morning class and then we have an evening class  
9 for the ones that were illiterate. So without that,  
10 it's impossible for them to do anything, because they  
11 don't understand the language. They don't understand  
12 the way the City work. They don't understand  
13 anything, and you can't do nothing. You can't do  
14 nothing. And like I said, there was emphasis many  
15 time that, you know, we are African, we don't speak  
16 African. We have different specificity in Africa.  
17 I'm from Central Africa. My mom is from East Africa.  
18 My mommy speak Amharic. My don't speak Amharic. He  
19 don't even understand it. I do because my mom is  
20 Amharic, so I do. But only in the Congo you have  
21 like more than 500 language. Swahili is being spoken  
22 in Burundi, so I can speak with somebody from  
23 Burundi, but I cannot speak Swahili with somebody  
24 from Mauritania. You understand? In Europe, Turkish  
25 don't talk French. French don't talk for Spanish.

2 So why it is that you would put everybody in Africa  
3 in the same bag and thinking that because we speak  
4 Asana [sic], because we speak [inaudible], everybody  
5 will understand. You see? I told you hakuna matata.  
6 You didn't understand anything. You see? So that's  
7 what we need. We need people that speak the native  
8 language to teach [inaudible] people. That's what we  
9 asking the city and the city refuse to [inaudible].  
10 And since 2002, I learn that French is indigenous  
11 language. Yes, French is indigenous language,  
12 because United Nations speak French as a diplomatic  
13 language. How come you cannot have OSHA [sic] in  
14 French? Why you don't have interpreter in hospital?  
15 Why I have to go and translate for my brother and  
16 sister every time they have an emergency? They call  
17 me at any time. Why? This is New York City. This  
18 is [inaudible] of the world. You have no excuse.  
19 There's not. So now I know that speaking French,  
20 you're indigenous. We have [inaudible] here. French  
21 embassy here. United Nation speaking first language  
22 of diplomat is French. So, New York City, you need  
23 to do better. You have no excuse whatsoever. You  
24 have none. You don't even want to implement English  
25 lesson for French speaker, but you have bilingual

2 class here. I know, because I was teaching French  
3 here. So you have no excuse. You refuse to do it. As  
4 soon as it's Africans that speak French, let's not  
5 help them. That's racist. That's been racist.  
6 That's embedded in your protocol and your process  
7 here. I want my brother and sister from African  
8 country that speak French, you are now speaking  
9 indigenous. They will not understand you. You are  
10 in New York City, you don't speak English or you  
11 don't speak Espanol, I mean Spanish, you are done.  
12 You are done. Because nobody was ever to give me an  
13 explanation why you don't have OSHA [sic] in French.  
14 Oh, we don't have the funding. Oh, we can't  
15 translate. What is this? This is not racist? Find  
16 me the right word then. If it's not racist, that  
17 means that you don't want to do it, and why? We are  
18 not immigrant like everybody else? We do not  
19 contribute? I pay tax in this country. That's  
20 disgusting. It is totally racist and xenophobic and  
21 it need to be known. In New York City--

22 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: [interposing] Thank  
23 you.

24 CORINE OMBONGO-GOLDEN: you missed the  
25 mark. You missed the mark.

2 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Corine.

4 Next we're going to have Council Member Hudson.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so  
6 much, Chairs. Thank you all for your testimony. My  
7 office hosted a resource fair back in November that  
8 was we thought going to be mostly for folks who are  
9 staying at the HERRC in my district, and we were  
10 completely overwhelmed and didn't have enough  
11 resources for all of the people who showed up. So  
12 we're hosting another one on June 1<sup>st</sup>, but I wanted  
13 to ask you all what types of resources-- we're going  
14 to have a vaccination bus, an IDNYC and many other  
15 resources for folks who are working very closely with  
16 the mutual aid groups that we've been working with in  
17 our district and our community. But I'm just curious  
18 to know from you all directly, what are some of the  
19 resources and services that we can have at a resource  
20 fair that would be most helpful?

21 ADAMA BAH: To be honest, there's so many  
22 resources fairs happening. We need workforce  
23 training. We really need to be able--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: [interposing] More  
25 what?

2 ADAMA BAH: Workforce training.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Workforce  
4 training.

5 ADAMA BAH: WE need our folks to be able  
6 to work. It is not fair because that they do not  
7 speak Spanish or English, they're not able to get  
8 that. We have been covering the vaccination by  
9 accompanying them to the hospitals, or even the  
10 clinics, but it's really workforce training that we  
11 truly need. And then mental health services. Mental  
12 health service is not based on what the City thinks,  
13 but what our community thinks, what our community  
14 needs.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. And  
16 then just touching on the vaccines that you  
17 mentioned. My understanding is that the City no  
18 longer does vaccinations at intake, and that they're  
19 sending folks to get vaccinated, and so I'm wondering  
20 if you know also if families with children are  
21 getting their children vaccinated, or if there are  
22 hindrances to making that happen.

23 ADAMA BAH: sure. I don't know how the  
24 City is doing it now, but for us, when they come to  
25 our office and they're not vaccinated, we refer them

2 to the two local hospitals which is Lincoln Hospital  
3 and Harlem Hospitals. They are welcoming towards  
4 Black migrants, and if they don't-- their children  
5 don't have the vaccines, we make sure that they have  
6 all the vaccines so they can enroll in school.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

8 ADAMA BAH: But we are ensuring in our  
9 office that they do get vaccinated and understand why  
10 they need those vaccinations, not just telling them  
11 you need to get it.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

13 ADAMA BAH: So, we do have healthcare  
14 workers that explain that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay.

16 ADAMA BAH: And I think Djibrill also  
17 wants to add on.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you.

19 DJIBRILL DIOUI: Yes, I want to add  
20 something like, the majority of migrants need to  
21 continue their learning at the school, and this is a  
22 big problem to pay their school, because they don't  
23 get money and they don't get support for pay their  
24 school, and I believe you will figure something for  
25 make it out. Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. Thank  
3 you all so much. Thank you, Chairs.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Majority Whip  
5 Selvena Brooks-Powers?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.  
7 And thank you so much for the powerful testimony that  
8 you all have shared. I think I can speak for my  
9 colleagues saying we've been waiting for this moment  
10 to hear your voices directly on this issue in terms  
11 of how the Black migrant community is being  
12 prioritized in this crisis. So thank you for  
13 testifying today. Kind of piggy-backing off of  
14 Council Member Hudson. I'm curious to understand a  
15 bit more granularly, the resources that are being  
16 provided-- so for example, I represent the 31<sup>st</sup>  
17 Council District in southeast Queens which includes  
18 JFK Airport where a hangar was open, and when I  
19 toured that hangar it was about-- the census for that  
20 day was about 752 migrants that were there,  
21 predominantly Black migrants that were there. And so  
22 my concern is in terms of what resources are being  
23 offered. So wanting to understand, and I know you  
24 mentioned, you know, a lot of resource fairs and  
25 workforce being needed, but what are some of the

2 other critical services that you need? How can the  
3 Council increase the capacity of the work that you're  
4 doing? And also I'm curious what the shelter  
5 experience is like. What language is being spoken in  
6 the shelter that you all are being located in?

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Before you respond,  
8 I just want to recognize Council Member Sanchez on  
9 Zoom. But please, respond.

10 ADAMA BAH: Djibrill wants to answer for  
11 the languages for the shelter. Go ahead, because he  
12 has translated.

13 DJIBRILL DIOUI: Majority of migrants  
14 speak, African speak Wolof, French, and other  
15 language. They need to translate for them in Spanish  
16 and English, and this is a big problem for them  
17 because sometimes some people's don't-- we don't  
18 understand what all them say, because this is a big  
19 problem for translate for them.

20 ADAMA BAH: For legal is another big  
21 thing that's really needed for Black Migrants.  
22 Patrice, you want to talk about how-- oh, she  
23 doesn't. But legal is desperately needed for Black  
24 migrants. We are seeing a huge gap of Black migrants  
25 not getting access to the Red Cross and we were told

2 it's because of language. We fixed that by offering  
3 the language services that we have. We're  
4 accompanying them with a translator. But legal is  
5 desperately needed. It's the only way that Blacks--  
6 and workforce Black is the only way Black migrants  
7 can get a foot in the system. Without that they are--  
8 they're hopeless. You have to understand, Black  
9 migrants have it harder in the immigration system.  
10 The first wave of migrants that we saw Black were all  
11 wearing ankle bracelets. At this time, people were  
12 shocked because we were only seeing Black migrants  
13 with ankle bracelets. We're seeing already Black  
14 migrants getting deportation letters. Black migrants  
15 aren't getting their mail. Mail is another big  
16 thing, because they are disproportionately kicked out  
17 of the shelter system, they do leave mail. At our  
18 office we offer that. We get their immigration. We  
19 get their medical, their bank. They need a system.  
20 A system that we have created from the ground and up  
21 that supports them, and we have to rely on grassroot  
22 organizations for that support.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: When you  
24 say disproportionately being moved out of the shelter  
25

2 system, can you explain that a bit more for me,  
3 please?

4 ADAMA BAH: Sure. So Black migrants are  
5 getting a 30-day notice. They're getting a piece of  
6 paper. For some, they are not getting a piece of  
7 paper, they're just being told that they have to  
8 leave, but it's not being translated properly, and so  
9 when they call us when they get kicked out and we  
10 have to explain to them that they can go to St.  
11 Bridget's and explain the whole system to them. It  
12 is not fair, because there's thousands of other  
13 people that need services, and we have to pause to  
14 explain how the shelter system works. Doctor Baldé  
15 just spoke and told you there are 400 people in his  
16 mosque. There are over 24 mosques now that are  
17 housing Black migrants in their mosques. They are  
18 overcrowded with no funding and no resources. So,  
19 shelter is a huge challenge.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

21 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: [inaudible] Those  
22 mosque, that they have been living, much of them are  
23 discharged. We have to fix. We don't get any  
24 funding, any funding for those [inaudible]. I don't  
25 know if it's [inaudible] to get it, but the mosque

2 never get funding from the City. And I'm telling you  
3 in Africa, we don't have language, we have dialect.  
4 Every country have more than [inaudible] dialect,  
5 different dialect. No one understand each other. If  
6 it was French, like most of them say they speak  
7 French, but this is error, because they say French  
8 because the country have been colonized by French.  
9 They have their own dialect. That's why this  
10 workforce training is very important. I'm talking  
11 about this legal aid. When they cross the border,  
12 they give them several list of pro bono lawyers.  
13 Myself, I take more than three hours to call each one  
14 of them. No one pick up. No one. I speak English,  
15 and now those people who get those papers through the  
16 border, how they came. I tried to find out. They  
17 don't get any. Until now, some of them don't even  
18 file their paper for asylum yet. Why? Because they  
19 don't have any phone, any means. So, please try to  
20 help. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

22 And just one more follow-up. Adama, do you have a  
23 list available of the organizations that you could  
24 provide to use that offer translation services?

25 Because when the Council was pushing the translation

2 funding in the past budget, I think there was a need  
3 to identify more organizations that have the capacity  
4 to offer their service. So if you can be able to  
5 provide that for us, that would be helpful.

6 ADAMA BAH: Yes, I can do that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,  
8 and thank you for the work you're doing on the  
9 ground.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Council Member  
11 Paladino? Apologies, Council Member Marmorato?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MARMORATO: Thank you.  
13 Hi. Thank you for coming here to testify today. I  
14 appreciate listening to you and hearing you and  
15 hearing what you have to say. You know, around the  
16 1920s my great-grandfather came to this country and  
17 he experienced similar struggles. So you are not  
18 alone, and even though he is of Italian descent, he  
19 is southern Italian, and he was considered a person  
20 of color back then. So he did experience similar  
21 struggles as to what you're going through. And I do  
22 apologize. I'm not going to apologize, but I'm not  
23 surprised that New York Health + Hospitals is not  
24 here to listen to you and be present for you, because  
25 they don't care. They don't care about their legal

2 immigrants. They don't care about the citizens  
3 within the country, and they don't care about all of  
4 you and coming here to listen to your concerns.  
5 Their absence is sending a message. And let's not  
6 forget that they don't think twice when they're ready  
7 to cash in the city's checks for housing  
8 opportunities to house the migrants, to house  
9 individuals, to feed you, to take your healthcare,  
10 but they're not here to listen to your concerns and  
11 that's a major problem. And we as a city, whether  
12 you're an immigrant or not an immigrant, we deserve  
13 better from New York Health + Hospitals. And that's  
14 about it, yeah. So, I'm here. I'm happy to hear  
15 what you have to say, and I'm listening, and we do  
16 provide legal immigration services in the Bronx to  
17 the two Bronx people at the end, in my office on  
18 Mondays. So if you ever need any of that, I can give  
19 you my information and we can help you out, anybody  
20 within our district or surrounding district, we'd be  
21 more than happy to help you guys out. Okay? Thank  
22 you.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council  
24 Member. Council Member Paladino?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good morning  
3 everybody and thank you for coming. This has been  
4 quite a moving testimony I've listened to today.  
5 It's disturbing in a great many ways. It's  
6 disturbing when I see human beings not treated  
7 properly. Prejudice and racism, those words have  
8 become watered down. They're used much, much too  
9 often. But I'd like to say this. In listening to  
10 everybody speak and making demands on New York City  
11 to do more, more, more. How much more are we  
12 supposed to do? How much more are we capable of  
13 doing? This system is so over-worked and over-  
14 burdened. We don't have the resources that you need  
15 to get what you need. I mean, your testimonies move  
16 me tremendously. I don't want to see anybody  
17 mistreated in any sort of way. I have to ask you,  
18 what motivated you to come here thinking the streets  
19 are paved with gold? They're not. They're  
20 absolutely not, and you're living through that. Now,  
21 we've watched many different people come across this  
22 border. The people who have come across this border  
23 have come across this border--

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Council Member, do  
25 you--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: have come across  
3 this border illegally.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Council Member  
5 Paladino, do you have a question for the panel?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: I do. I do.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Because we have to  
8 move on. Everyone we ask decorum in the chamber.  
9 Now, Council Member Paladino, if you have a question  
10 please present it. If not, we will move on to the  
11 next Council Member.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Okay, well  
13 we're talking a lot about health needs, legal  
14 services, language access, and responsible  
15 initiatives for these-- for the migrants. How much  
16 money and resources are being allocated to conduct  
17 background checks, screening of the migrants that are  
18 coming across, and what policy if they are coming--  
19 what is the policy if they are here illegally? How  
20 much more are we going to do? This is my question.  
21 How much money--

22 PATRICE LAWRENCE: [interposing] I'm  
23 happy to answer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: is being spent  
25 right now.

2 PATRICE LAWRENCE: I'm happy to answer.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Go ahead.

4 PATRICE LAWRENCE: I don't have all of  
5 the money numbers, but I'm happy to let you know the  
6 procedures of how people get to New York in the first  
7 place. So, customs and-- I have-- and my experience  
8 is coming from visiting both in Mexico, Texas, and  
9 California at different entry points for migrants  
10 before they get here in the United States and before  
11 they arrive in New York City. So, first of all, in  
12 Matamoros, in Reynosa, in Tijuana-- Tijuana I'm  
13 actually going to in two weeks-- Black migrants are  
14 there. They are often there for several months at a  
15 time before they're even allowed in the United  
16 States. They have to apply with what is called a  
17 CBP1 app. There are others who are not able to apply  
18 with the app and come through the border, but before  
19 they get to the United States, they have been checked  
20 by a CBP agent. That has happened. So the  
21 background check that you're asking, that has been  
22 done, rigorously. They have often also had to pay  
23 thousands of dollars in bond or bail before they get  
24 here, because Black migrants actually have an average  
25

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2 of between \$10-\$50,000 dollars that they have to pay  
3 in bond before they are released--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: [interposing]  
5 How do you do it?

6 PATRICE LAWRENCE: on their own  
7 recognizance.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: But how do you  
9 pay for that?

10 PATRICE LAWRENCE: We make a mickle [sic]  
11 out of a mickle [sic].

12 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Yeah.

13 PATRICE LAWRENCE: And I can share more  
14 about what the ins and outs of what that looks like.  
15 It is tedious. It is tireless, and it work that we  
16 do absolutely every single day all over the country.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Now, when you  
18 pay all that money, where does that money go?

19 PATRICE LAWRENCE: Back to the United  
20 States government. If you want more money to do the  
21 services that we are talking about, you need to speak  
22 to your government.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: To the Federal  
24 Government.

25

2 PATRICE LAWRENCE: To the Federal  
3 Government.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good luck with  
5 that.

6 PATRICE LAWRENCE: And also to make sure  
7 that New York services are being redirected where  
8 they need to be.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: They need to  
10 be.

11 PATRICE LAWRENCE: This city spends a lot  
12 of money on things that I don't think they need to,  
13 including some of the law enforcement and some of the  
14 additional niceties and robots and all sorts of  
15 things that New York City has paid for. I think that  
16 if we govern the budget, the budget with what our  
17 values and morals are supposed to be, we will not  
18 have to ask these questions anymore.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: You've made  
20 some very good point.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Council Member,  
22 we're going to move onto the next council question  
23 before we move onto the Administration. Thank you so  
24 much. Council Member Hanif.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much,  
3 Chair Avilés, Narcisse, and Hudson for today's very  
4 thoughtful and compassionate hearing. It's an honor  
5 to hear from providers, organizers, advocates, and  
6 asylum-seekers directly. This is very important for  
7 the Council. It of course pains me to come after a  
8 colleague who, you know, can say that they are moved  
9 by the testimony and still incite xenophobia in the  
10 same breath.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Take offense to  
12 that.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Deeply appreciate  
14 you all--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: [interposing] I  
16 take offense to that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: for testifying-

18 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: [interposing]

19 Council Member--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: [interposing] I  
21 take offense to that.

22 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Council Member--

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing]

24 Comments are out of order.

25 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Council Member--

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Let's get to the  
3 questions, please, so we can get to the  
4 Administration.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So we've heard--  
6 we've heard for many months now the horrors of being  
7 an asylum-seeker, and then you add on Black identity,  
8 being Muslim, and then add on languages that the city  
9 is absolutely unfamiliar with and new enclaves that  
10 are building as a result of folks coming in. And  
11 then, of course, the horrors being exasperated by the  
12 30-day and 60-day rules. Could you tell us the  
13 experience of those who were fasting during the month  
14 of Ramadan? How was it to fast in New York City  
15 outside of the homeland, and how has the experience  
16 of being Muslim in particular in this climate been?

17 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: As I tell you very  
18 difficult situation, but I forget-- what I forget to  
19 mention, you said thanks to our brave women. Brave  
20 women, wife, because they are the most supportive.  
21 Everyone bring at least three to four pan of food  
22 every day. The imams have been asking the congregante  
23 to give out wanted help. Particularly, at my mosque,  
24 the imam, every Ramadan they supposed to go to  
25 [inaudible] lasted 10 days, but this time they cancel

2 everything because of these people. Another problem  
3 we have when those migrants are discharged from the  
4 shelters, they don't [inaudible] because they don't  
5 have no way to stay until they [inaudible] the  
6 shelters. Another problem, when they come, we have  
7 no way to tell them to go. We have to accept it. No  
8 food. We have-- I'm telling you, sometimes I run  
9 from them because if I see them, I don't have nothing  
10 to give, nothing to pay food for them. I have to run  
11 away.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And those who are  
13 coming to the mosques, are they primarily men or  
14 families, too?

15 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: All.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Everybody.

17 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: Everyone.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, what is the  
19 living situation in the mosques? Knowing that our  
20 Administration knows that mosques are being occupied  
21 as housing.

22 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: Very difficult  
23 situation. Very difficult situation. Right now,  
24 most of the congregate running from the mosque. Why  
25

2 you cannot come get [inaudible] to be prepared before  
3 the Salah, because the line from the bathroom [sic].

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Do you think it  
5 would be-- you know, we've seen the Administration  
6 work really hard to expand shelters, and we just  
7 received one in my district for 400 adult men, and  
8 primarily the density is African Muslim men.

9 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: I need--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] But  
11 at the same time we're seeing that, you know, there  
12 are elected officials who are saying no shelters.  
13 What would you like to see? Would you like to see  
14 the mosques be able to be utilized as housing and the  
15 fast-tracking from the Administration which has a  
16 plan to convert or to make sure that mosques are  
17 available as-- or can be converted to make sure that  
18 the sleeping or the opportunity to use them as  
19 potential shelters are safe, are safely done?  
20 Because right now I know that there are a lot of  
21 issues that need to be addressed. Or the expansion  
22 of shelters-- and then of course, could you share how  
23 many from the community have been able to move into  
24 permanent housing?

2 DR. BALDÉ ABDOULAYE: At the mosque, I  
3 can't hold anyone. The mosque cannot hold those  
4 people anymore, because everything have been  
5 destroyed. We don't have any people to come to  
6 contribute. We have to fix it. It is place of  
7 worship. So we need you to find more shelters, more  
8 place, more, more place for them to go, a permanent  
9 place, because if they go for 30 days, they have to  
10 come back there. Please find out permanent places  
11 for these people. To answer our Council Member down  
12 in the back, we don't ask New York City for more, but  
13 we ask Federal Government to do more for New York  
14 City in order New York City to help these people.  
15 Thank you very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, one follow-up  
18 for Adama. Can you just share some of the  
19 experiences or specific issues impacting women?

20 ADAMA BAH: Women, it's been a huge  
21 challenge. When the 30 and 60-day policy hits them,  
22 they're in the street, especially single women. The  
23 Imam here has been housing them in their mosque, or  
24 we'll try to find them to room up with other women in  
25 the community for temporary. We can create as many

2 shelters as we want, but if we don't have social  
3 services for Black migrants, direct services, we're  
4 going to continue wasting money. We do not want to  
5 rely on the system. We are not promoting for people  
6 to stay in the shelter system. We're trying to  
7 promote independence, and the only way to do that is  
8 to provide them with support. I am former asylum-  
9 seeker myself. I am now an American citizen. I did  
10 not get the welcoming and the voice of these people  
11 to advocate for me, so I am here to advocate for  
12 them. If you help them the way you helped me, they  
13 will be self-sufficient. They will be advocating for  
14 themselves, and be sitting here for the next  
15 generation of councilwomen to testify for other  
16 services for their communities that they need.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.  
18 Deepest gratitude to this panel, and we could talk to  
19 you all day, but unfortunately, time is of the  
20 essence, and we are going to need to welcome the  
21 Administration. So I say thank you. We have heard  
22 your voices. We see you. You are asking for the  
23 bare minimum. You have not received the resources.  
24 It has not trickled down to this community in  
25 sufficient and equitable ways and ways of dignity. So

2 thank you for your testimony. And with that, we will  
3 move to the Administration.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. We  
5 will now hear testimony from the Administration. We  
6 will hear from Manuel Castro, Molly Schaeffer, Tom  
7 Tortorici, and Aissata Camara.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Could we please  
9 quiet the chambers? Any conversations, please take  
10 outside the chambers so we can continue with the  
11 testimony from the Administration. Thank you so  
12 much.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Before we begin with  
14 this panel, I will administer the affirmation.  
15 Panelists, please raise your right hand. Do you  
16 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
17 but the truth before this committee and to respond  
18 honestly to Council Member questions? Seeing that  
19 everyone has affirmed, thank you, and you may begin  
20 when ready.

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you Chair  
22 Avilés and Narcisse, and the Committee on Immigration  
23 and Hospitals for holding the first hearing at City  
24 Council about the experience of Black migrants and  
25 uplifting the particular needs of this community and

2 how we may come together to meet these needs. I am  
3 joined by Tom Tortorici, Executive Director of Legal  
4 and Support Initiatives at MOIA, Director Molly  
5 Schaeffer of-- Executive Director of the Office of  
6 Asylum-seeker Operations, and Aissata Camara, Deputy  
7 Commissioner for Policy and Strategic Initiatives and  
8 Chief of Staff at the Office of International  
9 Affairs. I want to thank all the immigrant-- the  
10 Black immigrant community groups and leaders who have  
11 worked tirelessly in service of the community and of  
12 New York, not just in the last two years, but for  
13 many, many years. During my time at the New York  
14 Immigration Coalition, about a decade ago, I had the  
15 honor and opportunity to work closely with many of  
16 these organizations such as African Services  
17 Committee, Black Alliance for Just Immigration,  
18 African Communities Together, the Black Institute to  
19 establish the Black immigrant table at the New York  
20 Immigration Coalition to advocate around the very  
21 issues that we're discussing today, and hold  
22 government at all level accountable for the  
23 communities that have historically been underserved  
24 and neglected. So again, thank you Council and  
25 Council Chairs for holding this hearing. I had a

2 chance to work alongside many of these groups over  
3 the years as I continue to do now to fight for  
4 comprehensive immigration reform and the need to  
5 expand temporary protective status to immigrants from  
6 nationalities that should be included in these  
7 programs. It's clear that our immigration system is  
8 broken and needs overhauling as it continues to have  
9 devastating consequences on our communities,  
10 especially Black migrants. Unfortunately, we know  
11 from very recent studies that Black migrants  
12 regardless of their national origin face more time in  
13 Federal Immigration Detention, pay higher price  
14 immigration bonds, and experience more abuse than  
15 other immigrant groups. But I remain hopeful that we  
16 may achieve change, especially seeing all the  
17 community members that turned out today, a testament  
18 to community leaders and to immigrants who despite  
19 the fear and anxiety of coming out to such events are  
20 willing to uplift their voice and fight for change.  
21 Now, I will-- for this reason, MOIA has prioritized  
22 federal advocacy efforts inclusive of all immigrants.  
23 I stood alongside Council Members of our Haitian  
24 community members to call on Federal Government to  
25 stop all deportations of Haitian nationals who now

2 call New York City and United States their home. We  
3 have made a priority to call on the Federal  
4 Government to designate or re-designate Cameroon,  
5 Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania,  
6 and Nigeria for TPS status. These advocacy efforts  
7 have help push for Federal Government to re-designate  
8 Cameroonians TPS. We hope to collaborate further  
9 with City Council to continue to support Black  
10 migrants through our programming, and as well as tis  
11 important advocacy efforts to bring about critical  
12 change at the federal level. And of course, I want  
13 to give full credit to community organizations  
14 pushing for this change here in New York City and  
15 nationally, as we heard from UndocuBlack who have  
16 been leading these efforts. Now, I would like to  
17 highlight our work in response to the arrival of  
18 Haitian immigrants to New York City and describe how  
19 MOIA works to serve immigrant communities. MOIA  
20 coordinates an innovative program known as the  
21 Haitian Response Initiative to meet the needs of  
22 newly-arrived Haitians. The initiative funds seven  
23 Haitian-led community-based organizations to provide  
24 case management and social services, and legal  
25 service provider to provide legal services and

2 capacity building trainings. The Haitian Response  
3 Initiative was created in Fiscal Year 22 and nearly  
4 \$5 million has been allocated to the program over the  
5 past three fiscal years. Over the life of the  
6 program, more than 4,000 recently arrived Haitian  
7 immigrants have met with HRI's case workers to  
8 determine what services and whose resources they need  
9 to integrate into our city. Case managers have spent  
10 thousands of hours following up with community  
11 members to determine their eligibility for benefits  
12 and connect them to resources and services, including  
13 direct cash assistance, food assistance, healthcare,  
14 maternal and infant health, school enrollment,  
15 housing, mental health services, and legal services.  
16 Additionally, following the Federal Government re-  
17 designation of Haitian Temporary Protective Status in  
18 2023, our HRI partners held TPS clinics around the  
19 City helping hundreds of Haitian community members  
20 access both protections from deportation and work  
21 authorization. Our proposed budget for fiscal year  
22 25 continues to fund this important work which is  
23 especially critical at a time when social upheaval  
24 impacts Haiti, as well as our neighbors in the  
25 Haitian diaspora. The Haitian Response Initiative is

2 a relevant example of MOIA's broader and the City's  
3 broader approach to responding to the needs of  
4 arriving immigrants and making sure they receive  
5 critical information, support and services. MOIA  
6 funds partners closely-- we fund and partner closely  
7 with community-based immigrant-led nonprofit  
8 organizations and immigrant legal experts who work  
9 together to provide culturally and linguistically  
10 responsive services and neighborhoods with  
11 concentrations of immigrants. Through our  
12 relationships and service initiatives, our community  
13 partners also let us know when information or  
14 services provided by the City are inaccessible so  
15 that MOIA can work with our sister agencies and  
16 offices to address these barriers. I believe this  
17 has resulted in 34 percent-- I believe that as a  
18 result, 34 percent of the MOIA's service appointments  
19 have gone to Black immigrant communities across all  
20 of our legal and support service programs. And now I  
21 would like to provide a list of the Black serving  
22 groups we have contracted over the past fiscal years  
23 as follows: African Communities Together, African  
24 Services Committee, Arab American Family Support  
25 Center, Muslim Community Network, Caribbean Women's

2 Health Association, Diaspora Community Services,  
3 Flamboyant, Haitian American Community Coalition,  
4 Haitian American United for Progress, DCI  
5 International, International Child Program, Haitian  
6 Women for Haitian Refugees, Life of Hope, as well as  
7 contracted organizations that serve all immigrants  
8 including Black immigrants such as Catholic  
9 Charities, NYLAG, Unlocal, and others. For smaller  
10 organizations we work closely with the Mayor's Fund  
11 in Philanthropy to provide micro grants and other  
12 types of in-kind and otherwise donations. Now  
13 turning to language access of critical importance to  
14 the community. During the intake process at the  
15 Arrival Center, many West African asylum-seekers  
16 state that their preferred language is French or  
17 Arabic. However, when having sensitive legal or  
18 medical conversations with shelter and city staff, it  
19 has become clear that many were not comfortable  
20 verbally communicating in these languages. Their  
21 mother tongue or language of preference is language  
22 of limited diffusion such as Wolof, Fulani, or  
23 Ansonika [sic]. I saw something very similar during  
24 my time at New Immigrant Community Empowerment as the  
25 Executive Director there. When working with

2 immigrants from indigenous communities in the  
3 Americas who mother tongues are Garifuna, Kanjobal  
4 [sic], and Quechua [sic]. This is an area where we  
5 want to show our Council Member to language access  
6 which is partly born out of witnessing the struggle  
7 of our immigrant families and communities here in the  
8 US. For this reason, under my time at MOIA, we have  
9 grown our language access team from three staff to 20  
10 staff, providing support to offices and cities across  
11 City government and deploying our language access  
12 specialists as needed. Indicative of this need, my  
13 first day as MOIA Commissioner, I was in the Bronx  
14 responding to the Twin Park fire that took the lives  
15 of 17 Gambian community members and left many more  
16 homeless. My team was immediately on-site helping  
17 impact individuals and families get connected to case  
18 management, IDNYC mental health supports. During  
19 this time language access was critical. My team  
20 worked with community-based groups on the ground to  
21 ensure the information and resources distributed in  
22 Wolof and other languages of limited diffusion.  
23 MOIA's language access team has collaborated with  
24 providers to translate materials into emergency  
25 languages, emerging languages. For languages with

2 limited written systems, we have shared best  
3 practices with agencies by recording messages that  
4 allow asylum-seekers to understand important updates  
5 and resource availability. Our team also create I-  
6 speak [sic] cards that include languages of West  
7 Africa to better identify prepare languages of entry  
8 points, as well as multi-lingual posters to ensure  
9 that newcomers know their rights to receive services  
10 in their preferred language. We believe that our  
11 approach of centering language access could become a  
12 model for other governments at the State and Federal  
13 levels and across the cities in the country.

14 additionally, as part of Local Law Six of 2023, MOIA  
15 recently surveyed 69 community-based organizations  
16 serving specific constituencies that need language  
17 assistance to better understand how the City may be  
18 able to increase and support language capacity. We  
19 are working with the Mayor's Office of Contract  
20 Services to facilitate and get better access to city  
21 contracts centered on language access.

22 Interpretation is provided regardless of language of  
23 asylum application-- at the asylum application center  
24 and its satellite offices, overseen by the Office of  
25 Asylum-seeker Operations. These sites provide pro se

2 application assistance for immigrants seeing asylum,  
3 temporary protective status, or work authorization.

4 MOIA's asylum-seeker legal assistance network also  
5 provides dedicated immigration legal assistance for

6 African migrants through contracts with nonprofit  
7 partners rooted in immigrant communities and

8 possessing the linguistic and cultural competencies

9 needed to properly provide service. Immigrant legal

10 services for African migrants are provided through

11 regular information session and application clinics

12 at African Services Committee, African Communities

13 Together, and on specific dates at an East Harlem

14 Legal Clinic run by Lutheran Social Services of New

15 York. During these clinics, interpretation

16 assistance for African languages of limited diffusion

17 is sourced from local community providers. My

18 office's French and Arabic language access specialist

19 are also available to provide onsite interpretation

20 during these days. ASLAN, as it is known, partners

21 have also prepared packets of research and

22 information that African asylum-seekers can use to

23 support their claims when presenting themselves pro

24 se. And finally, regarding Intro 84 and 85

25 introduced by Council Member Rivera, I want to thank

2 the Council Member for her trust and confidence in  
3 MOIA. I agree with the goals and spirit of these  
4 bills, but would like to meet with her team at some  
5 point to work through them and have a discussion  
6 about how to achieve these. As for Intro 739, the  
7 Administration is still reviewing the bills and how  
8 it would impact overall operations at the asylum-  
9 seeker response. And before I finish, as I usually  
10 do at the hearings, I want to thank-- take a moment  
11 to thank the staff both government and nonprofit  
12 staff on the ground doing the work to support newly-  
13 arrived immigrants in our city. Thank you and I look  
14 forward to questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,  
16 Commissioner and thank you all for-- we know there  
17 was a delay and I know you have had a hard stop at  
18 two o'clock, Commissioner. So we are going to try to  
19 speed through. Director, are you going to make a  
20 statement from OASO? No, okay. Thank you. So,  
21 let's jump into the questions. I'm going to start off  
22 and just maybe ask five questions. Then I'm going to  
23 turn it over to colleagues who are patiently also  
24 waiting to respond, and then we will pick up after  
25 the fact. So, thanks again. So, Commissioner, I was

2 intrigued by-- I would love for MOIA to send us the  
3 breakdown list of all the organizations that you read  
4 into the record with their-- with the amounts that  
5 they've been allocated on what kinds of work they've  
6 been allocating, but I was intrigued to know that a  
7 good number of the organizations in this room who  
8 have testified who are doing the work are not on  
9 those lists, and I think it was like-- it's a glaring  
10 mismatch, and I think-- I'm hoping that one of the  
11 things we will see today is there's a profound  
12 mismatch and I believe we have the creativity and  
13 ability to correct that situation and to get the  
14 resources moving to where they need to go. So  
15 without further ado, here we go. Is MOIA involved in  
16 connecting new arrivals with the diaspora or  
17 community that can help them with language access?  
18 And how would it do that, if so?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just as I  
20 mentioned, we have grown the team recently at MOIA.  
21 Our role really is largely limited to advising and  
22 assisting our sister offices and agencies, in  
23 particular the Mayor's Offices of which we're  
24 responsible to providing interpretation and  
25 translation services to. We are also working across

2 all city offices and agencies to ensure that they  
3 have language access plans that they're executing.  
4 Again, these plans, we serve as consultants to them  
5 as needed, provide feedback. We occasionally do  
6 deploy or language access staff to community events  
7 and as issues arise, but again, you know, we're a  
8 limited staff. We couldn't possibly provide all  
9 these many language services to thousands people that  
10 have arrived. And so we work closely with providers  
11 that provide language assistance, and we also support  
12 as needed, and we rely on contractors that we all  
13 have available in order to supplement our language  
14 services.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: For the new Peer  
16 Navigator Program that connects long-time immigrant  
17 mentors with new arrivals, has there been any  
18 feedback yet from the organizations or the  
19 individuals involved? What's the progress of that  
20 program?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're very proud of  
22 that program. As I mention in my testimony, we  
23 partner with the Mayor's Funding Philanthropy to make  
24 that program happen. It pairs newly-arrived  
25 immigrants with longer-term immigrants to share

2 resources, information and experiences gathered by  
3 longer-term immigrants and the CBOs that we partner  
4 with. We will be surveying the partners to  
5 understand what their learnings are from this  
6 program. We hope to continue it if funds are  
7 available to so do, but it was a really important  
8 program for those who participated in, as it really  
9 helped build bridges between both communities, and  
10 also create those community connections which we know  
11 are essential for newly-arrived immigrants.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Are Black migrants  
13 part of that program? And if so, what percentage of  
14 people are being served through this program?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, African  
16 communities could be maybe-- African Communities  
17 Together and African Services Committee are part of  
18 the program, and they each serve a specific number of  
19 people. I believe it's 25 newly-arrived and 25  
20 longer-term migrants. And-- 100 total. Sorry, I'm  
21 looking back for data.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: The savior team in  
23 the back that provides all the important information.  
24 Does-- you mentioned this in your testimony, so I  
25 think we don't-- can I ask how the-- the Africans

2 Serving Black-- serving organizations that you have  
3 partnered with, how are those organizations  
4 determined, your partnerships?

5 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, the  
6 organizations that I mentioned, of course, we've been  
7 working with them, many of the organizations  
8 historically, and MOIA through our legal services  
9 programs and other programs. As you know, these  
10 contracts, some of them have existed for years. The  
11 procurement process is quite long, and as mentioned  
12 earlier, onerous. With organizations that we began  
13 working with in the last two years and the last year  
14 and a half as a result of the response of the  
15 arriving asylum-seekers, we've been working with them  
16 in philanthropy. As resources become available, the  
17 Mayor's Funding Philanthropy often consults with us  
18 about the organizations that are doing the work on  
19 the ground, who's welcoming the buses, for instance,  
20 whose welcoming folks in the community? Ultimately,  
21 you know, of course it's up to Philanthropy to fund  
22 these groups. Molly can add to that.

23 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Well, no, I just  
24 want to also mention the City has been working with  
25 Robin Hood and Community Trust to set up a fund so

2 that we can get more flexible funding to smaller  
3 groups that may-- it may be harder to get through our  
4 traditional channels, and so we have a seat at the  
5 table at that, and we're really excited to begin that  
6 work. It's still in the early stages, but we'll have  
7 more to share and welcome any groups that you think  
8 that we should potentially give this opportunity to.

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And just finally  
10 I'd like to add-- it's in my written testimony. I  
11 didn't read it for time purposes. But MOIA is also  
12 very much focused on working with our Mayor's Office  
13 of Nonprofit Services and the Mayor's Office of  
14 Contract Services to look at ways that we can build  
15 up the capacity of immigrant serving nonprofits,  
16 smaller nonprofits who may have just obtained their  
17 501C3 status and who are looking to apply for  
18 contracts with us. Again, this could be an onerous  
19 process and a longer process. We hope to get there  
20 with them, but of course, you know, in the immediacy--  
21 - immediate response we work closely with our  
22 existing partners to achieve, you know, the goals.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, this issue of,  
24 you know, let's say lack of capacity or growing  
25 infrastructure or on-the-ground organizations that

2 quite frankly don't want to be tax identified  
3 entities, which you know, they have their right to  
4 form whatever structure they need to is not a new  
5 problem for government or for this agency in  
6 particular, and we have solved for that over and over  
7 again. I'm a little mystified while-- that it feels  
8 like a new problem. Like, we have created pass-  
9 through funding. We have done entities, larger  
10 entities that could accept larger contracts and  
11 subcontract out to smaller entities is a structure  
12 we've used over and over again. so I guess I would  
13 encourage the Administration to move much more  
14 urgently and making sure that the resource are  
15 getting to the organizations on the ground, because  
16 what you heard just in the pre-panel alone is that is  
17 not happening, and we are two years in. We have  
18 enormous assets we can continue to build and support.  
19 My last question. I'll turn it over to Council  
20 Members. Does MOIA have any plans to partner with  
21 additional organizations?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Oh, yes, certainly.  
23 We'd love to. I mean, we recently conducted a site  
24 visit of Afrikana along with our Deputy Mayor Anne  
25 Williams-Isom, Molly Schaeffer, and other colleagues.

2 What we saw was very moving. We had a chance to see  
3 their space, the many community members they work  
4 with. We're in active conversation about deploying  
5 our language access staff to support and so on.  
6 We're always looking to work with new organizations,  
7 especially those who are very rooted in the  
8 community, and I know of many others who are looking  
9 to work with us. That is something that is certainly  
10 a priority for MOIA.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And what is the  
12 allocated funding-- oh, I'm so sorry. I'll just  
13 finish this question. What is the allocated funding  
14 for these new partnerships that MOIA is looking to  
15 establish?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's something  
17 that we're continuing to work through as we negotiate  
18 the upcoming budget, and you know, we hope to  
19 continue working with these organizations as we move  
20 through that process.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Deputy Commissioner,  
22 please.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: thank you so  
24 much, and first, thank you for your dedication to  
25 Black immigrants. I'm one myself from the Republic

2 of Guinea. So I deeply understand what it means to  
3 be undocumented coming to New York City as a child  
4 and now working in this Administration. And the role  
5 that I have played, even though I'm the Deputy  
6 Commissioner for International Affairs, is also to be  
7 an ear for the Administration in the community. I  
8 speak many of these dialects. I deeply understand  
9 what our communities are going through. And what you  
10 heard is that all they want is to live a dignified  
11 life, and so that's why really I want to raise what  
12 Doctor Baldé has stated, which is that we all should  
13 work to help our communities get access to work. But  
14 in terms of identifying additional community members  
15 and community organizations to work with, I give my  
16 cell phone to many community leaders, and they know  
17 that they can also reach out to us. So I am also  
18 helping to advise them and others that are doing the  
19 work underground that will be included in some of  
20 these efforts. I wanted to add that to the  
21 discussion. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: thank you. Thank  
23 you so much, and thank you for being here. I think  
24 we're seeing a burden, a disproportionate burden on  
25 the weights and shoulders of Adama Bah, of Corine, of

2 Dr. Baldé who can no longer continue that pace  
3 bearing the burden of this city, and we must do  
4 better. We are stuck in certain ways, but we  
5 together can get unstuck and to commit to all of our  
6 people that we can do better. So thank you. I'd  
7 like to recognize Council Member Stevens for  
8 questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, thank you  
10 so much, and I would just like to start off by saying  
11 thank you Alexa for having this hearing, and I really  
12 appreciate your leadership on this because I've been  
13 like ringing the alarm about this. And so one, I just  
14 want to say I'm just so proud to see so many faces,  
15 not only inside but outside who came to show up, and  
16 I wanted to be clear and clearly say that you've been  
17 seen and no one could ignore it anymore, because this  
18 has been ignored for the last two years at the start  
19 of this asylum-seeker crisis, and you have been doing  
20 the work in the shadows, and you've been seen. And so  
21 today, no one can say that it's not happening. So I  
22 just want to thank all of you for showing up and  
23 being here today. I proudly represent the largest  
24 West African diasporas in the city in the West Bronx,  
25 and my community leaders have been ringing the alarm

2 about this even before the 60-day rules, because I  
3 think even today as we mention like, oh, it's been  
4 even worse after the 60-day rule. However, we've  
5 been talking about asylum-seekers being in the mosque  
6 and living in the mosque, and that's the first line  
7 of defense and they've been there-- and this is  
8 before the 60-day rule. It's been exacerbated since  
9 then. But my question to the Administration is-- and  
10 I'm going to ask a couple of questions. I have a  
11 bunch of them. Have we done an assessment to see how  
12 many mosques throughout the City has been doing this  
13 work to get a better understanding of what they've  
14 been doing and how they've been doing it? What  
15 supports have been given to the mosques and faith-  
16 based institutions while they've been stepping up  
17 during this crisis? And have we provided training?  
18 And not just like money, because I know we've been  
19 talking about money. We want the money, too, but  
20 have they been given training? Have they been given  
21 technical support? What supports have they been  
22 giving at these mosques that's been doing work?  
23 Also, I talked to a couple of imams who at the start  
24 of the crisis was told that the City would be  
25 partnering with them. So they went out, they got

2 spaces, they paid rent and got leases, but the City  
3 never came back, and so now they're being left with a  
4 bill. I'll start there, and I have some questions  
5 about juvenile justice. So I'll start there.  
6 Hopefully you wrote those down and you can answer  
7 some of those.

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, in the very  
9 beginning we've been-- we set up a faith bed  
10 sheltering program. It has been slow-going because  
11 we need to make sure that everybody who is in these  
12 non-traditional--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
14 When you say slow-going, what does that mean?  
15 Because I'm hearing it hasn't happened.

16 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: so, we have six  
17 shelters up and running for--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
19 Where? And are they partnered with mosques?

20 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: One of them is a  
21 mosque.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Which one? Name  
23 please.

24 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Sawa [sic].

25 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay.

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: But and I'm happy to  
3 get you the list of the other--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
5 Yeah, that'd be great.

6 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: houses of worship.  
7 It has been slow-going because we need to make sure  
8 that everybody who is in these non-traditional spaces  
9 is safe, and that has a high regulatory burden for  
10 both DOB and FDNY, and so we've been working with our  
11 partners on how to make them as safe as possible so  
12 that everybody in that, in those sites, we know is  
13 safe.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: But if we're in  
15 a crisis, how do we get this expedited? Because like  
16 I said, this is not new and we can't say it just  
17 started. I know I've spoken to some of the imams.  
18 They've been talking and leased space over a year  
19 ago. And so why is it taking so long, especially  
20 when you're in crisis, when you're also opening up  
21 other HERRCs that have not seemed to have the same  
22 turnaround. So I would love to hear more about that,  
23 but remember, we're on a clock.

24 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah, so happy to  
25 look into any site or any imam that says that they

2 leased space. They-- I don't know why that happened,  
3 so please give me those-- that information. We're  
4 happy to look--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
6 I've given this information a number of times to the  
7 Administration, but I'll do it again.

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yes, please do.  
9 We've gotten as creative as we possibly can. We've  
10 relaxed some rules while still keeping a stringent  
11 focus on safety, because honestly we don't want to  
12 have a situation where people are stuck in a  
13 basement--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing] I  
15 would love to see the rules that you relaxed, if you  
16 can send them to me and follow up because I would  
17 love to see what that looks like.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yes, okay.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And could we go  
20 to the other two questions that I asked, please. Like  
21 I said, I'm on clock and I still have two more  
22 questions.

23 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So we've been-- when  
24 we hear about mosques that are--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing] My  
3 first question was have you guys done an assessment  
4 to see what mosques have been doing the work, and if  
5 not, why hasn't that happened yet? Because we're in  
6 year two, right?

7 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We are in-- well,  
8 we're almost in year two.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay.

10 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: [inaudible] But we  
11 have-- when you've heard about mosques that are--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing] so  
13 you have not done your own independent assessment?  
14 Because I know I--

15 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: [interposing] Well, I  
16 want to--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: the  
18 Administration is the one who reached out to me  
19 regarding the mosques, and so you haven't started to  
20 do any assessments around how many mosques we have,  
21 who's been doing the work to kind of get a landscape  
22 of what that looks like?

23 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we've been in  
24 constant conversation with both the--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing] So,  
3 the answer is no.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We've not done a  
5 survey, but I also want to--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
7 Okay, great you have not done an assessment.

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: be very careful  
9 about safety and those spaces--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
11 SO, my next question, please. I hear you.

12 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We have a high--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]  
14 It's 29 seconds and I have more questions. So you  
15 have not done an assessment. So my next question  
16 was, have we given any training or technical support  
17 to the mosques that are doing the work since you said  
18 some of them have reached out to you and you do know  
19 some of them. Have you done any of that and what  
20 does that look like?

21 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, Pastor Monroe's  
22 [sic] and CAU's Office of Faith and Community  
23 Partnerships has been talking to the houses of  
24 worship and doing training. Happy to connect you  
25 with them and see exactly what kind of training.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Thank you so  
3 much, and if you could send me the list of training  
4 that already has been done, that'll be greatly  
5 appreciate. I just have two questions, and I'm so  
6 sorry, I'm trying to get done really quickly. The  
7 next two questions I have is about obviously homeless  
8 and runaway youth. Why didn't DYCD RHY programs have  
9 reference access to the asylum-seeker application and  
10 what are they doing to give the referrals access?  
11 And many youth are eligible for Special Immigrant  
12 Juvenile Status. What is MOIA doing to increase the  
13 funding for legal services for SIJS eligible youth?

14 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Okay, so very-- we  
15 did do a partnership with RHY to get a lot of folks  
16 into the asylum application help center. We've also  
17 as part of the asylum application help center done a  
18 couple of pilots on SIJ status, but I will turn it  
19 over to MOIA for more on SIJ.

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'll defer to Tom.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thanks for  
22 the question, Council Member Stevens. So, MOIA has a  
23 number of programs that provides Special Immigrant  
24 Juvenile status assistance to immigrant youth. Action  
25 NYC is one of those, and Immigrant Opportunities

2 Initiative and ICARE sit at different parts of the  
3 City. Currently, we're partnering with RHY. We're  
4 just starting this out to pivot the Action NYC in  
5 schools deliverables to conduct the screening of all  
6 of the newly-arrived 18 to 20 year olds in RHY  
7 shelter. There's approximately 3-400 of them right  
8 now; 80 percent are from African countries. And so  
9 we're going to really focus on that in the months of  
10 June through August, screen broadly, and then connect  
11 those who are approaching their age-out date, their  
12 21<sup>st</sup> birthday with direct assistance, and then triage  
13 the remainder. So, that particular population in RHY  
14 shelter, we are preparing to like surge resources  
15 toward.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I'm a little  
17 disappointed that we're just surging it, because I  
18 know for a fact that I've been ringing alarm about  
19 this in these RHY shelters. So please send me all  
20 the information and the things that you are gearing  
21 up to do, and I will definitely be following up.  
22 Thank you.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Will do.  
24 Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Thank you,  
3 Chairs.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just briefly,  
5 Council Member, just to read into the record, MOIA  
6 has partnered with mosques to organize 69 events  
7 where we provide information, resources, assistance  
8 with IDNYC and connect them to our partners at OASO.  
9 We recently held three Iftar events that we combined-  
10 - yeah, where we combined resource fairs along with  
11 them where a 1,275 people participated. So we used  
12 the last month to ramp up our services there. Again,  
13 that's just MOIA. I know that there are other things  
14 going on system wide.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Speaking to  
16 the mosques as well, as a member of the community, we  
17 do have deep conversations with the different Imams,  
18 and I did join as a Muslim, African and Muslim member  
19 of the Administration. I joined MOIA in the Bronx to  
20 actually go and speak to asylum-seekers and to help  
21 them with IDNYC cards. Would love to see more of  
22 that and to be able to show up for that. So, just  
23 wanted to add that to the conversation as well.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Thank you very  
25 much, and I just wanted to comment that I just got a

2 text in from some of my partners, and they were  
3 saying around the RHY stuff, none of the providers  
4 have heard about the things that you just spoke about  
5 that's about to get geared up. So, please make sure  
6 that if you guys are gearing stuff up, that we should  
7 actually let the providers know, and I will  
8 definitely be following up to see how that's going to  
9 be rolled out. In addition to, I would suggest that  
10 we at this point since we haven't done an assessment  
11 of how many mosques in the City are doing the work, I  
12 would suggest that the City start there, because we  
13 should have done that at least two years ago. Thank  
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council  
16 Member Stevens. Next, we're going to have Majority  
17 Whip Brooks-Powers.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.  
19 So, as the office focused in on asylum-seekers takes  
20 a greater role in operating shelters serving  
21 immigrant New Yorkers, how is this office seeking to  
22 coordinate with various nonprofits that could help  
23 provide these services like language access, and  
24 moreover, how is this office seeking to expand the  
25 base of nonprofits who are doing the work?

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: so, we have a really  
3 good partnership with MOIA and MOIA has deep  
4 knowledge and connection in the community. we  
5 ultimately know that the groups doing this work for  
6 10, 20, 30 years know how to do this better than we  
7 do, and ultimately we want to figure out a way where  
8 we can get more resources to the groups doing this  
9 work, build up their capacity so we do less on our  
10 side and more on their side. We are constantly  
11 looking at that and trying to build our strategic  
12 plans around that and how we, again, get resources  
13 into the communities that are absorbing people,  
14 because as we all know shelter is a temporary thing.  
15 It's for traditional homelessness-- traditional  
16 homeless folks and for asylum-seekers, and so we want  
17 to make sure that we are adequately resourcing the  
18 community as best as possible to be able to absorb  
19 people and give them that sense of community.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And in the  
21 testimony, it spoke to looking to fund important work  
22 that MOIA's doing in terms of the Haitian Response  
23 Initiative, and has proposed funding for Fiscal 25.  
24 I'm curious to know how is this funding that has been  
25 received and that is received on Fiscal 25, how would

2 that be allocated? Is this finding specifically for  
3 the Haitian Response Initiative? Is this a portion  
4 of a larger pot? Like, how is it being prioritized  
5 among the various immigrants?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you  
7 for the question, Council Member. The Haitian  
8 Response Initiative launched in Fiscal Year 22,  
9 providing funding to seven Haitian-rooted community-  
10 based organizations to provide case management and  
11 either direct services to social services and other--  
12 or referrals to other organizations that provide  
13 those services. There was an additional funding  
14 amount that went to Catholic Charities to provide  
15 immigration legal assistance to clients of those  
16 seven CBOs, and also legal capacity-building training  
17 to the CBOs so that they could more effectively  
18 support people at the initial point of contact.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And no  
20 offense to Catholic Charities, but I'm curious as to  
21 why Catholic Charities instead of a more indigenous  
22 organization such as HAUP, Haitian Americans United  
23 for Progress, or an organizations along those lines  
24 that can provide the support. I know Catholic  
25 Charities does a lot of great work in the different

2 communities, but I do find that they are overwhelmed  
3 in certain areas. So I'm not sure what their  
4 capacity is as it pertains to the services for this  
5 particular initiative.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you.  
7 So, MOIA funds Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees,  
8 HAUP, and other Haitian-serving organizations under  
9 the Action NYC program.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: But they  
11 fall under Catholic Charities, is that how it works?

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: No, I'm  
13 just describing the--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS:  
15 [interposing] Sorry.

16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Haitian-led  
17 orgs that are funded for immigration legal. The  
18 reason why Catholic Charities was the choice in this  
19 instance was because they run what's called the  
20 Immigration Court Help Desk Program which provides  
21 pro se assistance to people in removal proceedings,  
22 and they also have the Action NYC hotline which did  
23 not have Haitian-Creole speakers on it, so we really  
24 wanted to invest in improving their ability to serve,  
25 and also with their legal expertise train up the CBOs

2 in the Haitian community, and so it's a partnership  
3 in that way. They have built a team of Haitian-  
4 Creole speaking staff to do the work in partnership  
5 with the CBOs.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And then  
7 you also spoke about in terms of language access  
8 recognizing that the mother language is-- mother  
9 tongue language is what the migrants prefer and are  
10 most comfortable in speaking. How has the City been  
11 trying to address this?

12 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, at least in our  
13 shelters, we're really focused on getting bilingual  
14 staff, especially in the languages that we know  
15 people are speaking, and so we've been attempting to  
16 get-- to hire more people who are bilingual to make  
17 sure that we hit that, but I just wanted to say that.

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, no, and just  
19 to add to that, as language access experts would  
20 agree, in-person interpretation and language services  
21 is the ideal, but to get to the scale of course we  
22 use contractor and language line and so on, but as  
23 Molly said, I think hiring is optimum, and we're  
24 working to hire additional staff to provide those  
25 services in not just the top 10 languages, but also

2 in languages of limited diffusion, and also languages  
3 that are really hard to attain, you know, amongst our  
4 community providers.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: How are  
6 you promoting the positions that you're looking to  
7 hire for those roles?

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we don't do the  
9 hiring directly. I only hire for my office, but we  
10 work with all of the agencies and their vendors to  
11 make sure that we're prioritizing hiring, and we've  
12 also been lucky at least in our NCYEM sites that we  
13 have city volunteers who are bilingual, and  
14 especially who also speak some of these limited  
15 profusion languages that have been able to help out  
16 as well.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: But  
18 Commissioner, you did mention just now, right, that  
19 you guys are trying to hire up more?

20 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I'm saying that  
21 we've made it a priority through each of the agencies  
22 and through the vendors that we have doing the work  
23 to make sure that they are actually hiring.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: So,  
25 through the vendors, but what about internally in the

2 agency itself, are you doing anything to hire  
3 individuals that can do this work within the agency  
4 as well?

5 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah, absolutely.  
6 We're hiring right now and we've been really focused  
7 on diversity--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS:  
9 [interposing] Yeah, so what does that look like?  
10 What does that outreach look like in promoting that  
11 to ensure that you're able to hire folks that speak  
12 that language that you're prioritizing, those top 10  
13 languages?

14 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I mean, I think  
15 our-- my entity, my office doesn't-- we have some  
16 bilingual staff, but I think we're doing the normal  
17 channels, and then we're interviewing people and  
18 seeing what kind of experience they have and how they  
19 can help with this. I think maybe Commissioner  
20 Castro can talk about the language access staff a  
21 little bit more, but what I was really talking about  
22 is in the actual shelters making sure that the people  
23 that are talking to people day-in and day-out have  
24 that language ability.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And I hear  
3 you, and I was speaking to Commissioner Castro in  
4 response to something that he said, and I was just  
5 trying to get a better understanding of what the  
6 Administration is trying to do to hire people inside  
7 of the agencies that can speak some of these  
8 languages that you're looking to prioritize. I hear  
9 you in terms of like the CBOs which is great and  
10 necessary, because they're on the ground. But when  
11 people call agencies, they also want to know that  
12 there's someone that speaks the language that they  
13 understand.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Thank you  
15 for that question, because I strongly believe that  
16 representation matters. When I go into these HERRCs  
17 and I'm speaking their language, they all crowd  
18 around me and really just want to give me love and I  
19 give them the love back. And as someone that's  
20 advising the Mayor on the African community, one of  
21 the things that I've also been doing is really  
22 getting our community to apply for these jobs, and to  
23 also give them the opportunity to get interviews. So  
24 I'm also out there really working with the community  
25 leaders when we see jobs that are opening to tell the

2 community about it, to help them understand what it  
3 takes to work in a New York City agency. And If they  
4 have direct questions, I'm also there to answer, but  
5 I strongly believe in that representation, and I'm  
6 really glad that our Administration, we're committed  
7 to doing that because it matters so much to these  
8 asylum-seekers every time that they see out there,  
9 that we are them and that we understand their  
10 experiences.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And Chair,  
12 I would love to see the outcome of some of these, you  
13 know, hiring's through, you know, subsequent hearings  
14 to see what those outcomes are. And I'll just say  
15 the last question that I have is, I'm interested to  
16 understand how Council Members in our respective  
17 districts can partner in the effort to provide more  
18 effective services to Black migrants, and in what  
19 ways does the Administration believe that we can  
20 support and bolster these efforts?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just to speak  
22 briefly to our hiring of language access specialists,  
23 we share our job postings widely through our  
24 community organizations and community partners. Our  
25 language access team, in fact, as I mentioned has

2 grown from three staff when I started at MOIA to  
3 about 20. Each language access specialist has to  
4 pass an assessment to demonstrate their ability to  
5 serve a linguist or interpreter and translator within  
6 our office. But just to clarify, our offices are  
7 more positioned as coordinators. We're not executing  
8 on the operational part that--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS:  
10 [interposing] I'm aware.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, we help other  
12 agencies like H+H and system wide to also implement  
13 these types of hiring policies.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, we absolutely-  
17 - we understand that you are not hiring the language  
18 accessible staff. The problem is is that we don't  
19 see it on the ground. So I don't know who's in  
20 charge of hiring, but we still see significant gaps.  
21 So whether it is H+H or any manner of subcontractors.  
22 We would like to know for the record how many staff  
23 in the system speak Arabic fluently? How many staff  
24 speak French fluently? How many staff speak Fulani?  
25 How many staff speak Wolof? How many staff speak

2 Russian? In very exact numbers throughout the  
3 system, because what we are seeing today every day is  
4 we are depending on Corine and Adama and a bunch of  
5 aunties in the neighborhood to respond at all manners  
6 of the night to this entire community.

7 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I'd have to get  
8 back to you on the exact numbers. As you know,  
9 Fulani and Wolof are limited-profusion languages, so  
10 it is harder to get staff that are trained exactly in  
11 those languages to be-- and on the other service that  
12 they're providing. We are working to address that,  
13 and we do have staff in our sites that speak Fulani  
14 and Wolof, but-- and we're working on that, and we're  
15 happy to send it to anybody who has staff that wants  
16 to work in sites, but I will get back to you on the  
17 numbers.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, thank you. I'm  
19 sure there are challenges. I think what we want to  
20 see is progress. We want to see progress. So, next  
21 I'm going to call Council Member Hanif.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Hi, good  
23 afternoon. So, I'll just dive right in. Under the  
24 terms of the settlement the City made with Legal Aid  
25 and the Coalition for the Homeless, the City was

2 required to clear the wait list of people not  
3 receiving shelter placement by April 8<sup>th</sup>. I was very  
4 disappointed to see that the City failed to meet this  
5 requirement, and as of last week, people were still  
6 waiting in line outside St. Bridget's for a shelter  
7 placement. As of today, has the City eliminated its  
8 requirement to eliminate wait times for shelter  
9 placement?

10 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, anybody who  
11 comes back to St. Bridget's at this point to try to  
12 get another cot placement is given a cot place within  
13 24 hours.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, they come to--  
15 could you just describe what happens once they arrive  
16 to St. Bridget's again?

17 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yes, they come to  
18 St. Bridget's. They say I am here for a cot  
19 placement. We attempt to place them right there and  
20 then in a cot placement, and we move it along. If we  
21 can't, then we-- we refer them to a drop-in center or  
22 if they come too late so that the site is actually  
23 closed, then they go to a drop-in center.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, then as of  
25 today, the City has not met the requirements?

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We are in constant  
3 communication with Legal Aid, and we are working to  
4 implement the settlement that we agreed on.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: How soon will it  
6 be implemented?

7 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: As I said, we're in  
8 constant communication with Legal Aid--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] I  
10 mean, I understand you're in constant communication--

11 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: on the terms of the  
12 settlement.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: but there's-- it's  
14 a law now. It's required.

15 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: And we are in  
16 constant communication--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] Are  
18 you able to share a bit more of a definitive response  
19 than just simply being in communication?

20 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We are-- as I said,  
21 we are implementing the stipulation, and when we have  
22 an update to give, we will give that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: We look forward to  
24 that. When I visited St. Bridget's I was struck by  
25 the extent to which the line of people outside was

2 made up of primarily Black asylum-seekers. Does the  
3 Administration track demographics of the wait list of  
4 people that it is denying shelter?

5 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: SO, the 30-day  
6 notices and the 60-day notices for 18 to 22 year olds  
7 only affect single adults and adult families.  
8 Families with children get 60-day notices, and the  
9 renewal process out of St. Bridget's is only for  
10 single adults and adult families. What I will say is  
11 that migrants from Africa are disproportionately  
12 single adults and adult families. Around 81 percent  
13 of migrants from African countries currently in our  
14 care are single adults/adult families compared to the  
15 overall average of 22 percent for the entire system.  
16 So to just put that into perspective, for our  
17 migrants from Venezuela, 91 percent of them are  
18 families with children, versus nine percent are  
19 single adults and adult families. And so the 30-day  
20 notices are specific to single adults and adult  
21 families.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Could you just  
23 share what the wait list of people looks like right  
24 now?

25 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: No, we are--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] You  
3 don't keep track of that demographic?

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: No, we have-- we are  
5 attempting to-- we've been giving a bed to anybody  
6 who wants it within 24 hours at this point.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: But there's no  
8 tracking system of how many are on that-- on a wait  
9 list?

10 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: It's not the same as  
11 the wait list that we were talking about before we  
12 joined the settlement, but we are not tracking  
13 nationality of the wait list.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So, broadly,  
15 there's no wait list?

16 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, broadly,  
17 everybody is getting a re-cot within 24 hours.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So how many people  
19 have gotten a re-cot since yesterday?

20 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: It depends on the  
21 day. It depends on the day and how many people are  
22 coming--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] But  
24 is that being tracked on a daily--

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: [interposing] On a  
3 daily, yeah.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And what was it  
5 today?

6 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I don't know. I'm  
7 in this hearing.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I get that, but  
9 okay. Can you give it-- give me what was yesterdays?

10 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Not off the top of  
11 my head. I have to get back to you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: These are numbers  
13 that are pretty important given what we're witnessing  
14 here at the chambers. Today, folks who are outside  
15 waiting at City Hall park to come in and the  
16 testimonies we heard at the panelist before yours,  
17 and so to not have any clarity on census or a  
18 broader-- even if it's not disaggregated by  
19 demographic, it's pretty absurd.

20 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I want to take a  
21 step back there, and say that we do have demographics  
22 here. So, 16 percent of people in our care are from  
23 African countries, and as I mentioned, migrants from  
24 Africa are disproportionately single adults and adult  
25 families.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: That I all  
3 understand.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Just respectfully  
6 I'm asking about the current wait list, but anyways,  
7 we'll move on. Per the terms of the settlement, the  
8 City is required to extend people's shelter stays  
9 past their initial 30 or 60 days if they demonstrate  
10 significant efforts to exit shelter. These efforts  
11 can include making progress on their immigration  
12 legal cases, seeking employment and seeking permanent  
13 housing. This is limited but important policy change  
14 to the cruel and counterproductive 30 and 60-day  
15 shelter caps that have, of course, disproportionately  
16 impacted Black immigrants. How is the Administration  
17 ensuring residents are getting credit for undertaking  
18 these significant efforts?

19 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we're currently  
20 implementing the stipulation with Legal Aid and when  
21 we have an update on implementation, we will share  
22 it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then given the  
24 inherent limitations to these efforts people can make  
25 while living in the shelter, how is the

2 Administration making sure that standards for  
3 demonstrating efforts are not unrealistically high?

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: As mentioned, we're  
5 in constant communication with Legal Aid and the  
6 Coalition for Homeless on how we implement this and  
7 making sure that everybody understands the process.  
8 When we have an update on implementation, we will get  
9 that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: You know, just to  
11 be clear here, I know you're speaking as a cohort and  
12 collaborator with Legal Aid and the Coalition for the  
13 Homeless, but this is really on the Administration  
14 ultimately. So we would like to hear about what  
15 implementation and enforcement looks like, given this  
16 was settled. And then finally, I'm concerned about  
17 the consequences of someone not being able to meet  
18 these standards. What happens if the City determines  
19 that an asylum-seeker has failed to meet significant  
20 efforts standards? If they're evicted from their  
21 initial shelter placement and apply for another  
22 placement, can you guarantee that the City will  
23 provide them one?

24 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, as mentioned, we  
25 are currently implement-- working on implementing the

2 stipulation, and so we will be able to answer your  
3 questions, we'll be able to walk through it when we  
4 have an update to give. At this point--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: [interposing] But  
6 you have no timeline for us?

7 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: we don't have an  
8 update.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: You don't have a  
10 timeline for us knowing that today was going to be  
11 one opportunity for us to ask and check in about that  
12 stipulation. Well, that's disappointing. And then  
13 are there any scenarios in which the City will  
14 explicitly deny a placement to someone applying for  
15 shelter and relegate them to sleeping on the street?  
16 And if so, can you describe these scenarios?

17 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I think we've  
18 been very clear about that is not our intention for  
19 people to sleep on the streets. As mentioned, when  
20 we have an update on the Callahan stipulation, we'll  
21 give it, but I will also say that it is really  
22 incumbent that we get more federal and state help. I  
23 think we're actually just really focusing on the  
24 federal. We really need people to have the ability  
25 to work so that they can immediately get connected to

2 their legal options. They can get TPS, especially  
3 folks from Africa. Right now, TPS is not available  
4 for countries in Africa so that they can immediately  
5 get their work permits, and they can get connected to  
6 good jobs and be able to move out of our shelter  
7 system.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And could you give  
9 us an update about the advocacy efforts with the  
10 Federal Government?

11 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We continue to  
12 advocate. I mean, I think we're talking to folks all  
13 the time. We really, really need TPS. It has been a  
14 huge boon for the Venezuelan community, and we are  
15 continuing to do it. I don't know if you have  
16 anything specific you want to say.

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we're  
18 constantly uplifting the issue to the Whitehouse and  
19 to our congressional delegation. We work, as you  
20 know, in coalition with Cities for Action to submit a  
21 number of letters. We work on a number of coalitions  
22 for these particular countries that we've listed, and  
23 we had members-- we organized with members of the  
24 clergy to visit D.C., most recently, where we  
25 uplifted these issues as well. We'll continue to do

2 this. This is one of our priorities at MOIA and  
3 across the board, and of course, working with Deputy  
4 Commissioner and others. We are hoping to partner  
5 with Council and other elected officials to continue  
6 the drumbeat. Of course, the showing today I hope  
7 sends a message about the critical importance for  
8 this.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: And if I may  
10 add, Council Member, when I speak to these community  
11 members, my community, they're not interested in  
12 staying at the shelters. They want to move on. We  
13 are hard-working. We're here because we have given  
14 up a lot, and that's why you're seeing single  
15 members. It's because families pull all their  
16 resources to-- I don't want to cry-- to bring this  
17 one person here. That is their hope. So, if you  
18 really want to help our community, you also-- we ask  
19 you, we beg you to really start talking about TPS for  
20 our communities. We need it in Guinea, in Senegal,  
21 in Mauritania. We need this TPS, and the fact that  
22 our communities have not gotten this is something  
23 that is shocking to us, and when I talk to them, they  
24 say, "I'm able-bodied. I don't want to stay in the  
25 shelters. I want to be able to take care of myself."

2 As Africans, as Muslims, we love our dignity. We  
3 love being able to take care of ourselves and our  
4 families. So if you take away anything from today,  
5 what I will tell you is you need to help us so that  
6 they could get to work. They want to work. They  
7 want to contribute to the society. We do not want to  
8 be burden to New York City or to the United States.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Absolutely, Deputy  
10 Commissioner, and I'm so proud to meet you and thank  
11 you so much for the work you're doing directly in  
12 community. That's the goal of this Council, too. We  
13 want to see self-sufficiency. We want to see folks  
14 independent, and starting their lives here, not in  
15 constant eviction because of short-sided rules that  
16 tell a family or an individual adult that you got to  
17 keep-- you got to move on after 30 days or 60 days.  
18 That rule actually creates more a prohibitive and  
19 cruel state in this city, and it actually denies them  
20 any opportunity for independence or self-sufficiency.  
21 So I'm totally aligned with you. That's what we  
22 want. We want independence. Evicting people is not  
23 the way to go, because that's going to prolong and  
24 delay our newest community's efforts to be New  
25 Yorkers and to receive the job opportunities they

2 deserve, to be able to be placed in permanent and  
3 dignified housing, because we're making it absolutely  
4 difficult for them to reach that ultimate goal. And  
5 we really want to see the Administration. We've got  
6 a bill that go heard, Intro 210, to be able to be  
7 passed to eliminate that cap, because we want people  
8 to start their lives immediately.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council  
10 Member. And we'd like to recognize we've been joined  
11 by Council Member Cabán and Speaker Adams. Thank you  
12 for joining us, Speaker Adams. So, I'd like to pivot  
13 very quickly to language access again, a central  
14 theme here today. Under Local Law 30, city agencies  
15 must meet a number of requirements to make their  
16 services accessible to New York residents in a number  
17 of different languages. How has MOIA been involved  
18 in the implementation of Local Law 30? And does MOIA  
19 provide any support on how to meet the requirements  
20 of Local Law 30 to agencies?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair,  
22 for the question. As I mentioned earlier, we've  
23 grown our team from three staffers when I joined to  
24 about 20 specifically to make sure that across City  
25 government offices and agencies are able to develop

2 language access plans and execute against those  
3 plans. We collect these and we provide feedback and  
4 we make available our staff to provide technical  
5 assistance and support agencies to meet Local Law 30  
6 and support our immigrant communities, both longer-  
7 term and newly-arrived. Our staff is in constant  
8 communication. We are actually going on the road  
9 meeting with a number of different agencies to  
10 present on our language access-- the way that we can  
11 support through MOIA and other tools to develop their  
12 language access plans further.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, is MOIA able to  
14 hold agencies accountable for not meeting their  
15 requirements? And what does a language access plan  
16 actually look like? Are there performance metrics  
17 that agencies have to meet? If you could tell us  
18 specifically what that looks like. It's still very  
19 amorphous.

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we collect--  
21 actually, we collect these language access plan and  
22 publish them. We recently published these plans, and  
23 then we conduct an analysis and publish that as well.  
24 So, it's an ongoing let's say relationship with  
25 agencies and offices. We monitor. Again, we work

2 very closely with them to address issues as they come  
3 up, and they also come to us if they have any issues,  
4 and we work closely with the Mayor's Office of  
5 Contracts and other agencies to look at how we  
6 procure language services across the system.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But there are no--  
8 just for clarity-- there are no accountability  
9 mechanisms? If an organization puts forward a very  
10 ambitious plan to hire all these bilingual speakers  
11 and does nothing, is there any accountability  
12 mechanism around how an agencies is meeting the  
13 mandates of this law?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, you're  
15 correct in that MOIA is-- does not have any  
16 enforcement abilities.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: But of course, we  
19 work closely with--

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] I just  
21 wanted to be sure that there isn't-- there doesn't  
22 exist and accountability mechanism here to ensure  
23 compliance. So with that, I'd love to turn it over  
24 to Speaker Adrienne Adams.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you so much.

3 Welcome to today's hearing, panel. It's good to see  
4 you all and I thank our Chairs Avilés and Narcisse,  
5 and the entire Committee on Immigration for hosting  
6 today's very important hearing. I'm going to start by  
7 asking asylum-seekers have a much higher chance of  
8 successfully applying for asylum when an attorney or  
9 accredited legal representative represents them  
10 throughout their removal proceedings and application  
11 process. moreover, immigration legal service  
12 provides with the requisite cultural competence and  
13 country conditions expertise are better able to  
14 understand their client's unique circumstances and  
15 craft tailored legal strategies. What updates can  
16 MOIA provide regarding its advocacy for immigration  
17 legal services funding in our Fiscal Year 25 budget?

18 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you  
19 for the question, Speaker Adams. We are currently  
20 funding the Asylum-seekers Legal Assistance Network  
21 which is the \$5 million initiative specifically  
22 dedicated to serving newly-arrived migrants and  
23 asylum-seekers. That program has taken a little  
24 while to get off the ground because of hiring  
25 challenges. However, we've been serving high volumes

2 of individuals with screenings, pro se application  
3 assistance, trainings as well, and the preparation of  
4 packets in support of asylum applications that are  
5 submitted pro se. This work is done either directly  
6 by or in close coordination with community-based  
7 organizations specifically relevant to Black and  
8 African migrants. We're partnering with African  
9 Services Committee, and have actually not only funded  
10 them under ASLAN but also pivoted their Action NYC  
11 deliverables to serve high numbers of Senegalese  
12 migrants that are visiting them, and African  
13 Communities Together is working closely with Pro Se  
14 Plus Project in order to train community-based  
15 organization navigators to help people navigate the  
16 initial paperwork and then be referred to the  
17 appropriate clinics.

18 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you. I'm just  
19 curious, I don't know if this question was sked. I  
20 was watching a bit of the hearing earlier. Was this  
21 panel present when the population of migrants were  
22 testifying? You all were present? Oaky, I just  
23 wanted to make sure that understood that much,  
24 alright. Current OSHA [sic] training is not  
25 available to French speakers and excludes a

2 significant number of African and Caribbean asylum-  
3 seekers and migrants. Have MOIA or OASO advocated  
4 for OSHA training in New York City to be made  
5 available in French or any other languages relevant  
6 to Black immigrant new-comers such as Haitian-Creole  
7 or Arabic?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we've been--  
9 we've had ongoing conversations with Small Business  
10 Services and others who are responsible for enforcing  
11 site safety in our city. As you know, OSHA is a  
12 federal program. They certify instructors to provide  
13 the OSHA training and speaking from my experience  
14 having been the Executive Director of OSHA training  
15 provider, it is very difficult to find trainers who  
16 speak languages of limited diffusion which is why  
17 most of the trainers are English and Spanish-speaking  
18 trainers. And again, this is also an issue that  
19 partly belongs to the Federal Government. They need  
20 to do better at providing training in these  
21 languages.

22 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. I'm going to ask--  
23 Director Schaeffer, on OASO's asylum-seeker resources  
24 page, OASO lists a number of satellite sites that are  
25 assisting asylum-seekers. Most of these providers,

2 however, have not historically worked with Black  
3 immigrants and may not have the language access  
4 resources necessary to communicate with Black asylum-  
5 seekers and immigrant newcomers. Are there plans to  
6 engage CBOs that have the history and language access  
7 resources as resource centers or satellite offices to  
8 better serve this particular demographic?

9 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Absolutely, and I  
10 have to go look at that page. I think it's just the  
11 navigation centers, and so we absolutely are in  
12 conversations with CBOs that traditionally have  
13 served this population, and we continue to try to  
14 expand the work there. I will look at that page  
15 again and see if there's other resources that we want  
16 to put up that are specific to that population.

17 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. What would happen  
18 if an immigrant or a newcomer couldn't communicate  
19 with the satellite sites? Where would they be  
20 directed?

21 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, the Navigation  
22 Centers are run by MOIA, so I defer to them.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Currently,  
24 ICP or International Children's Program is supporting  
25 African asylum-seekers speaking languages of limited

2 diffusion. The organizations that don't  
3 traditionally serve that community, but are seeing  
4 many individuals go to them for assistance are using  
5 the language line or interpreters that are there  
6 brought in. I can say on the immigration legal we--  
7 Lutheran Social Services has a site in East Harlem,  
8 and they've been-- and this is sort of the trend  
9 that's been occurring partnering with ICP and other  
10 African-serving organizations who are sending clients  
11 there to also send interpreters with them, community  
12 members who have been trained to interpret. So we're  
13 seeing an increased use of community-based  
14 interpretation services and we continue to further  
15 that, and some of that is happening through payment  
16 as vendors under our contracts with legal service  
17 providers and community-based organizations.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: And just one other  
19 thing I'd want to mention is that at our Asylum  
20 Application Help Center which is one of the-- like,  
21 we run that. OASO runs that and that has some  
22 satellites, too. We have served about-- 16 percent  
23 of the asylum applications have been for folks from  
24 African countries which is aligned with the  
25 percentage in our shelter system.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. so we spoke about,  
3 or I heard you testify and speak about legal services  
4 and needing to hire when it comes to legal services,  
5 and I think that I'm hearing-- correct me if I'm  
6 wrong, but I think I'm hearing also that there are  
7 plans to perhaps hire more in-person interpreters to  
8 speak to the top languages spoken by African or  
9 Caribbean immigrant newcomers. Is that happening as  
10 well?

11 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah, we're trying to  
12 hire bilingual staff at our sites to make sure that  
13 we have the-- and we've been specifically focusing on  
14 languages of limited diffusion and languages spoken  
15 by the majority of people in our care which is not  
16 necessarily-- it's Spanish and then it's French,  
17 Wolof, English, Russian, Arabic, and Fulani.

18 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay, that's good to  
19 hear. Black immigrant newcomers are statistically  
20 more likely to have grappled with racial bias in the  
21 federal immigration system by the time they reach the  
22 City. Black non-citizens are disproportionately  
23 likely to face immigration detention, higher bonds,  
24 lengthier detention, and inadequate access to legal  
25 information, legal counsel, and proper interpretation

2 in detention. Individuals who have grappled with  
3 these realities often need immigration legal service  
4 providers with expertise in the immigration detention  
5 system, and the complex statutory intersection of the  
6 criminal, legal, and federal immigration systems,  
7 including for those who have faced prolonged  
8 detention, the potential impact of the one-year  
9 filing deadline for asylum applications. Does the  
10 Asylum Application Help Center work with such  
11 providers, and does MOIA refer cases involving a  
12 history of detention to other immigration legal  
13 service providers?

14 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, as mentioned  
15 before, we are filing applications for folks from  
16 African countries. We file applications for anyone  
17 in our care, and that includes folks that speak other  
18 languages. I defer to MOIA about the pathway of  
19 referring out.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI:  
21 Individuals who are currently in detention would be  
22 served either NYFUP or the Immigrant Opportunities  
23 Initiative. Both programs house under the Office of  
24 Civil Justice at HRA, and once no longer in  
25 detention, if an individual goes to the Asylum

2 Application Help Center and has an order of removal  
3 ore requires post-removal relief, they're typically  
4 referred to one of the programs that MOIA oversees,  
5 known as the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative.  
6 They specialize in helping individuals who have  
7 received an order of removal and are looking to  
8 overcome that so they can then apply for asylum and  
9 defend themselves in immigration court. In addition,  
10 the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, or IOI, also  
11 receives referrals for particularly challenging cases  
12 and complex cases.

13 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. In listening to the  
14 testimony of asylum-seekers, migrants, and advocates  
15 so far today, what is the takeaway that you all see?  
16 The top-- give me the top three takeaways or  
17 complaints that you heard today.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: That we need to do  
19 better, and we agree. We absolutely need to do  
20 better. Every day we get up, trying to do better,  
21 and we need to do--

22 SPEAKER ADAMS: [interposing] With what  
23 specifically?

24 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Well, specifically  
25 with language access. I think that was the biggest

2 thing we heard, and that's what we know, with the  
3 ability to work and connections to workforce  
4 development, and we 100 percent agree. We're  
5 constantly trying to work on it and we need our  
6 federal partners to step in and help us with it as  
7 well, but we have a lot of work to do which is why we  
8 keep getting up and doing this every day.

9 SPEAKER ADAMS: What are the extenders  
10 out to our federal partners, Director? You  
11 mentioned-- and we know, believe me, we know that we  
12 do need help from our federal partners which we have  
13 been asking for well over a year into this crisis.  
14 What are those-- what does that look like, reach out--  
15 - reaching out to our federal partners? Is that on a  
16 daily basis, a monthly basis? Is it email? Is it  
17 getting on the phone? It is all of the above? What  
18 does that look like, exactly?

19 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we have  
20 different levers that we use. You know, obviously we  
21 coordinate with our intergovernmental affairs team.  
22 We have at least weekly meetings with the Federal  
23 Government on this topic, and we're in constant  
24 communication, emails, phone calls. They know my  
25 name. that's-- you know.

2 SPEAKER ADAMS: I'm sure.

3 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: And you know, we're  
4 constantly pushing on these issues and we're  
5 constantly giving them the data that says look, like  
6 this is-- these are some of the bigger populations  
7 that are coming into the City. It would help us. It  
8 would help you. Like, we need help. We need TPS.  
9 And we're also using our inter-city collaboration.  
10 MOIA can talk about C4A [sic]. We've also been  
11 talking to other cities about what is it that they  
12 need, which very aligned with what we need, and using  
13 every lever we can possibly think of.

14 SPEAKER ADAMS: what are some of the  
15 barriers? I don't mean to-- and you can continue.  
16 What are some of the barriers that are preventing us  
17 from getting what we need from the Federal  
18 Government?

19 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I can't speak to  
20 what the Federal Government--

21 SPEAKER ADAMS: [interposing] They're not  
22 telling you?

23 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I mean, I--

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: [interposing] They're not  
25 being straight with you.

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah, I--

3 SPEAKER ADAMS: [interposing] They're not  
4 being honesty with you. They're not telling you the  
5 facts.

6 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I didn't say that  
7 either.

8 SPEAKER ADAMS: All we want are the facts,  
9 Molly.

10 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: And the facts are  
11 that we try. We push and we try and that's all we  
12 can do.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, Speaker, thank  
14 you so much for the questions.

15 SPEAKER ADAMS: Yes.

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Certainly, as  
17 Director Schaeffer mentioned, language access and  
18 other local issues came up during the previous panel,  
19 but most importantly is making sure that people have  
20 access to work authorization, because we hear this  
21 not just from the previous panel, but from asylum-  
22 seekers throughout the system. They just want to get  
23 to work. They want to show they can contribute. They  
24 don't want to be dependent on anyone, and that I hear  
25 all the time, and for that reason, my office has

2 focused on advocacy. So that's one of our key  
3 pillars and strategic plan, working with other  
4 cities, other mayors, county executives to push on  
5 the Federal Government to do more. We are in  
6 constant communication both with the Whitehouse and  
7 the congressional delegation. There just needs to be  
8 political will to do what's right for these meetings

9 SPEAKER ADAMS: Right. So, I just wanted  
10 to go on the record, Chairs. We are getting the same  
11 story from the Federal Government, because we too are  
12 in constant contact, and we too are being told the  
13 exact same thing that these-- this is politics over  
14 people, and for all of us that really do have such a  
15 stake in all of this in wanting to see people succeed  
16 and people thrive. People that are coming into this  
17 city deserve our attention, our time, our services.  
18 We know that, and I'm speaking to those of you that  
19 have testified, the advocates as well. We-- and I  
20 hope that you know this. The City Council hears you.  
21 we are doing our very best to make sure that this  
22 city provides its best to you coming in here seeking  
23 asylum and refuge from your experiences in other  
24 places. So, we just want to make sure that we all  
25 have an understanding that New York in spite of this

2 crisis is doing the very best that we can under dire  
3 circumstances, but we all recognize as well that this  
4 is an issue for the entire nation, and the entire  
5 nation must be responsible the way that New York is  
6 being responsible and doing our part as well. We all  
7 are going to continue to push to meet with, to speak  
8 with our federal partners to try to make sure that we  
9 take all of the distance away and the clouds away,  
10 what is impeding us from putting people before  
11 politics, because this is a national issue. It is  
12 not just a New York City issue, a Chicago issue, a  
13 Los Angeles issue. This is a national issue and we  
14 deserve, and the people coming to this country,  
15 deserve national, positive attention. So my  
16 colleagues and I are going to continue to do what  
17 we've always been doing, and that is to advocate for  
18 those that deserve the services for the people of the  
19 City of New York. You are our new New Yorkers and  
20 you deserve our attention, our time, and the services  
21 that we can offer to provide you as our new New  
22 Yorkers and neighbors. Thank you very much for your  
23 testimony today. Chairs, I turn it back to you.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
25 Speaker. I'd like to know in that vein, there are

2 five Asylum Application Help Centers, is that  
3 correct? Am I calling them the wrong thing? Need  
4 Centers?

5 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: It's four. It is--  
6 it's three satellite.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Put your microphone  
8 on, please.

9 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: sorry. It's four.  
10 It's three satellites and one main hub, if you will.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: and given the  
12 population, you mentioned 16 percent and that's just  
13 the population the Afro population from Africa. We  
14 are not talking about Black people from all over the  
15 world, is that correct?

16 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: That's correct. We  
17 also have separately the amount of applications we  
18 filed for Haitians.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, so just one  
20 question. Why is there no Black-led culturally-  
21 competent welcome center for this community?

22 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I'm going to  
23 refer to MOIA on that. Again, this is just through  
24 our work we've really been focused on serving  
25 everybody in our care, and making sure that everybody

2 has equal access to legal services before their one-  
3 year filing deadline.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, so you know  
5 the distinction between fairness and equity?

6 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, so maybe MOIA.  
8 Why is there no Black-led, Black-serving organization  
9 getting funded to receive the minimum of 16 percent  
10 of this community?

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, you mean the  
12 application Help Center, through our application help  
13 center--

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] That's  
15 just one part of the pie. We're seeing this  
16 disparity play out over and over again through the  
17 system. We're seeing it in language access. We're  
18 seeing it in the funding of the service providers.  
19 But in particular we have these centers that are  
20 being run by amazing organizations, many Latino, who  
21 have no cultural competency in this community and yet  
22 being given the contract. So, I just want to  
23 understand why is there no Black-led, culturally-  
24 competent organization that has been receiving  
25 significant funding to address the community.

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: And just one  
3 clarification point on this, the Asylum Application  
4 Help Center is not being run by a nonprofit or any  
5 nonprofit. It's through temp staffing, through on-  
6 call counsel, and we've really been focused on making  
7 sure that the staff that we get are bilingual and  
8 serve the population, but that's different I think  
9 than the satellite sites at the navigation center,  
10 which is I think is what you're asking.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And I'm sure the  
12 disparities are going to be present--

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: in your example as  
15 well.

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, I think we're  
17 getting crossed up a little bit with the sort of--  
18 the terminology, but I do want to highlight an  
19 initiative that I think Tom mentioned earlier, and  
20 I'd like Tom to talk more about it. I think early on  
21 where we selected the nonprofit satellite sites,  
22 early on in the situation, the arrival of asylum-  
23 seekers, it was primarily Venezuelans, Ecuadorians,  
24 and other Latin American asylum-seekers. Eventually  
25 we started to see more people form across the world

2 arrive, and so there's a bit of an adjustment period  
3 that we're undergoing. So I let Tom talk about what  
4 we're doing as a result.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thanks,  
6 Commissioner, and thank you Chair for the question.  
7 So it's hard to distinguish between the programs that  
8 are dedicated serving newly-arrived migrants and the  
9 immigration legal and service programs that MOIA has  
10 overseen for years, because both are serving newly-  
11 arrived folks. Looking at the data, as the  
12 Commissioner mentioned in his testimony, 34 percent  
13 of all service appointments under MOIA contracts are  
14 for Black-- or go to Black migrants, and that's--  
15 we've seen a 70 percent increase in the number of  
16 appointments that go to Black migrants since Fiscal  
17 22. And so the data demonstrates that our programs  
18 are serving increasing numbers of Black migrants. We  
19 have African Service Committee and the African  
20 Communities Together as our main legal service  
21 partners serving that community under Action NYC, and  
22 then ICP and the Navigation Centers, but you're  
23 absolutely right that more needs to be done and this  
24 trend needs to continue.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Just for the record,  
3 ICP is not a Black-led organization or an African  
4 organization is that correct?

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I believe  
6 it is. [inaudible]

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Electra [sp?] who's  
9 an amazing advocate-- shout out to Electra-- is  
10 leading the efforts there.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, no is the  
12 answer.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, ICP is a Black-  
14 led organization, yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, I think the  
16 crowd behind you wholeheartedly disagrees. I think  
17 with that, I'd like to turn it over to Council Member  
18 Hudson.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you, Chair.  
20 And apologies, this might be a little redundant. I've  
21 been in and out with other meetings. So, but I have  
22 HERRC in my district at 47 Hall Street, and I've  
23 heard from dozens of recently-arrived migrants and  
24 mutual aid workers that we work very closely with who  
25 support them to learn about the conditions at the

2 site, and they've told that there are little to no  
3 language support services for recently-arrived folks,  
4 specifically from Senegal and Mauritania among other  
5 countries who speak Wolof, as we've heard a lot about  
6 today. But they're unaware of services offered to  
7 migrants, everything from legal support to  
8 healthcare. I think the Public Advocate mentioned  
9 this earlier, but just when we were outside, there  
10 was a gentleman who was telling us nobody can get  
11 access to healthcare, and we told him anybody in New  
12 York City regardless of immigration status has access  
13 to healthcare. They were not aware of NYC Care and  
14 that program. So I'm curious to know just on that  
15 front, what are you doing to inform people of the  
16 resources that they do have available to them  
17 regardless of immigration status, and in what  
18 languages is that being provided to them in? We've  
19 also heard or seen reporting that's shown that West  
20 African migrants in other boroughs have missed calls  
21 for showers because announcements are only made in  
22 English and in Spanish. And so I'm curious-- I'm just  
23 going to list out my three questions and then you all  
24 can run through them. So I've already asked my first  
25 one. What services does the City currently offer

2 from migrants that are offered in West African  
3 dialects, including Wolof? How many Wolof speakers  
4 does the City employ? And if possible you could  
5 break it down by agency, that would be great. And  
6 then my last question is does the City have programs  
7 to recruit and pay local residents with expertise in  
8 these languages and cultures to liaise with migrants  
9 in government agencies? And if not, are you  
10 exploring said programs or working with existing CBOs  
11 who have them?

12 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Thank you for all of  
13 that. So, I would ask for the English and Spanish,  
14 the place where they're not getting showers because  
15 it's only being told in English and Spanish, if you  
16 can let me know what shelter that is.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We're happy to  
19 follow up, because--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: [interposing] it  
21 was from reporting, so I'll make sure I get the  
22 article--

23 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: [interposing] Yeah,  
24 yeah, yeah.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: from my team and  
3 let you know.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: That would be really  
5 helpful. So, H+H runs the 47 Hall Street, as you  
6 know. Everybody's supposed to be told about what  
7 kind of resources there are available. That's part  
8 of the plan and what we intend with case management.  
9 I will take it back. I will talk to the team about  
10 if folks are not understanding the resources that  
11 they have available. Again, Health + Hospitals runs  
12 Health + Hospitals, so there should be direct  
13 linkages of healthcare, and so that should never be  
14 an issue.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right.

16 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So happy to sort of  
17 take those concerns back and talk to them and sort of  
18 get back on those.

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just to add, at the  
20 arrival center at the Roosevelt Hotel, H+H manages  
21 that site. So folks are informed of how they can  
22 connect with NYC Cares and other programs in support  
23 of their healthcare needs. I know that NYC Cares also  
24 partners with CBOs to conduct some of this outreach.  
25 And of course it's worth mentioning that early on in

2 this situation when we were welcoming buses at Port  
3 Authority, we noticed that a lot of people were  
4 arriving with medical conditions that had been  
5 unaddressed, and a lot of needs, which is partly the  
6 reason why we partner up early on with H+H to help us  
7 manage the situation. And you know, we-- our Health  
8 + Hospitals system has been actively engaged in these  
9 efforts from the beginning.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I hear that and I  
11 appreciate that for what it's worth at the point of  
12 intake or the point when folks are initially  
13 arriving, but I think the experience that a lot of  
14 folks are having, being, you know, essentially  
15 evicted after 30 days, moving from place to place,  
16 you encounter many different things. You might get  
17 sick throughout your stay here. So other than that  
18 first point of contact, you know, I guess the charge  
19 for you all is to ensure that people are being  
20 informed of, you know, those resources and that they  
21 can access healthcare and where specifically they  
22 should be able to access that healthcare. And I  
23 think also the issue is language access, right? So  
24 if they're not being told this information in the

2 dialects that they speak, you know, then it's not  
3 really getting to them. Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, absolutely.  
5 You know, even for long-term migrants, you know,  
6 knowing about NYC Cares and registering for it has  
7 been a challenge. Their numbers have grown over the  
8 years, and communications staff went over to H+H, to  
9 NYC Cares to direct their communications efforts, and  
10 so we're looking to improve the way that we connect  
11 with migrants in this way.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thanks.  
13 And do you know how many Wolof speakers the City  
14 employs?

15 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We'd have to get  
16 back to you on exact numbers.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, and I'd  
18 love to know the breakdown by agency as well. And  
19 then just the last question about recruiting and  
20 paying local residents with expertise in the  
21 languages and cultures, do you do that, and if not,  
22 are you exploring ways that you might be able to  
23 leverage the skillset?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We don't have a  
25 specific program, although we are piloting the Peer

2 Navigator program and we're learning from it, as I  
3 mentioned earlier. But it is something that we're  
4 actively exploring. We're having conversations with  
5 language access cooperatives. ACT manages a very  
6 successful one, and you know, we're looking at all  
7 different models to increase our language capacity.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Great. Thank you  
9 so much.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: I just  
11 wanted to also add, as I think you were out of the  
12 room when I was speaking to the community engagement  
13 piece of our work as well. As the person that is  
14 advising the Mayor on the African community, we're  
15 also taking it upon ourselves to go out to the  
16 community and speak with them about the resources  
17 that are available through different engagements, and  
18 we also talk to a lot of the community leaders as  
19 well to ensure that they are aware of the services  
20 and they're able to pass on the message. So I think  
21 that from that perspective as the person that does  
22 that work, the commitment is very clear. I go out to  
23 the HERRCs. I speak some of these dialects, and I  
24 also just want to state that it's not just going to

2 be Wolof. We have the Fulanese [sic]. We have Susu  
3 which is my native language.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: So, we  
6 really are trying to support the work that is being  
7 done by Molly and by Manny by also going out there  
8 and doing more community engagement. So we'd love to  
9 work with you if you're interested in having us in  
10 your district to do that work.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Absolutely.

12 Would love to partner in that. Yeah, and I really  
13 just using Wolof as one example, but I know even just  
14 outside earlier we had 16 or more different languages  
15 spoken. So, if you want to get me statistics for  
16 city employees who speak all West African languages,  
17 I would take that broken down by agency.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I will see what we  
19 can get.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Thank you  
21 so much. Thanks Chairs.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: It certainly seems  
23 like-- I think you all believe in language  
24 cooperatives and funding community members to provide  
25 the support that we can't seem to be doing in-house.

2 So I'm looking forward to receiving and hearing the  
3 Administration's full support in funding for language  
4 cooperatives coming up. So, I guess I'd like  
5 recognize Council Member and like to call on Council  
6 Member Cabán.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, and  
8 thank you, Chair Avilés. Thank you to the panel for  
9 being here. Before I ask my question, I just want to  
10 take a moment to acknowledge some of the folks that  
11 are doing this work in my neighborhood. I see Adama  
12 Bah out in the audience who leads an organization  
13 that has been helping newly-arrived North African  
14 folks, because we have a very large North African  
15 community in Astoria, and so folks are flocking to  
16 our neighborhood to find that trust and that support  
17 and the cultural competency. I want to just quickly  
18 say thank you to Molica [sp?] who is also doing that  
19 work. Thank you so, so much. Y'all are picking up  
20 where we as government are clearly failing. I see  
21 the sort of genuine efforts for the Administration to  
22 go out and do the right thing, but I will say that at  
23 least from hearing from the leaders in our community,  
24 my community who are doing this work, it's as though  
25 at times the Administration is more of a barrier or a

2 block to folks who have been like really successfully  
3 serving newly-arrived asylum-seekers and neighbors in  
4 a meaningful way, and so would love just to see just  
5 some better collaboration and support for these folks  
6 there. I want to talk a little bit about sort of  
7 what the potential and the outcomes could and should  
8 be, not just short and mid-term, but long-term.

9 According to the CBO, the Congressional Budget  
10 Office, the economy is set to grow by \$7 trillion  
11 over the next decades than it would without the  
12 recent influx of newly-arrived asylum-seekers and  
13 migrants, and while that's a nationwide figure, when  
14 you look at New York City, that exact influx, that  
15 exact migration has made New York City the economic  
16 powerhouse that it has been across the country and  
17 across the world. And so seeing all of our neighbors  
18 here as the key to strengthening our economy, the key  
19 to strengthening our communities just short and long-  
20 term I think is really, really important, and you  
21 mentioned and acknowledged that being able to find  
22 gainful employment as being a huge thing. Now, I  
23 know this program lives under ACS, but NYC Promise,  
24 right, a really incredible program, first of its kind  
25 in the nation that we have funded that gives

2 childcare to undocumented folks. When we think about  
3 the ability for people to be able to go to job  
4 interviews, to get to work, to maintain a job, to go  
5 to appointments, social service appointments. You  
6 know, we've seen lot in our communities of parent and  
7 caregivers with small children trying to make the  
8 little bit of money that they can on a day-to-day  
9 basis. So I'd like to know if it's a priority of  
10 MOIA, if it's a priority of y'all to internally to  
11 really push for the increase in funding for NYC  
12 Promise, because I think that that is one of the most  
13 powerful upstream investments that we could make to  
14 support some of our newly-arrived neighbors.

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Council  
16 Member, for your words and your question. You're  
17 absolutely right. All immigrants have-- all New  
18 Yorkers have always benefited from the arrival of  
19 immigrants to our city, and that is a fact and I hope  
20 everyone understands that this is good for us in the  
21 long-run, and we want to make sure that. I think  
22 we're also working on what you mentioned, that  
23 children selling candies in the street and migrants  
24 trying to survive in our city, and so ACS consulted  
25 with us to establish Promise NYC. We've been working

2 closely with them. We know they have partnered with  
3 DSS and other agencies to look closely at what can be  
4 done with this issue in a way that also recognizes  
5 what people are facing and not be punitive. We've  
6 had conversations with the Ecuadorian Counsel for  
7 instance that have highlighted this issue as having  
8 been a flashpoint in other countries, where they  
9 literally went and took children away, and we do not  
10 want to get to that point, because we recognize--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: [interposing] But  
12 the current allocation, just to-- obviously, is just  
13 not scaled to the size of the need. We're a long  
14 ways from that. I think at its current funding we're  
15 able to fund childcare for about 660 families, right,  
16 under that program, and so my question is as we are  
17 in just the like heart of the budget process, how  
18 much of a priority is that investment in what we  
19 should see in the Executive Budget?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Conversations about  
21 the budget are still ongoing and we'll see, you know,  
22 if those funds are increased and what we can do as  
23 MOIA to help inform how Promise NYC grows.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: But will you  
25 advocate for it to grow?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'm not in the  
3 position to say that, but you know, once we know how  
4 much funding will be allocated, we'll be able to step  
5 in and support, and as we've done in the past, make  
6 sure that ACS and other agencies have the information  
7 they need to support the community.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: May I ask one more  
9 question, Chair?

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Make it quick,  
11 because we have a--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: [interposing]  
13 Okay. Will you at least con-- will you-- do at least  
14 agree with the fact that making childcare more  
15 accessible for our newly-arrived neighbors would make  
16 a difference for the safety, the economy, the health  
17 of the city?

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, from the  
19 beginning we've been strong advocates, you know, in  
20 that respect. We deeply care about the children and  
21 the families that are arriving. As a child migrant  
22 myself, you know, this is very important for me to  
23 say.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you. Thank  
25 you for taking my questions. Thank you for indulging

2 me. You mentioned that, you know, we need the  
3 political will to do the right thing. It's not just  
4 true of the Federal Government. I think it's true of  
5 the City as well. It's not unique to them. So, I  
6 hope that that is prioritized. Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you,  
8 Council Member. Council Member Narcisse?

9 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Good afternoon  
10 again and thank you for being here. Thank you for  
11 being a partner. We have seen you in the community,  
12 and this is a difficult moment for all of us, and  
13 with all my brothers and sisters in the back, and all  
14 we hearing over and over is about language access.  
15 For me, it's what languages are available to  
16 communicate in person from African and Caribbean  
17 immigrants newcomers? You have any-- how many you  
18 have?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Chair  
20 Narcisse, just to clarify, at the arrival center or--

21 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: [interposing] Yeah,  
22 what languages are available right now to communicate  
23 that you know of, that you're providing in-person for  
24 African and Caribbean immigrant newcomers? They're  
25 probably with our organization. What language-- how

2 many languages that we have? What languages are  
3 there?

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, the languages  
5 that we currently-- that are the primary preferred  
6 languages of people in care is-- and this is not  
7 necessarily indicative of the newly-arrived migrants  
8 in New York City, this is just the amount of folks in  
9 our shelter system. So, the first primary language is  
10 Spanish; 76 percent of the people in our care speak  
11 that. Then French, nine percent. Wolof is three  
12 percent. English is three percent. Russian is two  
13 percent. Arabic is two percent, and Fulani is one  
14 percent, and Chinese is one percent.

15 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: One of the things  
16 that I'm hearing quite often is the organization that  
17 providing the services, how those contracts are  
18 going. Because the small orgs from my understanding  
19 is having a tough time. You know, they want to  
20 provide the services, but how you doing with those  
21 contracts? Are they signed? Are they rolling for  
22 the services to continue?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: With the asylum-  
24 seeker specific contracts--

2 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: [interposing] Yeah,  
3 the new imitative that we start the provider  
4 services. Are the contracts are being signed,  
5 because some of them saying that they providing  
6 services, but yet they have no flow of anything  
7 going.

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: For the  
9 asylum-seeker legal assistance network, many of those  
10 contracts were already existing Action NYC contracts  
11 that were expanded to incorporate additional funding  
12 which is in place. Some of our other contracts such  
13 as under the Haitian Response Initiative has seen a  
14 little bit longer of a delay because they're managed  
15 in a different structure. But we're actively working  
16 to get those finalized and we're actively collecting  
17 invoices to pay under those.

18 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Please do so,  
19 because if they're providing services and they're not  
20 getting the finance the services, you know that is  
21 going to be limited, right? How many Haitian  
22 immigrants have received case management and social  
23 services through the MOIA Haitian Response  
24 Initiative? How many were through direct services,  
25 and how many were through referrals?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you,  
3 Council Member. For the life of the program from  
4 Fiscal Year 22 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, so half of  
5 Fiscal 24, 3,969 people received case management  
6 services and social services under the Haitian  
7 Response Initiative. In-house services provided  
8 directly by the CBOs funded from those programs were  
9 provided in 7,413 instances, and external service  
10 referrals were provided in 9,974 instances, and those  
11 numbers are higher than the total number of people  
12 getting the initial screening, because most of the  
13 times people need more than one service.

14 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: How many Haitian  
15 immigrants receive assistance for the last fiscal  
16 year?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: In Fiscal  
18 23, 1,447 individuals received the initial intake,  
19 and 6,781 were connected to services.

20 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Okay. Has MOIA  
21 heard any feedback from the organization under this  
22 initiative about the growing demand for their  
23 services and having to meet this demand? If so, how  
24 has MOIA responded to that feedback?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: We've  
3 absolutely heard the feedback. We meet with our  
4 Haitian Response Initiative community partners  
5 monthly, and we continue to hear that they're seeing  
6 double the number of individuals seeking assistance  
7 that they had seen previously. These are made up of  
8 some folks who have come through the CHNV program  
9 through a sponsor. It's a federal program  
10 established by the Biden Administration and others  
11 that are arriving through the US Southwest border, as  
12 many other migrants are. And so we continue to work  
13 to support our CBO partners, make sure that they have  
14 the information and resources they need to do the  
15 work, but we are internally discussing, you know, the  
16 increase in need and what that means.

17 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: One other thing I  
18 want to highlight. I think the Speaker spoke about  
19 it. What are we doing in term of to push federal and  
20 state to make sure-- because we have a bunch of  
21 bodies that ready-- I mean, they're ready, they're  
22 willing to work. So the workshop, I'm hearing again,  
23 they're not being done in the languages that make it  
24 easy, whatever that we're providing. Coming back  
25 again, language access. So we have to be mindful of

2 the people that we serving that willing and ready,  
3 because when I'm looking at a bunch of young body in  
4 New York City, we need people to work. We don't  
5 want-- and they said it in their own ways, that they  
6 don't come here to wait for a handout, right? So  
7 what are we doing to push, continue pushing? I want  
8 to reiterate that again, to push, and we hear about  
9 TPS. We hear about the workforce training. We hear  
10 about the language access. And they want their  
11 paper, of course, to work, and TPS come with that as  
12 well. So I want to say thank you for that. We've  
13 been joined by CM Brewer. One second I will get to  
14 your question. How-- I mean, how much funding is  
15 going to language access programs from your end? And  
16 how much funding is for in-person interpretation, and  
17 how much funding is going to telephonic  
18 interpretation services?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'll let Tom answer  
20 that question. He has the data in front of him.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: So,  
22 generally, you know, MOIA and New York City are proud  
23 at the multitude of languages spoken here. It really  
24 is amazing, and it's an incredibly enriching fact and  
25 one of the reasons why I love being a New Yorker.

2 So, MOIA has a small budget for language access.  
3 Each agency has their own.

4 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Which you have.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Yeah, and  
6 MOIA helps to advise. In Fiscal Year 25, MOIA will  
7 oversee approximately \$534,000 in language access  
8 funds. This is broken up in a few different buckets.  
9 In-person interpretation, about \$100,000 from the  
10 MOIA budget, and there is an additional amount from  
11 the Office of Asylum-seeker Operations funded by the  
12 State which I used at the asylum application help  
13 center. In telephonic interpretation \$181,381 from  
14 the MOIA budget, and an additional \$286,566 from the  
15 OASO budget. Again, only being used at the help  
16 center. And then finally, there is some funding for  
17 document translation that is used to support other  
18 mayoral offices and other translation needs for  
19 community efforts.

20 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: For asylum-seekers  
21 that receive telephonic interpretation, are there  
22 additional checks to ensure that the information on  
23 their application, if they're doing a process, is  
24 accurate? Do you have any follow-up to make sure?

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah, I mean, we  
3 have at least in our asylum application help center  
4 our process is pretty rigorous. There's many  
5 different layers of control on the application.  
6 There's a supervisor and someone else who actually  
7 looks at the applications and make sure that they're  
8 okay before they're sent on and filed.

9 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: The reason I ask  
10 that question, because I'm hearing the Black  
11 migrants, their papers for asylum-seeker is rejected  
12 more, more often than the others. so that's the  
13 reason I'm asking that question, because what  
14 happened the translation is not being done properly,  
15 so by the time they get a second layer person to  
16 translation, they're not saying the same thing. It's  
17 not-- there's no continuity in what they're saying.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: And we're happy to  
19 look into that at our sites. We have a pretty good  
20 relationship with DOJ and others who are processing  
21 our applications. Obviously, people haven't gotten  
22 asylum yet, but at least getting them to the point  
23 where they can get to the next process of getting  
24 work permits. We've had a pretty good success rate,  
25 but we're happy to look into any concerns.

2 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you. We  
3 were informed that management of HERRC is shifting  
4 from H+H to OASO. When will this transition take  
5 effect? What responsibilities have been transferred  
6 from H+H, do you know, to OASO at this time? And why  
7 is this shift-- I mean, this shift taking place, do  
8 you know?

9 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, that is news to  
10 me. We are not taking over currently H+H sites. We  
11 are focused on consolidation across the system and  
12 consistency. I think it might have been mixed up with  
13 DHS taking over a couple of H+H sites, which did  
14 happen and has happened, and that was really to focus  
15 to make sure that we were getting nonprofits  
16 involved, and that it was part of our cost-saving  
17 measures as part of our PEG.

18 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Now, I have to ask  
19 a couple of questions, two questions for my colleague  
20 Pierina since we don't have decorum here. She wanted  
21 to thank Adama, GYO, MCN for their advocacy in the  
22 Bronx. Have this organization have faced barriers to  
23 providing language access do you know?

24 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Sorry, which  
25 organization?

2 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: GYO, MCN, and  
3 Adama, do you know? Afrikana.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: [inaudible] So, if  
5 the question is if they have--

6 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: [interposing] Do  
7 you-- yeah.

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: If they have-- I  
9 mean, I think Adama mentioned while she was talking  
10 here that there's some languages that people are  
11 speaking that she didn't even know about. So, I can't  
12 speak for other organizations. I can only speak for  
13 mine, but I think we're all learning as people come  
14 in.

15 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: So, they-- because  
16 what she's saying that during the Twin Towers some  
17 organization provide language access, they were not  
18 able to provide the services, as well. So, the Twin-  
19 - okay. Second question, have organizations been  
20 provided contractual opportunities to provide  
21 language access or any other services?

22 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yes, and we're  
23 really excited because we're working with Robin Hood  
24 and New York Community Trust to launch an opportunity  
25 for smaller organizations that have traditionally the

2 burden of paperwork and the burden of the City's  
3 regulations made it harder for them to contract with  
4 us, and so we're real excited about that opportunity,  
5 and that's going to be-- that's through philanthropy  
6 which will allow it to be much more flexible funding,  
7 so that's something that's coming soon. And then, I  
8 don't know if you want to--

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] Yeah,  
10 no, I think it's an important subject. I think,  
11 becoming a vendor with the City is quite onerous as  
12 we've mentioned before, so you know, supporting  
13 organizations or groups that intend to become vendors  
14 is important. We're working closely with the Mayor's  
15 Office of Contracts to do that where folks to sign up  
16 to Passport and get everything in order so they can  
17 be able to do that. So our work with philanthropy is  
18 very critical because they're able to support  
19 organizations that want to establish that. Also  
20 important to mention here, and this is something that  
21 we look at very closely at MOIA, that not everyone  
22 can become an interpreter or a translator just  
23 because you speak the language. You know, they have  
24 to go through some type of training which is why ACT  
25 [sic] worker cooperative model, it's quite

2 interesting, and others who are trying to do this as  
3 well. Partnering with institutions that can provide  
4 that added training and certification is important,  
5 but that all takes time. We're trying to figure out  
6 with the different models out there that we work with  
7 to get to a point where we can scale this to serve  
8 the tens of thousands of people that have arrived.  
9 But in the meantime, you know, my team has been  
10 deployed a number of times, again as I mentioned  
11 earlier, to different sites across the system and  
12 also to organizations, most recently to Afrikana to  
13 add some more capacity and some support. But again,  
14 the issue is scaling, right, which is why we continue  
15 to rely on contractors.

16 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you.

17 [speaking French]

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Before we turn it  
19 over to Council Member Brewer, I just want to make  
20 sure I heard this correctly. So, OASO and MOIA's  
21 language access budget combined is \$534,000?

22 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we've said many  
23 times we don't really have a budget. We only have  
24 our staff budget--

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Okay,  
3 so it's the staff line.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: It's also contracts  
5 through each agency. Each of the agencies have their  
6 own contracts for language access.

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, we stepped in  
8 to support with our language access contracts.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it.

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And have been  
11 working closely with OASO to provide, you know, the  
12 ability to.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, is MOIA looking  
14 at the City's capacity-- so, like, does MOIA know  
15 what our city's contract is with language access that  
16 we've heard over and over again does not work and  
17 does not serve our purpose. Do we know what the  
18 scale of that contract is, and do we know-- do we  
19 know how many city agencies are actually using that  
20 as their primary source of interpretation?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, currently our  
22 major language line city master contract-- I don't  
23 lose anyone, because the procurement stuff is all  
24 over the-- quite complex. So, that was being held by  
25 DCAS. That has expired and that would be

2 traditionally what the different offices would tap  
3 into. Now, each agency utilizes their own funding to  
4 contract with language line and other language  
5 services.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. I will turn  
7 it over to the master of contracts, Council Member  
8 Brewer.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I don't know  
10 about that, but thank you very much. I've been  
11 listening and I've been at another hearing, I'm  
12 sorry. So, I went to the opening of ACT in Harlem. I  
13 know you mentioned that as one of your co-ops. Are  
14 they able to scale-up, because they obviously have a  
15 lot of languages? Are you contracting with them?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're currently not  
17 contract with the language cooperative, but like I  
18 said, they have a great model. They're growing.  
19 They're scaling, my understanding, and we've recently  
20 reached out to them to, you know, connect about  
21 opportunities, again, through philanthropy who's able  
22 to support-- step in and support. We're looking at  
23 different models and other entities, let's say, that  
24 are able to provide these, these types of community-  
25 rooted language access services.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So, I  
3 mean, I've been talking to Ruth Messenger [sp?] all  
4 the time and she talks to you all the time. And so  
5 the-- Robin Hood is trying, but they're slower than  
6 molasses. So what are you doing to help them move  
7 faster in terms of getting-- they need to get other  
8 supports, apparently, in order to get their funding  
9 to be released, even though they think they have more  
10 money than God. So what are you doing to help them  
11 move their funding for these smaller organizations?  
12 Like, for Adama and for [inaudible] and everybody  
13 else?

14 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we're constantly  
15 working with them. We have--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I  
17 don't know what that-- translate, translate.

18 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I mean, that's what  
19 we can say. We're working with them at all times to  
20 see if there's other philanthropy--

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] You  
22 can say we're getting closer, closer than ever, and  
23 so we-- director and Schaeffer and I recently met  
24 with the philanthropies. So it's Robin Hood and New  
25 York Community Trust--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I  
3 know.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: and a coalition--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I have the whole  
6 list.

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: and so yes, and I  
8 spoke at this meeting about the importance of the  
9 work that the community root organizations are doing  
10 and how important it is, you know, to look at what  
11 they're doing.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I mean,  
13 should ask others to push, but [inaudible]. The  
14 faith-based-- I know you've probable talked about it  
15 earlier. That's also slower than molasses. You have  
16 50 possibilities, 200 applications, and I don't know,  
17 six people who are actually in overnight. What's  
18 with this? I mean, you have-- can we skip the-- I  
19 mean, the Fire Department, I understand. They're  
20 concerned. We have safety. We had overnights for  
21 the last 30 years, and nobody got-- no fires, no  
22 problems, no safety, and the mosques are swamped.  
23 What are we doing to help the mosques in particular?  
24 Maybe you discussed this earlier, I'm sorry I was  
25 across the street.

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, as you know,  
3 safety is utmost priority--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I  
5 know, but enough with the safety

6 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We're trying to be  
7 as creative as possible. We've relaxed the  
8 restrictions. We've worked with FDNY and DOB. We  
9 need to make sure that people in non-traditional  
10 spaces are safe. That is the bottom line. So we're  
11 working as creatively as possible. If you have ideas  
12 on where you want us to focus our creative efforts,  
13 we're happy to look into that, but that's sort of why  
14 it's moving so slowly, because we need to-- it is  
15 under a regulatory screen that--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] And  
17 while you're talking about that, don't close Main  
18 Chan's [sic]. That's the-- I understand that's DSS.  
19 That's not you. But that would help to alleviate  
20 some of these problems, because there are a lot of  
21 African immigrants who are using Main Chan's \$3.7  
22 million dollars. Please do not close it. Is  
23 somebody in touch with the best Chief in the whole  
24 city, Chief Obe who's head of training who speaks all  
25 the dialects? Chief Obe, first woman, African woman

2 to be a Chief in the City of New York. She speaks  
3 all the dialects, every single one of them. Are you  
4 in touch with her?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: I'm not, but  
6 she sounds very impressive. Can you introduce us?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I will.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: She works for the  
10 New York City Police Department, by the way, and  
11 she's head of training, sort of a high job. I'd be  
12 glad to introduce you.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And then just  
15 finally, the question of how you are supporting  
16 people getting jobs. I know that it's been discussed  
17 endlessly, but I guess my feeling like everybody  
18 else, we have lost 500,000 New Yorkers. If we work  
19 hard with the individuals that you are supporting, we  
20 could have another 500,000, and that helps us with  
21 our population. I assume you're not checking where  
22 people are going. I happen to know the family  
23 community better. Nobody has any idea if they're  
24 going to Idaho, Texas, Queens, or Newark. It's the

2 same situation for the singles in the African  
3 community who have no idea where they're going.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we only know if  
5 someone tells us where they're going, but ultimately,  
6 just like any New Yorker who leaves the traditional  
7 homeless shelter system, we don't track where people  
8 are going when they join community, but we are very,  
9 very focused on workforce and we're very, very  
10 focused on both helping people get the paperwork that  
11 they need together to get to the point where they can  
12 work, and then also helping them connect to good jobs  
13 through SBS, through Department of Labor. Obviously,  
14 there's a lot of work to do there, but that is  
15 something we're very, very focused on.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I will  
17 leave that at that. Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council  
19 Member. We understand that Commissioner you have a  
20 hard stop at two. I suspect your colleague will stay  
21 or is the whole team-- I know you have to go. I've  
22 received all the text messages. I want to--

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] thank  
24 you.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You know, I know you  
3 have to go. We have Council Member Rita Joseph. I  
4 just want to ask one quick question before you go.  
5 How do each of you address equity in this work? And  
6 we're seeing disparities, the same disparities this  
7 country sees over and over and over and over again.  
8 So how are not mimicking the same systemic racism  
9 embedded in our policies? How do you as the two of  
10 the agencies address these issues? And also, how are  
11 you pushing other agencies to do it? I know you're  
12 advisory.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's an important  
14 question. Thank you for asking it. I think, you  
15 know, I always stress the importance at MOIA and  
16 colleagues in other offices and agencies being  
17 community rooted, you know, despite sometimes, you  
18 know, meeting with advocates and hearing a lot from  
19 them let's say. We need to continue to sustain  
20 conversation with them visiting their spaces,  
21 neighborhoods, engaging in these conversations, to  
22 learn and understand what are the challenges, and  
23 they're always evolving, and figuring out how to be  
24 as flexible and nimble as possible give in all the  
25 constraints we face here in city government, whether

2 it's, you know, regulation or budgetary. We need to  
3 figure out how to best support those groups on the  
4 ground that are telling us what they need to see, the  
5 changes that they need to see, and you know, I always  
6 stress that in our work.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, Commissioner, I  
8 thank you, and I know you're going to jump in,  
9 Director, but the Commissioner has to go. So I just  
10 want to follow up. Can you give us practical  
11 examples of how you have addressed the structural  
12 racism that you are seeing playing out? Today, we  
13 have seen it where there's disparities. What has  
14 you-- what has MOIA done structurally to being to  
15 address this? I know this a long-time piece of work,  
16 so no expectation to solve it, but what practically?  
17 Give us two examples of actual tangible addressing  
18 structural issues.

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, as you know,  
20 so much of our work happens through our nonprofit  
21 partners, and when I say let's be in rooted in  
22 community I often say, because then that influences  
23 how we think about our work and the decisions that we  
24 made, whether it's, you know, developing a program or  
25 developing a contract, an RFP, and so on. So bringing

2 back that information, that learning, to the work is  
3 important whether you're outreach staffer or not. We  
4 need to be close to the community. So, we made  
5 significant changes, and again, not to say that this  
6 is going to address, you know, the issues you've  
7 mentioned, but we've made structural changes to our  
8 We Speak program, our English language learning  
9 program. It had historically been, let's say,  
10 developed for intermediate, high intermediate  
11 students, and we made-- in the recent-- in the last  
12 year, significant changes so that it is better suited  
13 for beginner level students in all the curriculum  
14 that was developed used for those newly arrived  
15 immigrant communities and closer to their needs. And  
16 we recently relaunched it. We announced the  
17 partnership with the New York City public libraries  
18 and CBOs to pilot this program. Again, this was  
19 significant because We Speak is an Emmy award-winning  
20 program, you know, looks great, but I didn't think  
21 and others didn't think it was meeting the challenge--  
22 -

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing]

24 Commissioner, has that shift impacted Black migrants?  
25 Has it positively impacted Black migrants?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We just rolled it  
3 out and--

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Do we  
5 have any evidence of that?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We just rolled it  
7 out. You know, we're contracted-- for this reason,  
8 we've contracted with CBOs and the New York City  
9 public library systems so that these programs or  
10 these classes can be executed across New York City,  
11 especially in highly-dense immigrant communities.  
12 We're looking to study the impact of this pilot  
13 program, and hopefully continue it and really  
14 understand what this is going to do for the  
15 community.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,  
17 Commissioner.

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I know that was a  
19 long answer, but this is what we're looking--

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] No,  
21 we're going to keep hammering at this. we want to  
22 see the-- we want to see practically what is actually  
23 being done to address structural racism, because we  
24 are seeing the disparities perpetuate across the  
25 board, and we keep hearing it's hard, it's complex,

2 we're trying, we don't have enough, and I appreciate  
3 those efforts without question, 100 percent to the  
4 whole team. But you know, we are here to hold  
5 standard of dignity for everyone regardless and we  
6 are still seeing anti-blackness permeate, and so  
7 we're going to keep pushing this until we see  
8 everyone receive full dignity no matter-- not-- and I  
9 know you're partners in this work. I'd like to  
10 recognize Council Member Joseph. Council Member?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That's me. Thank  
12 you. Good afternoon. I have a couple of questions  
13 around TPS. For example, Cameroon, Ethiopia,  
14 Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, of those countries,  
15 how many of that population are here and how many  
16 have been receiving the legal services? Because I  
17 noticed today three things that were highlighted,  
18 workforce development, mental health, and legal  
19 services. How are you supporting the African  
20 communities that are qualified for TPS with support  
21 in getting their work permit, and especially having  
22 30-day shelter rules in place, how is that impacting  
23 them in getting their paperwork on time?

24 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we have people  
25 from 45 different African countries in our shelter

2 system right now. The majority of those folks are  
3 not from the countries that you mentioned. The  
4 majority of folks from African countries are Senegal,  
5 Mauritania, Guinea, and those are our top three.  
6 When-- our legal clinic is available to everyone in  
7 our shelter system depending on capacity. So we are  
8 appointment-based, right? But anybody who comes in  
9 and is part of those groups that would be eligible  
10 for TPS, we're immediately able to connect them and  
11 give them--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing] How  
13 do you identify them? How do you know?

14 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Because they come in  
15 and then we do a-- like, we do a specific assessment  
16 of what their needs are. The other thing is that in  
17 intake, we start by doing assessments of the pathway  
18 that someone came in on, their nationality, and we  
19 can also identify them that way. And then during  
20 case management we can also refer people when we have  
21 open appointments. So we're trying to center their  
22 legal pathway as a way of helping people get through  
23 these processes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is mental health  
25 included in that?

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we have-- as part  
3 of shelters, we have mental health. And as part of  
4 the intake, we do a behavioral health screening at  
5 the front door.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: But we notice  
7 that language has been the barrier. How is that  
8 service being delivered if language is the barrier?

9 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: so, in our sites, we  
10 do have Language Line and we have--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]  
12 Language lines don't work.

13 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: I understand, but  
14 I'm also saying that we do--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]  
16 Languages have nuances, right?

17 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: We're trying to get  
18 more bilingual--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]  
20 Languages have nuances, right? So, are these nuances  
21 being met? If the person speaks Wolof, for example,  
22 there are nuances in that translation that must be in  
23 place in order for the proper translation to take  
24 place, right?

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Absolutely, and so  
3 what we're doing is trying to get as many bilingual  
4 staff as we can for all of our positions so that we  
5 can better meet people's needs on all sides of this  
6 in every service that we give. We're not perfect,  
7 obviously. We're not even--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing] Not  
9 even close.

10 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: But we are-- we do  
11 at least as the basic, we have Language Line, and  
12 then we also have bilingual staff, and on top of that  
13 we work with MOIA to bring in other translations if  
14 needed.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: In-person would be  
16 helpful. Language lines don't work, because we deal  
17 with it on a hospital level, and all of that, and in  
18 schools. It doesn't work. We have to bring in folks  
19 to do the translation at the moment, right? So, I  
20 have another question for you. So when you do  
21 identify those that may qualify for TPS in those  
22 countries that I mentioned, how are you-- do you  
23 assign them? Do you connect them with work? What are  
24 you doing for next steps in term of the work permit,  
25 job placement, and even in terms of education? Is

2 there any partnership with D79 to make sure they know  
3 that there are transfer school available for  
4 students, or the 16-- 16 to 21. Are these services  
5 being done? Walk me through that, please.

6 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Yeah, and just also,  
7 one change is that we just finished calling all  
8 eligible Ethiopians for TPS that were in our shelter  
9 system. So whenever we get an update on the federal  
10 policies, we immediately call everyone.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay.

12 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we-- there is--  
13 when people apply for work, we then refer them to SBS  
14 or the Department of Labor to go through either the  
15 Workforce One centers or the Department of Labor  
16 infrastructure to then be able to help people do  
17 whatever services that they have. So sometimes they  
18 have ESL. Sometimes they have resume building  
19 workshops, and then connect them to the jobs that  
20 they have in their databases. We're also piloting  
21 other programs. We work with the state on a  
22 restaurant workforce development program. We want to  
23 build out more workforce development. We're at  
24 large. We're doing-- we're doing it with nonprofits  
25 and sort of in a patchwork way, and so we're trying

2 to figure out how to do it more at-large. And then I  
3 think that I forgot that last question.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You forgot, okay.  
5 Earlier Commissioner, you spoke about the Haitian  
6 Response Initiative. You said the funding was \$5  
7 million. Can you give me a breakdown as to how many-  
8 - the organizations that you allocated and how much  
9 was allocated to each of these groups?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you,  
11 Council Member Joseph. The Haitian Response  
12 Initiative has received nearly \$5 million in funding  
13 over the course of its life, so since Fiscal 22.  
14 Annually, it's funded at approximately \$1.65 million.  
15 That breaks down to \$100,000 for each of the seven  
16 community-based organizations.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Can you name them  
18 for me?

19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Of course,  
20 CWAHA, Caribbean Women's Health Association, Diaspora  
21 Community Services, Flamboyant [sic], Haitian American  
22 Community Coalition, Haitian Americans United for  
23 Progress, Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, Life of  
24 Hope.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And have these  
3 contracts been registered? Because we're getting  
4 word that some of these contracts have not been  
5 registered.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Since--  
7 they fall under the Research Foundation for the City  
8 University of New York. So they're not registered by  
9 the Comptroller, per say. However, we are proceeding  
10 with finalization and payout of those contracts.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And what is the  
12 timeline for that?

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Four to six  
14 weeks.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Four to six week  
16 as-- and services have to continue. You see the  
17 faces the services have to reach. My question was  
18 for D79, are they being referred? Students between  
19 16 to 21, are they being referred to D79?

20 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we have to talk  
21 to DYCD. We do have coordination with DOE, but we  
22 are working to make sure that our pathways are  
23 bigger. We're also looking at Job Corps and the  
24 federal program there to make sure that we're  
25 connecting eligible 18 to 24-year-olds.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: We have a lot of  
3 transfer students. You have older students that are  
4 coming into the system, and you also have a lot of  
5 SIFE students as well. How are you supporting that  
6 if you do come across the students with interrupted  
7 formal education?

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I'd have to get  
9 back to you on that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Please do. Thank  
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
13 Council Member. So, you know, for the record, I  
14 think it's important to know that we recognize  
15 immigrant providers, immigrant service providers.  
16 Particularly I was noting the four centers, right,  
17 and the ones that are in communities. Obviously, all  
18 these communities are on the front line. All these  
19 providers are on the front line providing services  
20 with dignity and respect, and we thank them for that  
21 work. I think it's important to note that we are--  
22 what we are trying to point out is that we need to  
23 scale up and meet the moment, and there's a  
24 particular community that is slipping through the  
25 cracks and that is not acceptable for any of us. So,

2 I hope people understand that this is not about  
3 pitting Latino providers against Black-led providers.  
4 We are all one people and we are all fighting for  
5 dignity, but what we see here is disparate treatment  
6 and what we see here is a need to continue to address  
7 the challenges in real ways. So I think for the  
8 record I want to say thank you to everyone who has  
9 been on the ground doing that work, whether you-- I  
10 mean, everybody-- Africa is everywhere. We are all  
11 from Africa in the end, but this is not to diminish  
12 one work or another, but to highlight where we need  
13 to do better. So it was important. I know  
14 Commissioner, you have to go to your next meeting.  
15 We appreciate the time. For the record, as you know,  
16 we will follow up because there are a bunch of  
17 questions that got waylaid, so that we will expect a  
18 response on the record for those questions we were  
19 not able to get at in this hearing today, but we  
20 thank you and your team for the time and responding.  
21 So, you can go.

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Okay, thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But Director, you  
24 can't.

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair  
3 Avilés.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Because I have a  
5 couple more questions for you.

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And I think we're  
8 going to -- thank you, Commissioner. I want to-- you  
9 got to do your thing. Just for OASO, I just have a  
10 couple of questions. So with the new plans to end  
11 the DocGo contract, is there any plans to push or  
12 redirect some of that funding for local organizations  
13 that do the work, like many in this room?

14 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: so, we're focusing  
15 on issuing a competitive RFP that anybody can apply  
16 for, so that is what we are focusing on right now.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, a competitive  
18 RFP, that's going to require people to be contracted  
19 vendors. Is there any ideas around getting one agency  
20 who could subcontract to the actual vendors on the  
21 ground that are providing the services that are  
22 unfunded at this point?

23 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I mean, I think  
24 we're talking about shelter services. So we're  
25 talking about the management of, you know, 28

2 shelters, and so we're really focused on figuring out  
3 how we can get more nonprofits or resettlement  
4 experts involved in that. And so that is what we're  
5 really focused on. And I will say that even with  
6 DocGo, what they did is they subbed to a lot of  
7 nonprofit, especially upstate. A lot of the actual  
8 service delivery was done by local nonprofits  
9 upstate. So, for instance, a case manager or like a  
10 resettlement nonprofit upstate that was doing the  
11 work. And so we are really focused on making sure  
12 we're, you know, not-- we're giving as-- being as  
13 flexible as possible when we issue this RFP so that  
14 many different types of organizations can apply and  
15 we can kind of identify what makes the most sense.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So what data  
17 is being collected at the point of entry into the  
18 system and how is the data being protected?

19 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we uphold the  
20 privacy here really intensely because we know how  
21 sensitive this information is, especially around  
22 immigration. We have a lot of data lawyers that are  
23 involved in every part of this. Lot, a lot of  
24 conversations, but we really do focus on trying to  
25 get the start of our case management. So, very basic

2 information that will help us understand and identify  
3 a pathway. So we really focus on how did you get  
4 here, so we have a better sense of people's journeys.  
5 What country are you from? What's your primary  
6 language? What are your very basic needs? And sort  
7 of where-- so that we can start identifying what we  
8 need to do move forward with you.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And so does OASO  
10 have a breakdown of how many asylum applications have  
11 been filed by country of origin?

12 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: WE have to get back  
13 to you on that.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And in terms  
15 of-- what legal screenings, referrals, and  
16 culturally-competent legal services are available to  
17 Black, LGBTQIA and immigrant New Yorkers are the  
18 asylum application help center?

19 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, at the asylum  
20 application help center, we really focused on asylum,  
21 TPS, work permits, and a small, small pilot of SIG  
22 [sic], and we give that to anybody who wants it, like  
23 who needs it. It's appointment-based, as you know,  
24 and it's really focused on folks from our shelters.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And so how is OASO  
3 ensuring that this community of asylum-seekers are  
4 putting forth the strongest possible claims?

5 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we-- again, we  
6 have in-person translators, not for every language,  
7 but we have in-person translators at our asylum  
8 application help center, and we work with every  
9 single individual and every single household to  
10 ensure that we can help them figure out the best  
11 claim for themselves. And we do a screening  
12 beforehand. So maybe asylum doesn't make sense for a  
13 specific household or an individual, and we make sure  
14 that asylum is the path that they want to go down  
15 before we even start that process.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And in terms of-- I  
17 think you just started to actually answer this  
18 question. In terms of-- what other forms of  
19 immigration relief does the help center screen for  
20 for noncitizens?

21 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, it's the four  
22 that I mentioned. We also do motions to change  
23 venue. We do very-- we do a couple of the other  
24 smaller filings, but majority of what we do is asylum  
25 TPS work permits.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, like all  
3 noncitizens navigating the asylum application  
4 process, as you know, Black immigrant newcomers could  
5 benefit from culturally-competent application  
6 assistance from legal reps with country condition  
7 expertise. Many Black immigrant newcomers from  
8 Mauritania have fled the threat of slavery and other  
9 significant human rights abuses. The governments of  
10 several African countries have targeted and  
11 criminalized LGBTQIA+ communities. to make the  
12 strongest case for their colorable [sic] asylum  
13 claims, asylum-seekers who have escaped government-  
14 led, government-sanctioned persecution in their  
15 countries and native origin need legal services and  
16 wrap-around support including long-term full legal  
17 representation. What is the Administration's plan to  
18 ensure that once an individual has submitted these  
19 asylum applications that they will have access to  
20 these services and support?

21 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: so, we're working  
22 with our colleagues on MOIA on what the long-term  
23 landscape for this. We've been really focused on  
24 what we can do on a high-volume way to make sure that  
25 we set every single person up for success as quickly

2 as possible, which is why we opened the asylum  
3 application help center. But I can defer to my  
4 colleague Tom if there's anything else you'd want to  
5 say. We're currently making those plans.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Is there a timeframe  
7 that we can expect the plan to be produced?

8 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: Not a specific  
9 timeframe. This is something we're actively working  
10 on. I don't know, Tom, if you have anything that you  
11 want to share about the work that MOIA's doing.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: I can  
13 share a bit about the asylum-seeker legal assistance  
14 network which has been funded in Fiscal 23 and 24  
15 which is a complement to the asylum application help  
16 center in that it's community-rooted. It funds  
17 nonprofits, including African Services Committee, the  
18 Pro Se Plus Project, and African Communities  
19 Together, Lutheran Social Services and others. And  
20 so what they're doing is training community-based  
21 organization staff who speak the languages of their  
22 clients and the people in their immediate  
23 neighborhoods to provide application support, mostly  
24 pro se, and certain critical cases, it gets  
25 escalated. And then cases are also referred to other

2 city contracts that provide full representation such  
3 as Immigrant Opportunities Initiative and others.  
4 Our OASO [sic] providers are also currently preparing  
5 country condition packets, which applicants can use  
6 to support their asylum applications by country. I'm  
7 beginning to listen them on their website. That's  
8 the Pro Se Plus Project doing that, and just recently  
9 held a training with members of ACT, staff members  
10 and others in the community to help begin to build  
11 the broader capacity of folks that speak the  
12 languages of migrants who are arriving to do this  
13 work. The capacity building and the immigration  
14 legal field, it needs to be intentional and it needs  
15 to be long-term, and we are certainly focused on  
16 that.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. In terms  
18 of when folks are submit-- we understand that it's a  
19 one-shot deal. You come in, you do your application,  
20 the application gets sent out. And we talked about  
21 this I think at the last hearing. How is OASO  
22 ensuring that these are quality applications, given  
23 all the challenges that we hear about? Number one,  
24 Language Line, not having-- I don't know what  
25

2 percentage of the applications are being done with  
3 just telephonic interpreters or Language Line.

4 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, I-- we were  
5 working on this, and I'm delightfully-- I'm excited  
6 to say that we do in-person translation of any  
7 language at this point in our asylum application help  
8 center. So, we have on-site live interpretation.  
9 The-- as I've mentioned before, there's a lot of  
10 layers of review. So we have the asylum application  
11 helper, and then we have a supervisor and another  
12 supervisor that looks over our applications. We've  
13 gotten really good feedback from DOJ and from judges  
14 who've seen our applications. We can-- like, if  
15 there's any concerns that people have, we look at  
16 people's applications again, but we've been trying to  
17 hold a-- we've been trying to make sure that our  
18 applications are high-quality.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I appreciate that.  
20 And you know, I think we're going to see the step two  
21 of this process, which is preparing for and  
22 adversarial setting where you're going to have to  
23 again prove and maybe remember what was in those  
24 applications a year ago. And so I guess it gets to  
25 the legal question of how we are planning to build

2 up. So, we'd be eager to see what the actual plan is  
3 of how we are going to meet the next step of this  
4 process.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Chair, if I  
6 may?

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yes, yes.

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: it's  
9 happening already. It's beginning to happen in a  
10 greater scale under the asylum-seeker legal  
11 assistance network, essentially, training  
12 individuals, pro se respondents to represent  
13 themselves in court when they have to if they don't  
14 have an attorney. And it's not because, you know,  
15 that's the ideal, but it's because of the limited  
16 legal capacity, the necessity. So if folks are going  
17 to represent themselves they should know how to  
18 present before the court and how to effectively state  
19 their claim. So those trainings are beginning now.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Doctor  
21 Aissata, I know you have to leave, but I'd love for  
22 you to offer any last words.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Yeah, thank  
24 you so much, Chairs. It's been really incredible to  
25 be in this room with the community and to again

2 emphasize our commitment as an Administration to the

3 Black immigrants. You have a representation there.

4 It's me, but you also have many others in the

5 Administration including my brother Ahmed [sp?] who

6 has worked with me as an activist for many years.

7 So, please know that we are going to be collaborating

8 with our colleagues to make sure that the voices of

9 Black migrants are not forgotten, but also I have the

10 honor to be able to represent the Administration to

11 the African community, and that's something that I

12 personally take very seriously. So we are committed

13 to helping this community, because we are them, and

14 we know that they are here to provide support and

15 they're here to actually help improve our city. So,

16 thank you for bringing all of us together. To Adama

17 and everybody else, we heard you. Your voices are not

18 being ignored. We are committed to you, and that's

19 why the Mayor actually put me in this position. So

20 thank you. I'm sorry that I have to go to

21 [inaudible]

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: No, we appreciate

23 you being here, and you know, I think we have to give

24 credit where credit is due, so I appreciate the Mayor

25 has put you in this position. I think what we want to

2 see is equitable funding for this community. What  
3 you have seen today is inequitable funding and  
4 treatment and so we will partner with you--

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: [interposing]  
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: to continue to  
8 demand that we see the money.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Right. We  
10 welcome that partnership, and we welcome your voice  
11 in calling for TPS and the right to work.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Absolutely.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Because that  
14 is really what our community needs.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Absolutely.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: thank you  
17 again, and apologies for having to leave.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. No, no,  
19 we appreciate you.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAMARA: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: One more question  
22 and then we're going to go to public testimony. This  
23 is about food, huge issue. What percentage of the  
24 contracts for food are being dedicated to halal  
25 meals?

2 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, every shelter--  
3 do DHS, Department of Homeless Services, you can  
4 request a halal meal at your shelter. Every other  
5 shelter has it built-in to their actual day-to-day  
6 service delivery. I've heard issues, so if you have  
7 specific issues in specific shelters, let me know. We  
8 can look into it.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, we heard the  
10 mosque is-- was feeding thousands of people unfunded,  
11 on community, and obviously I know your purview is  
12 only those shelters, but there is a desperate need  
13 for our city to be able to fund halal food  
14 distribution in many, many locations. We will  
15 continue to keep you posted, but there is an enormous  
16 gap there that needs to be met. I keep saying the  
17 last question. In terms of-- you've heard that  
18 congregate settings are inconsistent with faith  
19 practices of many Black immigrant newcomers. What  
20 are the Administration's plans to accommodate these  
21 different faith practices within the shelter system?

22 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we've had to  
23 open 220 sites in the last two years and service more  
24 than 190,000 migrants. I will say that we have  
25 really tried to make sure that we have prayer rooms

2 that we're bringing in faith leaders. Especially we  
3 had-- we had some events at Randall's last week-- or  
4 not last week, two weeks ago with an Iman to make  
5 sure that people have access to faith, and we're  
6 really trying to make sure that people have access to  
7 bins to clean their feet and hands. So we're really  
8 trying to incorporate the practices of individuals  
9 into the actual shelters.

10 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: As I'm hearing  
11 this, are you connecting, trying to connect the folks  
12 that you're serving to the community organization  
13 that providing workshop services as well? Like,  
14 elected official, too, because City Council is in  
15 every-- you have 51 Council Members, are you  
16 connecting them for some basic, you know, needs that  
17 they may have? You are providing those kind of  
18 information?

19 DIRECTOR SCHAEFFER: So, we are trying to  
20 build out networks for each shelter. If you have  
21 specific groups that you think we should connect to  
22 for specific shelters, we're happy to do it. I will  
23 say that a lot of the times there's a capacity issue  
24 with local nonprofits. So we have been trying to be  
25

2 very deliberate about the kinds of resources in the  
3 community that we direct people to.

4 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you. For me,  
5 I make it personal. I go to the shelter myself  
6 trying to-- there's people in need. People have just  
7 arrived. They just want their foot on the ground.  
8 And if we can't do our part very well, and like my  
9 colleague just mentioned, it's the equity. We  
10 looking for fairness. We give them people a start,  
11 and it's not about like this migrant-- we're not  
12 pinning anyone against each other, but we realize  
13 Black migrant been kind of like on the lower end of  
14 the stick.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, with that, I  
16 think we would like to move forward with public  
17 testimony. I want to thank all the members and staff  
18 members who are here. And before I-- I guess that's  
19 it. I'm sorry. It's called no food. I should not be  
20 complaining. Yeah, I guess with that we will close  
21 the Administration's testimony and move on to public,  
22 the public testimony. But first we're going to call  
23 on Senator Cordell Cleare who we have on Zoom, and  
24 then we will be calling the first panel. And of  
25 course, you can go.

2 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
4 you so much. So, now I open the hearing for public  
5 testimony. I remind members of the public that this  
6 is a formal government proceeding and that decorum  
7 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of  
8 the public shall remain silent. The witness table is  
9 reserved for the people who wish to testify. Please  
10 no video recording or photography is allowed at the  
11 witness table. Further, members of the public may  
12 not present audio or video recordings as testimony,  
13 but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the  
14 Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing period.  
15 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill  
16 out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and  
17 wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will  
18 have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topics.  
19 If you have a written statement or additional written  
20 testimony you wish to submit for the record please  
21 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at  
22 Arms. You may also email written testimony to  
23 [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72 hours of this  
24 hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be  
25

2 accepted. And with that, we'd like to turn it over  
3 to Senator Cleare.

4 SENATOR CORDELL CLEARE: Good afternoon.  
5 Can you hear me?

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Good afternoon. We  
7 can hear you, Senator.

8 SENATOR CORDELL CLEARE: Thank you. Good  
9 afternoon. I'm New York State Cordell Cleare, proudly  
10 representing the communities of Harlem, West Harlem,  
11 a large portion of East Harlem, El Bario, a small  
12 portion of Washington Heights and the Upper West  
13 Side. And I just want to thank Chair Avilés and the  
14 members of the New York City Council Committee on  
15 Immigration. I commend you for addressing the  
16 incredibly important issue of the experiences of  
17 Black migrants in New York City. It's been well over  
18 two years now that we've been addressing the influx  
19 of West African migrants in Harlem, which has largely  
20 been an invisible crisis. We have encountered  
21 primarily young men from West African countries who  
22 have different food, different dialects, different  
23 languages, different religious and cultural needs  
24 other than some other migrant populations in the  
25 district. In my district I have dozens-- hundreds of

2 African migrants who are eager to work and learn.

3 We've held numerous community events, coat drives and

4 giveaways, distributed toys, supplies, even multiple-

5 - even taking multiple community surveys, as well as

6 the all-important task of feeding thousands and

7 connecting them to groups and organizations who can

8 help them support all aspects of daily living. As it

9 specifically relates to Introductions 84, 85, 739,

10 and Resolution 340, I am in complete support.

11 surveys are an invaluable tool and one that my office

12 has used to better understand the needs of African

13 migrants and certainly based upon the over 700

14 surveys we have collected, a focus on economic,

15 workforce, health, and mental health needs is

16 incredibly important. In our first community survey

17 of over 300 individuals we learned the following:

18 the average age of our respondents was 28 years old.

19 They were almost 88 percent male. The great majority

20 identified their country of origin as Guinea or

21 Senegal.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time's expired.

23 SENATOR CORDELL CLEARE: Furthermore, 77

24 percent of the respondents spoke French as the

25 primary language, and 53 percent spoke Wolof or Pular

2 as their secondary language. Since 2022 I've  
3 repeatedly advocated with the President Biden,  
4 Majority Leader Schumer, Governor Hochul, and Mayor  
5 Adams to provide and encourage the provision of TPS  
6 for our African asylum-seekers, and also to fund,  
7 food, housing, and language programs, primarily  
8 administered by West African and African mosques to  
9 ensure that the language and education services are  
10 offered in language-appropriate languages and  
11 religious-appropriate meals are provided. In fact, in  
12 February we brought hundreds of asylum-seekers to  
13 Albany during caucus weekend to plead our case for  
14 more funding in the state budget. I assure you I'm in  
15 your partner and working tirelessly to drive those  
16 funds to our mosques. One of the greatest problems,  
17 the City has a program where our mosques who are  
18 sleeping individuals because they have no place else  
19 to sleep are trying to qualify for the funds that are  
20 available to help them with that. However, many of  
21 them can't get past the building code issues, and I  
22 have been speaking to MOIA and the Mayor's Office  
23 about making sure that our mosques can get those code  
24 violations taken care of so that they can provide the  
25 space for our migrants to shelter. Again, I continue

2 to seek money on all levels, city, state and federal.  
3 I believe today's hearing can only help our shared  
4 cause as we continue to fight for equity and fairness  
5 for Black migrants in New York City. I appreciate  
6 all the efforts, all the testimony that I've been  
7 able to listen to from all of the advocates and all  
8 the work that's being done. Please consider me a  
9 partner in all your efforts moving forward. Thank  
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
12 Senator. And now we will move to the first in-person  
13 panel. Amaha Kassa, Abdoul Gadiri, Fatoumata-- I'm  
14 so sorry. I hope your ancestors forgive me-- Diallo,  
15 Maimouna Dieye, and Melissa Johnson. Okay, so we  
16 will have-- Melissa, we'll have you join in the next  
17 panel. [inaudible] Yes, please join this panel.  
18 Thank you. Thank you all for your patience and many  
19 hours. I'm eager to hear your testimony. Please.

20 AMAHA KASSA: Thank you, Chairperson  
21 Avilés. Thank you, Chairperson Narcisse and all the  
22 members. We've heard a lot about issues and policy  
23 problems and policy solutions, but I want to just  
24 take a moment to reflect on the people question.  
25 This morning, 2-3,000 predominantly West African

2 Black migrants came to City Hall seeking what every  
3 person in this city and this country and the world is  
4 seeking, an opportunity, freedom, safety, housing, a  
5 job, a dignified job, and just the opportune-- fair  
6 share of public services without discrimination.

7 And I want to thank you for creating the platform.

8 Council Member, I want to thank you particularly for  
9 coming outside to address people. If we can't bring  
10 people into City Hall, we need to bring City Hall out  
11 to address the people. I'm going to speak to just a  
12 part of the challenges that our fellow Black migrants  
13 organizations laid out. I really want to recognize  
14 the other organizations that made today happen,  
15 particularly I want to recognize Adama Bah and  
16 Afrikana, also our sister Seydi Sarr, Doctor Seydi  
17 Sarr with ABISA, and Patrice Lawrence with the  
18 UndocuBlack Network. And I want to say you've heard  
19 our name a few times and how we're getting some  
20 funding from Action NYC, from Immigrant Navigator  
21 Network and others. What that adds up to is about a  
22 three-person service delivery team and a three-person  
23 legal team, which is less than the size of a  
24 department in many of the larger providers.  
25 nonetheless, we have something like 300 people walk

2 through our door on a monthly basis and have  
3 registered over 10,000, 10,200 individual contacts,  
4 not counting necessarily family members of West  
5 Africans since the arrival of-- shall I conclude?  
6 So, I think in terms of solutions, we need to make  
7 contracts more accessible to smaller organizations  
8 that are close to the ground. That includes  
9 organizations like Afrikana, Gambian Youth  
10 Organization. We need to reduce some of those  
11 hurdles. We need to make funding available to our  
12 mosques for needed repairs and maintenance, and we  
13 need to restore over the \$5 million in funding that  
14 was dedicated to the language services workforce that  
15 was a part of the Fiscal Year 23 budget. It was  
16 reduced to \$3.9 million, and unfortunately was  
17 sunsetted [sic] in the FY24 budget. We would be  
18 having a very different conversation bout language  
19 access and language justice if that funding had been  
20 maintained and if it is now restored I think we'll be  
21 in an excellent place to move forward. I'll stop and  
22 encourage the other members of our panel to speak.  
23 But thank you again. Yeah, I think [inaudible].

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, as we move on, I  
25 just want you to know we will have a two-minute clock

2 and so as we get closer, just pay attention and  
3 we'll-- just because we want-- we have a lot of  
4 public testimony. We want to hear everyone's voices,  
5 but thank you.

6 MAIMOUNA DIEYE: Good afternoon, Council  
7 Member Avilés for holding this hearing. My name is  
8 Maimouna Dieye. I'm the Program Manager at African  
9 Communities together where I lead our language access  
10 programs. At ACT I supervise the incubation of our  
11 recently launched language services worker  
12 cooperative, AfriLingual. African Communities  
13 Together, as you know, is an organization of African  
14 immigrants, and we empower our community members to  
15 integrate socially and get ahead economically and  
16 engage civically. On behalf of ACT I would first  
17 like to applaud and thank the Council for their major  
18 accomplishment in prioritizing language access for  
19 our immigrant New Yorkers in allocating funding for  
20 FY 23 that Amaha just mentioned for the establishment  
21 of worker-owned language cooperatives. So thank you  
22 for your advocacy and leadership in combatting the  
23 barriers that immigrant New Yorkers face in accessing  
24 city services. As you've heard throughout today's  
25 hearing, language access is one of the biggest

2 barriers affecting Black immigrant communities here  
3 in New York. Many recent arrivals in the City are  
4 Black migrants, many of whom are Africans who speak  
5 languages of limited diffusion, and this group faces  
6 the greatest language barrier because they are  
7 underserved-- I mean, as a result of that, they are  
8 underserved and they encounter racial disparities in  
9 accessing critical and vital city services. In fact,  
10 advocates have voiced concern that language barrier  
11 may exacerbate the lack of support that the Black  
12 migrants are receiving from the City, and the sad  
13 reality is that Black migrants who do not speak  
14 English or Spanish are vulnerable and they are being  
15 left out. So, our organizing and navigation team at  
16 ACT who work directly with the African migrants, they  
17 have noticed the lack of language access in a lot of  
18 city social and legal services. Many of them have  
19 seen firsthand how the African migrants in emergency  
20 shelters are not informed in their preferred  
21 languages about their rights as asylum-seekers or  
22 about how to access critical information, then  
23 leaving them vulnerable. African Communities Together  
24 incubated our co-op in 2023, in August 2023, and the  
25 co-op has participated in providing language

2 translation and interpretation services in French and  
3 many African languages, helping many of our community  
4 members who are in need of services to access  
5 services in their own languages, and we want that  
6 funding to be reallocated again for our community to  
7 continue the work that we've been doing. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

9 NNEKA OKPARA: Good morning, Council. My  
10 name is Nneka Okpara and I'm the Black Immigrants  
11 Initiatives Fellow with Immigrant ARC, as well as a  
12 practicing asylum attorney at Immigration Law and  
13 Justice New York. Immigrant ARC is a coalition of  
14 over 80 member organizations that provides legal  
15 services throughout the state of New York and our  
16 mission is to increase access to justice and access  
17 to legal counsel for immigrant New Yorkers by  
18 mobilizing New York's legal service providers. And  
19 as you've heard and will continue to hear throughout  
20 testimony given today, there's an overwhelming need  
21 for greater access to legal resource and  
22 representation for the incoming Black migrants in New  
23 York City and there's a lack of adequate language  
24 access for Black migrant languages such as  
25 interpreters and translators for legal services

2 amongst many other issues. And interest of keeping  
3 my testimony brief today, I just wanted to list a few  
4 of the funding asks that Immigrant ARC is submitting  
5 to the Council. Immigrant ARC is urging that the  
6 City fund long-term immigration legal services and  
7 support the Council's call for the Mayor to restore  
8 the funding cuts and allocate an additional \$50  
9 million for immigration legal services which includes  
10 investing in \$58 million for immigration legal  
11 services, investing an additional \$50 million to  
12 support emergency immigration legal services. And  
13 lastly, at the moment, Immigrant ARC in conjunction  
14 with the Language Justice Coalition comprised of ACT,  
15 NYIC, MASA, and Asian American Federation, we're  
16 currently designing a pilot program to institute an  
17 interpreter bank that would be housed by I-ARC which  
18 would allow legal service providers currently within  
19 I-ARC's member organizations to access Black  
20 immigrant languages amongst other languages to enable  
21 a more extensive and comprehensive representation of  
22 clients, and we ask that the City commit to funding  
23 this initiative in the amount of \$2 million. Thank  
24 you.

25 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

2 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

3 UNIDENTIFIED: Chairperson, do you want  
4 us to translate or-- [inaudible] Oh, no, okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: She--

6 UNIDENTIFIED: Okay.

7 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

8 TRANSLATOR: My name is--

9 ABDOUL GADIRI: Abdoul Gadiri.

10 TRANSLATOR: Abdoul Gadiri. I come from  
11 Guinea [inaudible].

12 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

13 TRANSLATOR: I'm here for political  
14 reasons.

15 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

16 TRANSLATOR: I was a prisoner in my  
17 country and that's why I fled here.

18 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

19 TRANSLATOR: And I've had a lot of  
20 difficulties since arriving in New York City.

21 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

22 TRANSLATOR: I have difficulty in finding  
23 lodging.

24 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

25 TRANSLATOR: I've had health problems.

2 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

3 TRANSLATOR: And I've had a terrible time  
4 finding legal representation.

5 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

6 TRANSLATOR: We didn't come here-- we  
7 were forced to come here because of the insecurity,  
8 the physical and freedom-- the lack of freedom and  
9 safety in our own country.

10 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

11 TRANSLATOR: So, we haven't been able to  
12 work for five months, and if you can't work, how are  
13 we supposed to support ourselves?

14 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

15 TRANSLATOR: It's very humiliating  
16 because it's not just us who suffers, but we are  
17 unable to care for our families and that's heart-  
18 breaking.

19 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

20 TRANSLATOR: And if I'm speaking, I want  
21 you to know that I'm speaking here on behalf of the  
22 thousands of people who are just outside this  
23 building who are in the same situation I am and who  
24 are counting on me to let you know.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You can have more  
3 time if you need it, given interpretation.

4 TRANSLATOR: [speaking French]

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: If there's anything  
6 else you'd like to say.

7 TRANSLATOR: [speaking French]

8 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

9 TRANSLATOR: I'm going to let my  
10 colleague speak next.

11 ABDOUL GADIRI: [speaking French]

12 TRANSLATOR: I would like to thank all  
13 the humanitarian organizations that are helping  
14 migrants who are here today, and it's really  
15 important the work you're doing for us.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

17 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

18 TRANSLATOR: My name is Batouna [sic]. I  
19 am also from Guinea Conakry.

20 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

21 TRANSLATOR: I also fled the dangerous  
22 conditions in Guinea.

23 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

24

25

2 TRANSLATOR: I had to cross through eight  
3 countries to successfully end up in the United  
4 States.

5 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

6 TRANSLATOR: There were a lot of dangers  
7 along the way.

8 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

9 TRANSLATOR: There was a lot of rape and  
10 assault, a lot of starvation and illness.

11 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

12 TRANSLATOR: There are people who arrived  
13 here pregnant, not by choice.

14 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

15 TRANSLATOR: So, and then when we finally  
16 got here, everybody said welcome to the United States  
17 and immediately marginalized us.

18 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

19 TRANSLATOR: We don't have legal  
20 representation. We don't have a place to live.

21 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

22 TRANSLATOR: And we don't have medical  
23 insurance so we can't get care.

24 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

2 TRANSLATOR: So, we're begging you as the  
3 American authorities.

4 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

5 TRANSLATOR: So, would you please shorten  
6 the 150 days it takes to get a work permit?

7 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

8 TRANSLATOR: We do not want to be a  
9 burden on the government. We want to be independent.  
10 We want to be self-supporting. Please help us  
11 achieve that goal.

12 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

13 TRANSLATOR: We would love to contribute  
14 to your country's economy.

15 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

16 TRANSLATOR: Thank you very much.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
18 you so much. I guess two things: we will fight for  
19 TPS. Unfortunately, we don't control that at the  
20 city level.

21 BATOUNA: [speaking French]

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But you mentioned  
23 other ways that our city should be stepping in to  
24 meet the needs, so our intention is to continue to  
25 meet those needs with dignity.

2 TRANSLATOR: [speaking French]

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you all.

4 Thank you all for your testimony and thank you for  
5 the work you do on a daily basis. And for the next  
6 in-person panel we'll have Doctor Seydi, Fatimatou  
7 Balde, Diallo Fatimata, Mamadou Toupe. I just want  
8 to remind everyone if you have not filled out a  
9 witness slip and you would like to provide public  
10 testimony, please do that. It's one of these. The  
11 Sergeant at Arms will collect it. Doctor Seydi we  
12 can begin with you. Thank you.

13 DOCTOR SEYDI SARR: Yes, salaam alaikum,  
14 everyone. Good afternoon. Thank you for all the  
15 effort that was made today and thank you for still  
16 being here. So, I am the Founding Director of the  
17 African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs.  
18 And I apologize for having made all those faces while  
19 the other testimony was going on, but I could not  
20 help it. So, Amaha just said it. when we started in  
21 2019, having houses of worship hosting migrant, their  
22 collaborative actually provided language access on-  
23 site, because we were triaging people on a daily  
24 basis, and Amaha with African Communities Together  
25 had somebody twice a day that would sit for four

2 hours a day and they would pay for it so we can  
3 figure out what the needs were. So when it comes to  
4 language access it's not about not having a model.  
5 And when the folks talk about oh, they need to be  
6 certified. We know who works for Language Line and  
7 Language Line is not certifying those people. So you  
8 cannot just tell us oh, they need to be certified,  
9 when if I wanted to be a Language Line worker, I  
10 could. If Language Line don't work, it's because it  
11 doesn't work for people like me or somebody else who  
12 knows the language and who don't have all the time or  
13 whether they are being paid enough for them to stay  
14 over the phone. So when you can't have Malinke or  
15 you don't have Pular, or you don't have Wolof, it's  
16 for a reason. The community here is skilled, but the  
17 community needs to be paid properly and equitably,  
18 and if you use a collaborative like the one that ACT  
19 have, we already know that the service is there. It  
20 exists. They are employing folks that are credible  
21 in the community and we know that that works. So,  
22 folks [inaudible] need to take their guidance from  
23 the community who is already doing the work. On the  
24 side of--

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing]

3 Continue.

4 DOCTOR SEYDI SARR: On the side of legal  
5 access, Catholic Charities have, for example, process  
6 a lot of people with the pro se applications. All  
7 the lawyers in New York was like this is not going to  
8 work. Why? Example, you go to Catholic Charities,  
9 you get your asylum application in before your master  
10 hearing. They don't represent you at the master  
11 hearing. When you go to your master hearing, the  
12 judge understand that you don't have lawyer. The  
13 judge holds your clock. So this asylum application  
14 that was now in the system should take 150 days. Now,  
15 because your clock for the 150 days was hold because  
16 of a lack of representation. Here you have somebody  
17 who effectively applied and who is going to wait more  
18 than seven months until they are able to pay for a  
19 lawyer. So those small kinks really need to be  
20 addressed, and saying over and over we're talking  
21 about it, we're figuring it out for the last two  
22 years, it is not acceptable. And I just wanted to  
23 flag those two things, but everything else that we  
24 are seeing as hurdle are muddling the same  
25 conversation. Organization have stepped in on day

2 one because we didn't want to see our people in the  
3 street, and we saw them in the street anyway, and  
4 that was painful, and it's a fact which we cannot go  
5 over. But I believe that there need to be more  
6 coordinated effort for the one who are on the ground  
7 to ensure that funding is done properly, and that  
8 communities are not being gas lit when they are  
9 saying hey, we have people here that need support,  
10 and this is how we need to support them. Because  
11 folks who are closer to the issues are closer to the  
12 solution. And all the organizations that we've  
13 talked about today here are from this community. We  
14 are the communities [sic] that we serve, because we  
15 are also impacted as they are. Thank you for your  
16 time.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. And  
18 again, thank you for all the work that you have been  
19 doing, and even today above and beyond as usual. I  
20 appreciate your testimony.

21 DOCTOR SEYDI SARR: Thank you.

22 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
23 language]

24 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon everyone.  
25

2 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
3 language]

4 TRANSLATOR: I'm staying in a hotel  
5 shelter with three of my kids, and we don't even have  
6 the means to cook, and our life in the shelter is  
7 very difficult.

8 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
9 language]

10 TRANSLATOR: There is an issue with the  
11 food where culturally my kids refuse to eat it  
12 because they don't know it.

13 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
14 language]

15 TRANSLATOR: If we eat and we don't  
16 finish it, we don't even have a fridge where we can  
17 like keep the rest of the food, so we're wasting the  
18 food that we have.

19 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
20 language]

21 TRANSLATOR: When my kids go to school  
22 hungry, then they get sick and they cannot perform.

23 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
24 language]

2 TRANSLATOR: We're here. We can't work.  
3 We don't speak the language. We don't have access to  
4 work, and we're just sitting here wasting.

5 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
6 language]

7 TRANSLATOR: That's all I wanted to say.

8 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking different  
9 language]

10 TRANSLATOR: My name is Mamadou Toupe.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You read my mind.

12 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking other language]

13 TRANSLATOR: [inaudible]

14 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking other language]

15 TRANSLATOR: [inaudible]

16 MAMADOU TOUPE: [speaking other language]

17 TRANSLATOR: Me too, I live at the  
18 shelter with my kids.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can I ask you to  
20 speak louder and into the microphone?

21 TRANSLATOR: Yes. Me too, I stay at the  
22 shelter with my kids.

23 FATIMATA DIALLO: [speaking other  
24 language]

2 TRANSLATOR: I have my two kids and a  
3 sister of mine.

4 FATIMATA DIALLO: [speaking other  
5 language]

6 TRANSLATOR: But at the shelter, the  
7 food, my kids cannot eat the food at the shelter.

8 FATIMATA DIALLO: [speaking other  
9 language]

10 TRANSLATOR: And around Ramadan time we  
11 couldn't eat, because when you come back for the  
12 breaks, the food is no good at all.

13 FATIMATA DIALLO: [speaking other  
14 language]

15 TRANSLATOR: And they give us two months  
16 to stay at the shelter and then you have to go out  
17 again with your luggage and the kids and find another  
18 place. It's very difficult.

19 FATIMATA DIALLO: [speaking other  
20 language]

21 TRANSLATOR: And also I have a kid that  
22 is like 18 to 19. Until now he doesn't have no  
23 school.

24 FATIMATA DIALLO: [speaking other  
25 language]

2 TRANSLATOR: So, please help us.

3 FATIMATA DIALLO: Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, thank you.

5 Merci, thank you. Can you state your name for the  
6 record?

7 TRANSLATOR: [speaking other language]

8 FATIMATA DIALLO: Fatimata [inaudible]  
9 Diallo.

10 TRANSLATOR: Yes, my name is Fatimata  
11 [inaudible] Diallo.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Merci.

13 FANTA DOUMIBA: [speaking other language]

14 TRANSLATOR: My name is Fanta Doumbia  
15 [sic]. I run from my country.

16 FANTA DOUMIBA: [speaking other language]

17 TRANSLATOR: So, we run all over and then  
18 from all these countries to come to the United States  
19 because I didn't want them to circumcise my daughter.

20 FANTA DOUMIBA: [speaking other language]

21 TRANSLATOR: So, since we here, we run  
22 with a lot of difficulties, so such like the working  
23 permit, and we also have a problem at the shelters.

24 FANTA DOUMIBA: [speaking other language]

25

2 TRANSLATOR: So, we really need to work  
3 so that we could help the country, too.

4 FANTA DOUMIBA: [speaking other language]

5 TRANSLATOR: So, it's that [sic].

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
7 you so much.

8 TRANSLATOR: [speaking other language]

9 AMADOU DIALLO: Good afternoon. So my  
10 name is Amadou Diallo. I came from Guinea Conakry.  
11 So, I'm here to try to speak this language English to  
12 show you, so everything is possible. In my country  
13 the time I go to school. Since that time, so I have  
14 to try-- I can try to speak this language, English.  
15 That's why, because since I was here I see the  
16 importance given the way I came, the language can't  
17 help me too much. So before I waste your time here,  
18 let me try my best. Okay, so my [inaudible] me I'm  
19 very happy and I know many people from outside, when  
20 they had the way you can talk from here, they will be  
21 happy. Because you say the very important things  
22 from here. Me I was up here. So, the reason--  
23 accept you say we have to come and tell you some--  
24 explain our problem. That's why even the time I read  
25 my name here, I tell him to write English and French.

2 I'm able to speak French really, but this language,  
3 English, is what I tell you. You see I can try.  
4 Even this time I'm going to the school for the  
5 [inaudible]. For this country, since I was here, you  
6 talk about Adama [inaudible]. We are very happy  
7 about Adama. That [inaudible] very good important  
8 [inaudible] for the West African people. And another  
9 person come here, he talk about the mosque, for the  
10 people who stay at the mosque. That also is  
11 [inaudible] because I am in Bronx [sic], I know. So,  
12 you see all here why, because we, the people from  
13 West Africa, if you some-- if you were from another  
14 place, it's not necessary to say anything here. But  
15 you can say many things here. It is true. If you  
16 see like five people here just like me, I'm a  
17 Guinean. You can see Senegal here. You can see  
18 Mauritanian, and you can see other tribes, the other  
19 tribes [inaudible] like me, Guinean and Senegali, the  
20 other people. Just like we are not the same. Some  
21 African people can speak English and we can try. You  
22 understand? So by that way, you have to do that  
23 favor for us very well, because you tell them-- you  
24 give them [inaudible] from here. I'm very happy for  
25 that, really. So people also, we are very happy for

2 you. So, our problem from here, they say all-- our  
3 problem is about the working, the work. This is a  
4 big problem for us. Just like me, I have one wife,  
5 four children. So, since I was here, I do my asylum,  
6 but I don't have lawyer. So I have appointment in  
7 July. This is a big problem for me. You see? So,  
8 this is the first problem. The second, so when it is  
9 possible to help us about this working permit it's  
10 very important for us, because many, many, many  
11 people-- you are not able to see all. But really, no  
12 we suffer. Really we suffer about food. We suffer  
13 about work. We are suffering about many things. But  
14 since I was this-- I worked with this schools the  
15 Massey [sic] Center, it is for 149 [sic] across from  
16 Langone Hospital. This organization, they are very  
17 good. Because I see different type from there,  
18 Senegali, Guinean, Mauritanian, they will help them  
19 about the asylum. Even me, I have seven months. I  
20 never do the asylum. They are the one who help me  
21 about asylum. Since maybe yesterday or day before  
22 yesterday, maybe they don't bring it, you see? I  
23 try. Oh, I don't have it. So, that's why I have a  
24 big problem, and many, many, many people have the  
25 likes of me. So why I try to speak this language, I

2 want to assure you we are able to do, because me  
3 [inaudible]. So I speak French very well since I was  
4 here. And I try-- I know I can try my best. I do my  
5 best.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Mr. Amadou, you do  
7 amazing. Unfortunately, we are out of time and we  
8 have many, many other people who want to testify.

9 AMADOU DIALLO: yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, I thank you for--  
11 - I know you are capable, much better than I, of  
12 learning another language, and I thank you for your  
13 patience and being here. I think if you would like  
14 to submit further testimony, we'd be happy to receive  
15 it, but I thank you for all the work that you've done  
16 and for telling us and sharing-- for all of the  
17 panelists for sharing your experience here.

18 AMADOU DIALLO: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: We want to be a  
20 welcoming beautiful New York.

21 AMADOU DIALLO: So, I'm ready. Just like  
22 me, my problem and the other people is about the  
23 lawyer, because I have appointment in July. So  
24 that's why I came. When we have-- when I have the  
25 opportunity it's very important for me and the other

2 people, many, many, many people, about the food,  
3 about [inaudible] just like these people can say it  
4 [inaudible]. It is very difficult to [inaudible] you.  
5 You ask these people who move from there right now,  
6 you ask them two questions, very important. Really,  
7 I was there. I'm very happy about you. God bless  
8 you. God bless America. Really, I [inaudible]  
9 because you give them a real question. They answer,  
10 but it is not the answer. Yeah. Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
12 you. We're going to call the next panel. Thank you  
13 so much. We're going to call the next panel. Thierno  
14 Sandior [sic] Diallo? Abdourahame Diallo? I'm so  
15 sorry. Mamadou Diallo? Mamadou Bello Bah? Melissa  
16 Johnson, Melissa. I thought we called-- and Julio  
17 Herrera. Okay, thank you. Melissa would you like to  
18 start? Or we'll start on this side. Thank you.

19 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: As Salaam Alaikum.

20 TRANSLATOR: As-salaam Alaikum.

21 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
22 language]

23 TRANSLATOR: I say hi to everyone, each  
24 of you here, and I really need more help.

2 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
3 language]

4 TRANSLATOR: So, my fellows came here to  
5 speak and I just want to add a little more about the  
6 help that we need.

7 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
8 language]

9 TRANSLATOR: My name is Abdourahame [sic]  
10 Diallo.

11 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
12 language]

13 TRANSLATOR: And I am from Guinea  
14 Conakry.

15 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
16 language]

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: What is his name?

18 TRANSLATOR: Abdourahame Diallo.

19 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: Abdourahame Diallo.

20 TRANSLATOR: Abdourahame Diallo.

21 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
22 language]

23 TRANSLATOR: I am here with my wife and  
24 my daughter who is five years old.

2 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
3 language]

4 TRANSLATOR: We came here together, but  
5 they are outside. They couldn't get in.

6 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
7 language]

8 TRANSLATOR: Like my fellow spoke to you,  
9 we have a problem with the language, where to stay,  
10 the shelter, and also for--

11 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
12 language]

13 TRANSLATOR: and also for the food at the  
14 shelter.

15 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
16 language]

17 TRANSLATOR: So this is what I have to  
18 add, and also if you could help more for the working  
19 permit.

20 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
21 language]

22 TRANSLATOR: If we don't have no working  
23 permit, it's going to be difficult to take care of  
24 our family.

2 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
3 language]

4 TRANSLATOR: So, we really want to work  
5 with the country, the people in this country, but we  
6 don't want to be a burden to you guys. We really  
7 want to work for ourselves and take care of  
8 ourselves.

9 ABDOURAHAME DIALLO: [speaking other  
10 language]

11 TRANSLATOR: So, thank you so much.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Julio--  
13 we'll just go down the--

14 JULIO HERRERA: Can you guys hear me  
15 okay? Good afternoon. Buenos tarde. [speaking other  
16 language]. My name is Julio Herrera. I'm the  
17 Executive Assistant from the Black Institute. We're  
18 a 501C3 think tank that engages in policy and  
19 advocacy work from education, environment,  
20 immigration, and economics. For immigration we have  
21 our highest priority placed on immigrants from the  
22 African diaspora, bet that from Latin America, the  
23 Caribbean, and especially West Africa right now. I  
24 don't want to spend my time flogging a dead horse. A  
25 lot of the issues were apparent. No notice of

2 vacancies, harassment by NYPD, no communication  
3 whatsoever from shelter staff, no real outreach from  
4 case workers, and enormous language barrier. It  
5 seems to-- and from my time speaking with some of the  
6 folk over at Earth Church right by the East Village,  
7 who in January 2024 took in a lot of people almost  
8 freezing to death from the cold in the dead of an  
9 American winter in flip-flops and short sleeve t-  
10 shirts, they told me those stories and a lot of them  
11 overlapped with neglect, lack of representation, lack  
12 of clear communication and interpretation, and just  
13 lack of oversight overall. And I also just want to  
14 take the time to extend my thanks to Afrikana, to  
15 ABISA, to UndocuBlack, all the other groups that  
16 stretch themselves thin just to do-- just to make  
17 sure that thousands of people don't slip through the  
18 cracks. And my real recommendation is that the City  
19 take effective steps to make sure these people  
20 continue to do their work. They've clearly  
21 demonstrated their interest and ability to do this  
22 work, and I think it's best that we give them the  
23 resources to continue to do so. Thank you.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,  
3 and wholeheartedly agree with that. Do you need  
4 interpretation?

5 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking other  
6 language]

7 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

8 TRANSLATOR: I want to thank you for this  
9 opportunity to be here. The very fact that we're  
10 able to hear-- to be here and present our views is  
11 meaningful that we have somebody-- that we have the  
12 right to express what's happening to us and to  
13 participate in the process. It's very meaningful.

14 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

15 TRANSLATOR: The majority of the people  
16 here in our community is from West Africa.

17 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

18 TRANSLATOR: I'm from Guinea.

19 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

20 TRANSLATOR: I have a diploma in Finance.

21 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

22 TRANSLATOR: But I only speak Fulani and  
23 French, so it's a problem for me.

24 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

2 TRANSLATOR: we have huge problems in my  
3 country.

4 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

5 TRANSLATOR: I was--

6 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

7 TRANSLATOR: So, we have ethnic problems,  
8 where one ethnicity punishes the other, and if you  
9 are Fulani you are constantly abused and victimized.

10 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

11 TRANSLATOR: I went to Polytechnic  
12 Institute and I have dual degrees in Finance and  
13 Business.

14 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

15 TRANSLATOR: And we have a candidate,  
16 Diallo, who won election three times without ever  
17 being allowed to assume the presidency.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Silence in the  
19 Chambers, please.

20 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

21 TRANSLATOR: So, I was injured severely  
22 after my candidate won election but was not allowed  
23 to take office.

24 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

2 TRANSLATOR: So, even if you are severely  
3 injured, as many of us were, you couldn't afford to  
4 go to the hospital because they were working for the  
5 government, and often you would be killed off there  
6 purposely.

7 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

8 TRANSLATOR: And one of the brothers who  
9 put me through school and sustained me through all of  
10 this is the reason that was I able to alive [sic].  
11 He wasn't-- he didn't die on the spot, but he died  
12 soon after as a result of his injuries.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can you ask-- can  
14 you state your name for the record, and if you would  
15 begin to wrap up your comments. We can receive your  
16 testimony afterwards, because we have many more and  
17 we don't have the room for very long.

18 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: Mamadou Bello Bah.  
19 [speaking French]

20 TRANSLATOR: So, I have no-- and like so  
21 many other people here, I have been unable to find  
22 shelter. I have been-- I can't find legal  
23 representation until the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, and my wife is  
24 stuck in Senegal, and I can't find a way to bring her  
25 over.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can you let him know  
3 that we have to end the testimony and move to the  
4 next witness. I deeply apologize for that.

5 TRANSLATOR: [speaking French]

6 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

7 TRANSLATOR: Okay, I'll wrap up.

8 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

9 TRANSLATOR: Thank you very much.

10 MAMADOU BELLO BAH: [speaking French]

11 DIALLO: [speaking French]

12 TRANSLATOR: My name is Diallo. I'm from  
13 Guinea also.

14 DIALLO: [speaking other language]

15 TRANSLATOR: So, we also-- we fled for  
16 our lives because of the violent threats against us  
17 because of our political beliefs and our ethnicity,  
18 which is targeted for extinction.

19 DIALLO: [speaking other language]

20 TRANSLATOR: So, we applied for-- in  
21 January for asylum, but we have no legal  
22 representation, and we haven't gotten any response,  
23 and we are very scared. We don't know what to do.

24 DIALLO: [speaking other language]

2 TRANSLATOR: But if we could ask for only  
3 one thing it would be for a work permit, because we  
4 ask for nothing more than to be able to earn an  
5 honest living and contribute to the economy.

6 DIALLO: [speaking other language]

7 TRANSLATOR: Okay, thank you very much.

8 MELISSA JOHNSON: Thank you to the  
9 Committee on Immigration and the Committee on  
10 Hospital, the Committees, for holding this public  
11 hearing to address the experiences of Black migrants  
12 in New York City. My name is Melissa Johnson, New  
13 York organizer for the Black Alliance for Just  
14 Immigration. I'm testifying on behalf of BAJI to  
15 speak to the expansion of policing, private security  
16 and surveillance and its impact on newly arrived  
17 Black asylum-seekers within the asylum shelter system  
18 through the use of NYPD and the subcontracting of  
19 private companies, including but not limited to  
20 DocGo, Arrow Security, Medrite and BH Rags Home Corps  
21 who are primarily providing private security and  
22 surveillance and are not equipped to provide  
23 culturally-competent trauma-informed care, case  
24 management, and community navigation support, all  
25 needed for the inclusion of asylum-seekers into our

2 communities and their stable transition into full and  
3 autonomous livelihoods, whether here in New York or  
4 outside of the state. Over the course of the last  
5 year through the guidance of Afrikana, Africa is  
6 Everywhere, and African Communities Together, our  
7 mutual aid work has been to support the Stockton  
8 Respite Center located in District 36, Bed-Stuy  
9 Brooklyn, and the Hall Street Shelter located in  
10 District 35, Quinton [sp?] Hill. Today, we will speak  
11 to what we have witnessed there, the use of NYPD and  
12 private companies does not support the vulnerability  
13 of Black asylum-seekers, especially those who are  
14 African, Haitian, or Black LGBTQ migrants who arrive  
15 fleeing war, conflict, political violence, or threat  
16 of life due to a combination of factors. In the  
17 absence of culturally-competent, trauma-informed care  
18 Black asylum-seekers including women and children are  
19 subject to increased racial targeting, harassment,  
20 and discriminatory practices which make them  
21 vulnerable to arrest, incarceration, and migrant  
22 detention, negatively effecting or subsequently  
23 ending their process to seek asylum. Police, private  
24 security and surveillance in these shelters do not  
25 and cannot provide culturally-competent, trauma

2 informed care, such as health and mental health  
3 services, case management, including Afro indigenous  
4 language translation interpretation, and community  
5 navigation support for social services providing  
6 particularly NYC ID cards, health insurance, and  
7 vouchers for housing, SNAP, WIC, and MTA Fair Fare  
8 programs which are all accessible and eligible for  
9 asylum-seekers. However, through subcontracts,  
10 police enforcement and surveillance documented by  
11 Black migrant asylum-seekers, Black migrant  
12 organizations, mutual aid groups, and Legal Aid show  
13 that both police and private security have  
14 participated in physically violent, xenophobic,  
15 retaliatory, and extreme anti-Black practices that  
16 abuse and discriminate against Black asylum-seekers,  
17 mirroring conditions already found within the NYC  
18 shelter system and within our state carceral system.  
19 the use of increased policing and the absence of  
20 culturally-competent trauma-informed care through the  
21 Black migrant direct service providers reinforces  
22 detention-like conditions that undoubtedly harms  
23 already vulnerable Black asylum-seekers. BAJI has  
24 witnessed the Adams' Administration create an  
25 inhumane asylum shelter system. Therefore, we ask

2 that City-- and we call on City Council to strengthen  
3 shelter and respite center stay policies, but also  
4 remove contracts for NYPD and private companies that  
5 police and surveil and do not provide culturally-  
6 competent trauma-informed care. We also call on the  
7 Council to review and-- we call on the Council to  
8 approve bill Intro 0739 and its focus on reporting of  
9 asylum-seeker demographics and active contracts to  
10 help provide increased transparency and  
11 accountability to address abuses of discrimination--  
12 abuses and discrimination faced by Black asylum-  
13 seekers. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

15 I want to thank BAJI in particular and call on  
16 someone who recently passed away, Carl, who  
17 introduced me to BAJI many years ago, and the work  
18 that you've done on the front lines. So thank you so  
19 much for your work and your testimony and your  
20 support in helping pull this hearing together. We  
21 have more-- so much work to do on this front, and we  
22 know that the intersection of the police and  
23 surveillance and carceral systems of Black  
24 communities does not work. And we want to build a  
25 system of compassionate care, what people deserve.

2 So thank you so much. And I think with that, we're  
3 going to move to the next panel. Lauren Wyatt,  
4 Sandra Dieudonné, Zeinats Eyega, Mamadou Saliou  
5 Diallo-- I'm so sorry-- and LC Saint Louis. And  
6 Damian Harris-Hernandez. Great, if you'd like to  
7 start. If you could start with your name for the  
8 record, and please start.

9 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: Good afternoon. My  
10 name is Sandra Dieudonné. I am the Supervising  
11 Attorney at Catholic Charities. I work with the  
12 Haitian Response Initiative Project. We service--  
13 excuse me. We help all the Haitian immigration  
14 immigrants that come in through Catholic Charities  
15 and assist them with their legal services. We have  
16 screened approximately 1,002 Haitian immigrants. We  
17 filed 1,011 immigration applications, and 114 cases  
18 for full representation. As everyone here has  
19 explained, there is access to language that is  
20 definitely an issue. However, what's unique with the  
21 Haitian Response Initiative Program, the entire staff  
22 speaks Creole, and we understand the cultural nuances  
23 that are essential in helping the Haitian immigrants  
24 get the services that they need. One major issue  
25 that we've noticed is that we have seen several cases

2 where immigration judges have refused to terminate  
3 removal proceedings for Haitians with TPS. We had  
4 one Haitian couple that was ordered removed despite  
5 presenting their TPS approvals to the judge and  
6 requesting termination. In each of these cases, the  
7 respondents did not have any criminal or other  
8 histories that were explained for them to decline  
9 terminating removal proceedings. Catholic Charities  
10 has not encountered this with other TPS recipients  
11 from other countries, whose cases the judge has  
12 routinely terminated. Through HRI, the Haitian  
13 migrants often face significant challenges in  
14 obtaining benefits and services to which they are  
15 entitled. For example, healthcare professionals  
16 generally do not provide documents in Haitian-Creole,  
17 and we have frequently seen cases where Haitians were  
18 provided medical information and records written only  
19 in English and Spanish. Haitians with TPS who are  
20 entitled to work authorization and social security  
21 numbers are often turned away from the social  
22 security offices because staff did not wish to call  
23 interpreters to assist, and this also happened in the  
24 Medicaid and the City's IDNYC offices.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you for your  
3 testimony and I hope you will submit it.

4 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: So, the Haitian--  
5 I mean, when they go to get services, so because of  
6 the language barrier, so they turn them away?

7 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: Yes, we had several  
8 that were turned away.

9 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Alright. Are you  
10 keeping a data of that? So, because numbers make a  
11 lot of sense for us, because when we talking to those  
12 folks we can say exactly where it's coming from.  
13 Now, if I say they probably say, ah. But if you can  
14 collect data, that will be very helpful to us so we  
15 can hold people accountable. That's what we do.

16 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: Yes, we did collect  
17 data. We reported to MOIA. So they assisted us with  
18 those family members to get them the IDNYC. That was  
19 like in the beginning. So, a lot of the families we  
20 were able to assist, but that was a major issue.  
21 They refused to call Language Line. They turned them  
22 away and so we had to rely on MOIA to help us be a  
23 liaison for the families.

24 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: And what I realize  
25 being Haitian, when I get people to be online, like

2 to be on the call on telephone, it's not the same as  
3 in person, and you can be speaking their language.  
4 You don't even realize, especially the seniors.

5 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: Right.

6 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Until you said,  
7 Mommy, can you understand what the person saying?  
8 This is what the person saying. Oh, I didn't hear,  
9 but the person is next to them. Either they have  
10 hearing-- sometimes I realize they don't even have  
11 hearing problem. They still not connecting with the  
12 phone, because they're not used to it.

13 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: Right.

14 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: They like this  
15 gesture because we come from a culture with a lot of  
16 gesture, with a lot of, you know--

17 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: [interposing] Facial  
18 expression, exactly.

19 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Yeah, expression,  
20 facial expression. So, I thank you for your service,  
21 and I thank you for your work in New York City, and  
22 that's what we're looking for, me and my colleagues  
23 are looking for, you know, to address the inequities  
24 in the Black-- especially Black migrants. Thank you.

25 SANDRA DIEUDONNÉ: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Lauren?

3 LAUREN WYATT: Good afternoon, everyone.

4 Thank you very much for having us today. My name is

5 Lauren Wyatt. I'm the Managing Attorney for Access to

6 Justice Initiatives at Catholic Charities New York.

7 I oversee several programs designed to serve

8 unrepresented immigrants who are often newly-arrived

9 and moving through the deportation system. Among

10 them, the Haitian Response Initiative, as well as the

11 Immigration Help Desk, and Family Group Legal

12 Orientation Program, as well as the New York State-

13 funded office of New Americans Program. Right now,

14 about 30 percent of the people that we are seeing are

15 recently-arrived people from African countries

16 speaking many of the languages that we've heard from

17 today. Most of the people, the overwhelming majority

18 of people that we've seen from African countries have

19 very strong asylum claims, and I'd like to talk a

20 little bit about what they're having to face when

21 they move through the immigration court system.

22 although the majority of people that we have seen do

23 have very strong immigration cases, because the legal

24 community here is less familiar with the things that

25 people are dealing with in the countries that they've

2 come from, I think that these groups of people are  
3 having difficulty finding immigration attorneys,  
4 although people do have, again, very strong cases and  
5 would likely win their cases if they found  
6 representation. In the immigration court, right now  
7 immigration court hearings are repeatedly rescheduled  
8 for African migrants due to the lack of available  
9 interpreters. The New York City Immigration Courts  
10 do not have in-person interpreters for most African  
11 languages, and telephonic interpreters are also  
12 generally unavailable. As a result, a lot of the  
13 African immigrants that we're seeing in the  
14 immigration court system are repeatedly turned away  
15 from their hearings and just told to come back on  
16 another date. There is no interpreter to tell them  
17 that information, so they're just given a new hearing  
18 notice. It's not explained to them, and they're just  
19 told to come back later and they don't understand why  
20 or if they've done anything wrong. A lot of times  
21 they are sent to us at the Immigration Court Help  
22 Desk, the pro bono rooms for us to explain that to  
23 them. We have the same difficulty in securing  
24 interpreters that the court does, and so we're just  
25 trying to figure out as best as we can, often in

2 French, that you know, they have to come back on  
3 another day. For a lot of the people, the judge is  
4 the first person that they're speaking with to tell  
5 them about important deadlines such as the one-year  
6 filing deadline, and so they're not in many cases  
7 learning about that important deadline for something  
8 that they would likely win until after the deadline.  
9 The last thing that I would like to flag, that the  
10 programs that I mentioned through Catholic Charities  
11 today have the capacity to assist many of the people  
12 in immigration court proceedings with requesting  
13 something called prosecutorial discretion where they  
14 could close their immigration cases in court. We  
15 have been available and have the capacity to do this  
16 for several months now. We have been following up  
17 with this with MOIA. I know MOIA has put the request  
18 into the City. We are only waiting for-- to be able  
19 to help these groups of people. They only need an  
20 appointment with the NYPD to get fingerprinted and we  
21 have already discussed with the court with the  
22 Department of Homeland Security for us to be able to  
23 help these people to close their cases. We could be  
24 assisting dozens and dozens of families per month  
25 with closing their cases if we could only secure

2 fingerprinting dates from the NYPD. So I know that  
3 MOIA has made this request already, so anything that  
4 you could do to help us to secure these dates with  
5 the NYPD, we could immediately be doing this, helping  
6 these people not be in fear of deportation, and it  
7 would all be done for free. So thank you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.  
9 We will certainly follow up on that and thank you for  
10 all the work that you are doing for our communities.  
11 We really appreciate it. And I think with that,  
12 we're going to move on to the next panel. Damian  
13 Harris-Hernandez, are you here? Maybe not. Zeinats  
14 Eyega from Sauti Yetu Center for African Women?  
15 Mamadou Saliou Diallo from Guinean Community in  
16 Brooklyn? Okay, Jamie Powlovich, Souleiman Ba,  
17 Jennifer Jarrell, Sebastien Vante from Safe Horizons,  
18 Henry Love, and Ninaj Raoul. Oh, we need a chair. I  
19 think one of our interpreters, we may not-- want to  
20 start?

21 SEBASTIEN VANTE: Thank you, Chair  
22 Narcisse, Chair Avilés, and members of the  
23 committees. My name is Sebastien Vante and I serve  
24 as the Associate Vice President of Streetwork  
25 Programs at Safe Horizon. I'm here today to shed

2 light on the plight of vulnerable population that has  
3 been overlooked and underserved, West African  
4 unaccompanied youth and minors seeking refuge in our  
5 communities. For several months our program has  
6 experienced an influx of these young individuals,  
7 many of whom arrive at our doors after being  
8 discharged from temporary placements, left adrift and  
9 without proper guidance. These youth fleeing  
10 persecution, violence, forced marriage, and female  
11 genital mutilation seek safety, community, and  
12 humanity in our programs. Despite our best efforts,  
13 we operate under-resourced and underfunded. Still,  
14 we remain steadfast in our commitment to meet their  
15 needs. As a provider, it pains me to witness these  
16 youth being ushered through a system that fails to  
17 address their unique challenges and aspirations  
18 adequately. Many of our staff share similar  
19 identifies and histories with the youth we serve,  
20 which invIEWS [sic] our work with our profound sense  
21 of empathy and understanding. However, the current  
22 system characterized by bureaucratic hurdles and  
23 systemic indifference fails to honor their humanity  
24 and the struggles of their journey. Recent reports  
25 have highlighted the shortcomings in our city's

2 response to the educational needs of immigrant youth  
3 despite federal laws mandating their enrollment in  
4 public schools, we are witnessing egregious delays  
5 and obstacles hindering their access to education.

6 The New York City Public Schools failure to track  
7 enrollment referrals and reluctances to provide  
8 timely and appropriate educational opportunities to  
9 these youth are deeply concerning. What should be a

10 straightforward enrollment process has become a  
11 cumbersome ordeal, often lasting several weeks to  
12 over a month. Seat availabilities, school types,  
13 student needs and timing within the academic year  
14 contribute to this delay. One major obstacle is the  
15 lack of space in GED programs or alternative high

16 school options. This scarcity makes securing  
17 placements for immigrant students exceedingly  
18 difficult. Prolonged delays negatively impact our  
19 youth's mental wellbeing as they feel increasingly

20 isolated from their peers attending school. This  
21 systemic failure is compounded by the challenges  
22 faced by immigrant youth in accessing stable housing  
23 and essential services. The recently legal

24 settlement regarding shelter rules while a step in  
25 the right direction for people under 23 who may

2 qualify for an initial 60-day stay still leaves many  
3 vulnerable individuals without adequate support and  
4 resources. The plight of individuals who lose their  
5 jobs due to the arduous reapplication process for  
6 shelter underscores the urgent need for comprehensive  
7 reforms. We must hold the city to account for the  
8 systemic failures that marginalized immigrant youth.  
9 We demand transparency, accountability and meaningful  
10 reforms to ensure every child and young person has  
11 access to the resources and opportunities they need  
12 to thrive, regardless of their background or  
13 circumstances. I urge this committee to take  
14 decisive action to address the systemic failures in  
15 our city's response to the needs of immigrant youth.  
16 We owe it to them to provide a pathway to safety,  
17 stability and opportunity, and it is our collective  
18 responsibility to ensure that no young person is left  
19 behind and ignored. Thank you for your attention.

20 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you.

21 JENNIFER JARRELL: Hello. My name is  
22 Jennifer Jarrell. I am the Director of Cov Works  
23 which is the employment, education and training  
24 department at Covenant House New York which is a  
25 homeless shelter for youth ages 18 to 21. Covenant

2 House New York is the nation's largest nonprofit  
3 adolescent care agency providing housing support to  
4 youth experiencing homelessness. During this past  
5 year, CHNY has served over 1,500 young people and  
6 provide over 132,000 nights of housing across our  
7 residential programs. In addition, to crisis,  
8 transitional and long-term housing our continuum of  
9 care includes services to support mental health and  
10 wellness, legal services, educational programming,  
11 workforce development, and life skills training all  
12 geared toward moving them from homelessness to  
13 housing stability and ultimately ending the cycle of  
14 homelessness in their lives. Ninety percent of our  
15 youth we serve are people of color. Nearly 40  
16 percent are LGBTQ, and over the past year, we have  
17 served over 250 undocumented youth. That is 25 times  
18 more than we have served in the years prior to  
19 starting before the immigrant crisis. In our 60-day  
20 shelter that houses 120 youth capacity, as many as  
21 half of the population have been new immigrants that  
22 are Black immigrants in recent months. Since seeing  
23 the influx of migrants in our shelter, the  
24 demographic has shifted from the majority of  
25 immigrants that are African immigrants-- excuse me.

2 It's shifted to the majority of youth being African  
3 immigrants from West Africa with a large  
4 concentration in Guinea. However, we do have youth in  
5 Mauritania, youth from Chad. We also have youth from  
6 Senegal and also youth from Haiti. We have had to  
7 turn away many youth due to reaching capacity,  
8 unfortunately, and out of 100 youth last month, we  
9 had 80 youth that were Black immigrants. We have--  
10 excuse me. The Black immigrant youth have not  
11 received TPS status, and we are advocating for our  
12 youth to qualify for TPS status like the Venezuelan  
13 youth that we helped previously. Our legal  
14 department has assisted in number of eligible youth  
15 in obtaining their documents and still work with our  
16 partners to determine eligibility. Our education  
17 department has also made sure that young people are  
18 able to attend the ESL GED program, and currently we  
19 have an ESL GED program on site where we're serving  
20 14 youth that just began April 4<sup>th</sup> in it, and we have  
21 in attendance 14 youth, and we have teachers that  
22 speak French, Creole and English, and that's pretty  
23 much it. Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Who is supporting  
25 that program? It's District 79?

2 JENNIFER JARRELL: It is District 79.

3 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Okay.

4 JENNIFER JARRELL: Supporting that  
5 program.

6 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: thank you.

7 JENNIFER JARRELL: You're welcome.

8 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Next is Souleiman  
9 Ba?

10 SOULEIMAN BA: Good afternoon. Today I  
11 start before you with my story, my journey. My name  
12 is Souleiman. I'm from Mauritania. I'm here with  
13 [inaudible] my life. You know, I found refuge in  
14 United States at Covenant House. Living in my  
15 country West Africa is not a choice to me. I love my  
16 country, of course [sic] my family. And then the  
17 life [inaudible] stay there, that's not safe for me.  
18 My country [inaudible] and the journey to United  
19 State I take alone. I have traveled a plane and take  
20 a car, and I walk. I [inaudible] but I couldn't give  
21 up. When I arrive in New York, I was stay  
22 [inaudible] of Brooklyn on the shelter. After that,  
23 I find Covenant House, and I just come there to get a  
24 bed, and they offer to me to get a lawyer and  
25 everything. But they have a lot of young people like

2 me. They need lawyers. So Covenant, they only have  
3 only lawyer, so they need a lawyer. They have like  
4 only young people who need to speak English or need  
5 to get a class. So, for me, they offer me-- I do it.  
6 I'm doing [inaudible] program and I'm doing GED, too.  
7 So, and we need to get a working permit to be part of  
8 something else. So, just I want to share it  
9 [inaudible] with us, and then-- I speak six language  
10 for that, and we don't-- I cannot use it to work if I  
11 don't have like working permit or something else.  
12 So, we all need help for us. And thank you for your  
13 time.

14 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you. Next  
15 is Jamie Powlovich.

16 JAMIE POWLOVICH: Thank you. Good  
17 afternoon. My name is Jamie Powlovich. I use  
18 she/her pronouns, and I'm the Executive Director of  
19 the New York State Coalition for Homeless Youth.  
20 Thank you to the Chairs for holding today's hearing  
21 and for the opportunities to testify. I'll be  
22 submitting longer, more detailed written testimony,  
23 but I would like to focus my verbal testimony on  
24 highlighting the needs of unaccompanied youth and  
25 minors, the vast majority of whom are coming from

2 African countries. CHY is not an immigration-focused  
3 organization, but for over two years we have played  
4 an active role in supporting the needs and newly  
5 arrived youth and minors, including connecting them  
6 to youth specific shelter advocating for their needs  
7 and pushing back against the often harmful,  
8 xenophobic narrative and policies that are being  
9 pushed by City Hall. Because unlike this  
10 Administration, we believe that it doesn't matter  
11 where a young person was born or when they made New  
12 York City their home. If they are homeless or in  
13 need of support, it's our job to fight for them, the  
14 same way we would do so for a young person that was  
15 born in Baltimore or the Bronx. Although we do not  
16 have concrete data because the City has failed to  
17 collect it, overwhelmingly the Department of Youth  
18 and Community Development Runaway and Homeless Youth  
19 programs are reporting that a vast majority of the  
20 newly-arrived young people that they are surviving  
21 which you've heard from the others on the panel that  
22 they're serving are Black migrants from African  
23 countries who identify as male, and despite Runaway  
24 and Homeless Youth programs are going above and  
25 beyond to support them, the City as a whole is

2 failing them. Specifically, as it relates to  
3 unaccompanied minors, from 2021 to 2023, the number  
4 of destitute minors and the cases that have been  
5 filed in Family Court have doubled, and those are  
6 just the numbers of unaccompanied minors where  
7 petitions are being filed in Family Court for them.  
8 We believe that the numbers are actually much higher.  
9 The Coalition has been pleading with the City to not  
10 only acknowledge but support these unaccompanied  
11 minors, but yet they have done nothing and they are  
12 here. They need support and the numbers are growing.  
13 Is it okay if I finish? I'd also like to highlight  
14 specifically for the Black migrants coming from  
15 African countries that are here unaccompanied and are  
16 minors, that we are hearing more frequently of unique  
17 situations that are arising regarding their  
18 documentation. Unlike people that are migrating from  
19 countries where they do not need to access a plane to  
20 get here, young people that are coming from Africa  
21 have to be 18 years old to access an exit visa to get  
22 on a plane to come to either Central America, right,  
23 or directly to the United States. And to do so for  
24 unaccompanied minors, many are accessing  
25 documentation, primarily passports that indicate that

2 they are older than they are, making them 18 or 19,  
3 when in fact they are minors and all of their other  
4 documentation proves so, but then once they are here  
5 they're not being believed that they are in fact  
6 minors, and it is posing huge barriers to their  
7 access to education and also connecting them to child  
8 welfare services because overwhelmingly ACS is not  
9 believing them or stepping into support. I have a  
10 lot of other things that'll be outlined in the  
11 written testimony. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you. Next  
13 is Ninaj Raoul. Ninaj Raoul? Henry Love?

14 HENRY LOVE: Thank you to both Chair  
15 Narcisse and Avilés for this incredibly important  
16 hearing today. My name is Doctor Henry Love and I'm  
17 the Vice President of Public Policy and Strategy at  
18 Win. We're the largest homelessness provider in the  
19 country. We operate 16 shelters across the five  
20 boroughs, and we-- about 7,000 people call Win a home  
21 every night. We also have about 350 migrant families  
22 that are in our shelters. I'm here to talk about what  
23 their experience is, and I want to be really clear,  
24 Afro descendant indigenous people are dramatically  
25 overrepresented in migrant families coming into our

2 city and subsequently entering shelter, whether  
3 they're from Venezuela, Haiti, Honduras, Guinea,  
4 they're overwhelmingly Black and indigenous. Our  
5 nation has systemically relegated Black immigrants,  
6 many facing unfathomable circumstances to our  
7 homelessness systems, a stark contrast to the  
8 thousands of white Ukrainian refugees. Twenty  
9 percent of our asylum-seeking families are Honduran.  
10 Most of them belong to the Afri [inaudible] Garifuna  
11 population. Many of our Garifuna populations have  
12 fled wide scale racism and persecution. One quote  
13 from a mother, and I quote directly from here about  
14 the racism that she experienced in Honduras. "I  
15 belong to an ethnicity called the Garifuna. We are  
16 of African origin and due to that we have received a  
17 lot of discrimination, and they don't want us there.  
18 It's as if we weren't a part of Honduras, even though  
19 we were born there and essentially Honduran. Just  
20 because our ancestors were immigrants, so because of  
21 that the government and the gangs discriminate  
22 against us and target our land." What we're seeing  
23 is that populations are not only facing  
24 discrimination in their own places of origin, but  
25 also once they get here to New York. This is not a

2 housing justice issue, but a racial justice issue.

3 However, we anticipate that we have a report that

4 just is coming out that the City's approach has been

5 expensive, ad hoc, harmful to the health of migrants-

6 - if I can just finish-- and the city at large, and

7 we're urging the Council to consider the attached

8 report that I will pass out after I speak, and in

9 that report that was released this morning, including

10 ending the 30 and 60 days rules and upholding the

11 right to shelter, expanding housing vouchers, and

12 increasing access to employment authorization could

13 save New York up to \$3.5 billion. It's the smart

14 thing to do and it's the ethical thing to do.

15 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Thank you.

16 [inaudible] used to say, that's not around with us

17 anymore, Lou Fiddler, about young folks, teenagers on

18 the street of New York, we cannot afford that, so

19 that's the same feeling that we have for all young

20 folks. They should not be on the street, because

21 they are at a sensitive age that we need to protect.

22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you all to the

24 panelists, and we're going to call the next panel.

25 Rex Chen, Monica Tulchinsky, Arielle Wisbaum, Ellinor

2 Rutkey from The Door, and Abdulmajeed Ishag. Okay.

3 Are we ready to-- if you'd like to start?

4 REX CHEN: My name is Rex Chen, he/him  
5 pronouns, and I'm the Immigration Director at Legal  
6 Services NYC which gives free immigration and other  
7 civil legal services. Black asylum-seekers in New  
8 York City suffer from systemic structural and  
9 societal anti-Black racism in New York City. If you  
10 go to any subway station near a HERRC shelter you'll  
11 see a group of mostly young, Black, recent arrivals  
12 standing by the turnstile hoping someone will swipe  
13 them through. They're trying to build a life here to  
14 find immigration relief, work, and a roof over their  
15 head. They're doing the precisely the things the  
16 Mayor is requiring them to do to avoid street  
17 homelessness, but the City doesn't give them metro  
18 cards. Meanwhile, the Adams Administration is  
19 flooding the subway with police and the Governor  
20 called in the National Guard. We know that police  
21 overwhelmingly arrest Blacks and Latinos for fare  
22 evasion. The Adams Administration is boxing in  
23 people in a way that's particularly dangerous for  
24 young black men, and we know that fare evasion and  
25 citations can have serious consequences for people's

2 immigration cases. The 30 day rules combined with the  
3 over-policing of fare evasion endangers Black asylum-  
4 seekers. And we're seeing that New York City  
5 communities are being pitted against Black migrants,  
6 stoking racial resentments and painting asylum-  
7 seekers as criminals in order to further xenophobic  
8 agendas. We heard earlier today throughout the day  
9 about the combination of problems that Black asylum-  
10 seekers face, including language access problems,  
11 cultural competency issues, and a lack of immigration  
12 legal services. I just want to add a point that when  
13 Black asylum-seekers overcome all of those and manage  
14 to get an immigration court hearing, the deck is  
15 stacked against them because anti-Black bias does not  
16 stop at the courtroom doors. We see it from bond  
17 decisions to immigration judge rulings. We at LSNYC  
18 have begun training our lawyers and other lawyers  
19 around the country about ways to interrupt  
20 immigration judges about their anti-Black bias, but  
21 Black asylum-seekers need to get competent  
22 immigration lawyers who have these tools to have a  
23 chance to get the relief that they qualify for.  
24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

2 MONICA TULCHINSKY: Chair Avilés, Council  
3 Members and staff, good afternoon and thank you for  
4 the opportunity to speak to the Immigration and  
5 Hospitals Committee. My name is Monica Tulchinsky  
6 and I'm a Senior Staff Attorney at the Legal Health  
7 Division of New York Legal Assistance Group. I want  
8 to first thank the Council for their support of legal  
9 representation for immigrants through the Immigrant  
10 Opportunities Initiative and Immigrant Health  
11 Initiative. We do not presume to testify to the  
12 Black migrant experience. We humbly defer to Black  
13 migrants themselves and our esteemed colleagues on  
14 previous panels to that end. Legal Health is the  
15 largest medical legal partnership in the United  
16 States. We serve 38 hospitals across New York City  
17 including the entire Health + Hospitals system. We  
18 have seen firsthand the landscape of health  
19 challenges and related legal issues that immigrant  
20 New Yorkers face, and the need for funding for both  
21 health and legal services. Having operated our  
22 medical legal partnership for over 20 years, we  
23 understand the nexus between health and legal issues  
24 and its impact on the social determinants of health.  
25 Social determinants of health are the non-medical

2 circumstances that directly affect ones health as  
3 well as access to healthcare, and these include  
4 income, racism, access to home care, housing,  
5 immigration status and health insurance coverage.

6 Racism as a social determinant of health affects  
7 Black people in the United States most significantly.

8 Due to historical, structural and medical racism,

9 Black Americans suffer from significantly worse

10 health outcome and higher mortality rates, and Black

11 immigrants are particularly vulnerable due to the

12 intersectional impact of racism and immigration

13 status on health. Many immigrants have serious or

14 chronic illnesses for which legal interventions are

15 required, and legal interventions are required

16 because lack of immigration status prevents access to

17 many forms of health insurance, healthcare, and

18 ultimately detrimentally impacts their health

19 outcomes. We urge the Council to pass Introduction

20 852024A. this bill would provide the needed

21 information to understand the full range of health

22 and social needs of immigrants in New York, and if I

23 may finish-- and considering immigrants' long-term

24 health needs, the Council should not forget social

25 needs, including legal services that often impact

2 heath and provide funding required at this absolutely  
3 critical point in surveying the immigrant population  
4 of New York City, especially with recent drastic cuts  
5 in funding for immigrant services with more attention  
6 on the horizon. Thank you very much for your time.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

8 ELLINOR RUTKEY: Good afternoon. My name  
9 is Elli Rutkey, and I'm a lawyer with The Door's  
10 Legal Services Center. The Door is a comprehensive  
11 youth development organization and our legal services  
12 center specializes in serving young people in their  
13 immigration cases. In my written testimony, I detail  
14 the myriad of challenges that newly-arrived Black  
15 youth face. Today, I will share the anonymized  
16 stories of two particular Black youth. M grew up in  
17 a Muslim household in Senegal. He attended school  
18 until he was about nine or ten years old, at which  
19 point his father removed M from school so that M  
20 could perform physical labor on the family's farm. M  
21 was afraid of his father who was abusive toward  
22 everyone in the household, and his father routinely  
23 beat and whipped M, once breaking a bone. M knew he  
24 had to leave for his own safety, so when M was 17 he  
25 began his journey through eight countries to the

2 United States. When M arrived at the US/Mexico  
3 border, cartel members stole the only money he had.  
4 M spent his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday on a flight from the border  
5 to New York City where he didn't know a single  
6 person. He now lives with hundreds of adults in a  
7 HERRC where hardly anyone speaks his native language  
8 and where he reports receiving barely any food during  
9 Ramadan. T was born in Sudan. When he was three  
10 years old, his entire village was burned to the  
11 ground during the Darfur genocide. When he was nine  
12 years old, he was shot in the leg. Less than a year  
13 ago, rebel forces broke into T's family's home. They  
14 then raped T's 16-year-old sister and beat T's  
15 brother to death in front of T and his family. T  
16 eventually escaped the rebels and fled to the US  
17 where he now lives in an adult shelter. Despite  
18 constant outreach to legal services organizations,  
19 T's been unable to find a lawyer to represent him in  
20 his case. He hopes he'll find one within the next  
21 nine months, before he turns 21 and becomes  
22 ineligible for special immigrant juvenile status.  
23 These are just two of the hundreds of Black new New  
24 Yorkers we have met at The Door who needs the City's

2 support. I urge you to provide that support. Thank  
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Is Deborah Lee here?  
5 Oh, yes, okay. Okay, great. You're the interpreter.

6 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
7 language]

8 TRANSLATOR: Good day everyone. My name  
9 is Abdulmajeed Ishag. Good day everyone. My name is  
10 Abdulmajeed [inaudible] and--

11 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
12 language]

13 TRANSLATOR: I'm 32 years old. My name  
14 is Abdulmajeed Harom [sic].

15 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
16 language]

17 TRANSLATOR: I entered the United States  
18 on April 2023.

19 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
20 language]

21 TRANSLATOR: And I arrived in the City of  
22 New York in June 2023.

23 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
24 language]

2 TRANSLATOR: I settled in New York in  
3 Brooklyn, in Brooklyn, New York in a shelter.

4 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
5 language]

6 TRANSLATOR: I came to New York-- I came  
7 to the United States because I am-- in my home  
8 country I face genocide.

9 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
10 language]

11 TRANSLATOR: At this moment I live in a  
12 shelter, and the shelter system is very harsh for me.  
13 Every month they move me from one shelter to another.

14 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
15 language]

16 TRANSLATOR: And the procedure to be  
17 moved from one shelter to the other could take a week  
18 or up to 10 days.

19 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
20 language]

21 TRANSLATOR: What I heard from the  
22 shelter that two, three months from now, the shelter  
23 will be only for the family with children.

24 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
25 language]

2 TRANSLATOR: Another experience, the city  
3 employees of the shelter, they treat us differently.  
4 They treat the Spanish-speakers much better than they  
5 treat us.

6 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
7 language]

8 TRANSLATOR: I lived in five different  
9 shelters, and one of them one of the employees spoke  
10 Arabic.

11 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
12 language]

13 TRANSLATOR: And because I suffer from a  
14 very bad stomach, I cannot eat spicy food, I cannot  
15 eat-- I can eat only small numbers of food, and I  
16 just cannot find these in the shelter.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can you let him know  
18 thank you for the testimony and if we could wrap up  
19 just because we have--

20 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
21 language]

22 TRANSLATOR: And I don't have any  
23 paperworks or work permits in order for me to go to  
24 work, and the work-- the newcomers six or seven days  
25 a week for \$1,300 for the whole month.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

3 ABDULMAJEED ISHAG: [speaking other  
4 language]

5 TRANSLATOR: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, we're going to  
7 have to go on to the next panel. Thank you to all the  
8 panelists today for coming. Syed Ahmed, Connie  
9 Ticho, Sergio Uzurin, Mariel Acosta, Iesha Sekou, and  
10 Seidu Hamaidu. Thank you so much. Would you like to  
11 start?

12 SEIDU HAMAIDU: Thank you Chairwoman and  
13 to the rest of the Council Members for allowing us to  
14 speak on this panel. My name is Seidu Hamaidu. I'm  
15 from Ghana, West Africa, a member of La Colmena, a  
16 Staten Island organization that support Black and  
17 Brown immigrants like myself. La Colmena provide  
18 [inaudible] and service to empower our community and  
19 foster a more inclusive society for all. As someone  
20 that is seeking asylum, it can be difficult to find  
21 organization like La Colmena that not only assist  
22 with navigating and complex immigration system, but  
23 always provide a sense of belonging and support  
24 during this difficult time. I am grateful for the  
25 [inaudible] and community that La Colmena offers,

2 allowing me to feel more secure and hopeful about  
3 this country in future. Through the workshop and  
4 service I was able to learn skills and [inaudible]  
5 work support that has been instrumental in navigation  
6 that asylum process in my search for a fresh start.  
7 La Colmena supports and empowerment have been light--  
8 has been like a guiding light in the darkness helping  
9 me to find a way towards a brightness future. Their  
10 dedication to help individual like myself burden  
11 their life, and it's true inspiring and has made all  
12 the difference in my journey towards stability and  
13 security. Continue to support organizations like La  
14 Colmena. God bless America. God bless New York  
15 City. God bless all the panel members. Thank you  
16 for giving me time.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. We love  
18 La Colmena, and we're glad you found La Colmena.

19 SYED AHMED: [speaking another language]  
20 Good afternoon city leaders and As-Salaam Alaikum to  
21 our beloved community listening in. My name is Syed  
22 Ahmed, and many people know me as Mahdi. I am the  
23 Manager of New York Operations for halal food  
24 certification body call Halal Food Standards Alliance  
25 of America. All of the asylum-seekers that have come

2 to the United States arrived to expect a better life  
3 and many to escape religious oppression. About half,  
4 if not more, of the asylum-seekers in many shelters  
5 are Muslim and must eat Halal food. The month of  
6 Ramadan where Muslims fast and the [inaudible]  
7 holiday has just passed, and it has to come to light  
8 that the asylum-seekers are currently not being  
9 served halal food and meat at all, outside of  
10 vegetarian diets. In the Quran, chapter six verse  
11 121 God say, "Do not eat that meat over which the  
12 name of God has not been pronounced. This is surely  
13 a sin." The meat has raised concerns and doubts  
14 which caused many to protest and many to avoid eating  
15 and looking elsewhere to find free halal food such as  
16 mosque and charity distributions. There are people  
17 faced with the thought, "Do I sustain my health or do  
18 I stay true to my religion?" as declared by the one  
19 of the asylum-seekers. Many of the community and  
20 mosque volunteers that have worked with the migrants  
21 have attested to the struggles they are facing  
22 regarding this matter and work hard to feed the  
23 starving stomachs of our brothers and sisters. Due  
24 to the severity of the issue and rising need for a  
25 solution, they requested help from our organization.

2 The City has a large allocated budget for food, and  
3 being that many aren't even able to eat the food,  
4 it's a complete misuse of funds. It is a  
5 constitutional right for religious freedom and  
6 freedom of speech, and our migrants who are accepted  
7 in by the states are being penalized for speaking up  
8 on this subject matter in the shelters. This is  
9 completely unacceptable. Getting halal food is an  
10 emergency right now due to the heavy Muslim  
11 population of migrants. We need to allocate the  
12 budget towards the right direction to bring in food  
13 through the right means. Halal food cannot simply be  
14 claimed as halal like it was from a doctor at NYC  
15 Health + Hospitals, or how it's currently being done.  
16 There are many issues with meat and cross-  
17 contamination procedures that would need a reliable  
18 halal monitoring agency to get involved to ensure  
19 that halal food is being served. The Prophet  
20 Mohammad-- peace be upon him-- said, "He who avoids  
21 doubtful matters clears himself in regard to his  
22 religion and his honor, but he who falls into  
23 doubtful matters eventually falls into that which is  
24 unlawful." Reference Buhadi [sic]. We need halal  
25 food with the standards of being slaughtered in the

2 proper manner by the hand of a Muslim and being  
3 monitored with the correct meats processes with zero  
4 risks of cross-contamination. The correct way to  
5 achieve this is by going through the right course of  
6 action and involving a halal monitoring agency such  
7 as Halal Food Standards Alliance of America or Halal  
8 Monitoring Services who are frequently doing their  
9 due diligence to ensure that the right things are  
10 being served. We from Halal Food Standards Alliance  
11 of America are here with a proposal letting you know  
12 that we are willing to work with the City in helping  
13 with this emergency situation. Right now, there are  
14 likely no meats being served to migrants that are  
15 considered halal according to the correct hand-  
16 slaughter halal standard that it should be. There  
17 can also be heavy risk of cross-contamination during  
18 processing and cooking. We are a prominent and  
19 trusted nonprofit organization in New York and  
20 throughout the nation as we implement the standard of  
21 halal that inclusive to the vast majority of Muslims.  
22 This ensures that Muslims can eat reliable halal food  
23 at a time of heavy corruption in the food industry.  
24 Similar to health inspectors, we have our halal  
25 inspectors and team who monitor, communicate, and

2 oversee the food services provided by the enterprises  
3 that we work with. We are nationally-based and we  
4 work with businesses, universities, medical  
5 facilities, halal distributors, halal suppliers, as  
6 well as other halal-certifying bodies worldwide to  
7 strive and build a trust with the community so our  
8 Muslims can eat what they rightfully should. We're  
9 available to discuss more on this and I can share our  
10 information after to get a start on this as soon as  
11 possible. I appreciate you all for listening to my  
12 testimony, and I like other community members and  
13 asylum-seekers hope that a change can be implemented  
14 as soon as possible for the benefit of the community  
15 and to instill the dignity of the Muslims here in New  
16 York. Thank you everyone for listening.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

18 SERGIO UZURIN: Ready? Great. Sergio  
19 Uzurin here, spokesperson for NYC ICE Watch, part of  
20 the Migrant Mutual Aid Coalition. We are a non-  
21 hierarchal, unofficial, unincorporated-- nor should  
22 we be, frankly to be compensated for the work that  
23 we've been doing. I know this because a few years  
24 ago in my role as a sole proprietor, video production  
25 guy, I have gotten city checks that I've picked up on

2 Sixth Avenue for work that I've done. So when Manny  
3 Castro was talking about oh, we're working with  
4 organizations, but they're still working on the 501C3  
5 incorporation, he's full of nonsense, and he's  
6 making excuses for his abject failure. And so is  
7 Molly Schaeffer, who I made sure to use Google  
8 translate to tell the migrants that she's the  
9 inventor of the 30/60 day rule, and you should have  
10 seen the looks of disgust on their faces when I told  
11 them that. A couple of examples of the  
12 inefficiencies we've had. In the fall of 2022, the  
13 Mutual Aid Coalition had an event at a church in  
14 Washington Heights. On a budget of less than a  
15 thousand dollars, we saw a physician was able to see  
16 between 70 and 120 migrants. At the same time, the  
17 Red Cross which I think was opening their center in  
18 midtown on a budget of I think it was \$81 million  
19 dollars, their metric was 100 physician visits a  
20 week. That's one, one hundred thousandth of the  
21 budget. We, New York City ICE Watch and our partners  
22 in the Mutual Aid Coalition, we are the ones feeding  
23 the people at line at the re-ticketing center at St.  
24 Bridget's which we found out this morning there's a  
25 line there again. We are the ones that have received

2 calls from so-called community partners that work  
3 with MOIA and the Mayor's Clergy Round table. I'm  
4 shouting out Pastor Monroe here who have received--  
5 not shouting out, I'm calling him out, because I'm  
6 getting calls from pastors that run hotels and  
7 shelters asking me for free labor to do asylum and  
8 TPS paperwork. Why is the City asking-- telling  
9 people to ask for free labor when DocGo and Medrite  
10 are getting their contracts renewed to the tune of  
11 half a billion dollars? I don't know. I have gotten  
12 calls from people that have gotten on flights that  
13 were paid for by Catholic Charities and they didn't  
14 have metro cards or were not given money to have  
15 their luggage on the flight. We have literally found  
16 migrants walking on the New Jersey turnpike trying to  
17 walk from Newark to Manhattan, and this is what these  
18 large nongovernmental organizations do. They're  
19 inefficient. On top of that we've got people that  
20 are trying to work as delivery drivers. You go to the  
21 Red Hook impound, there's millions of dollars of  
22 mopeds there right now, thousands of mopeds. On every  
23 step and every level of the way, our compas [sic]--  
24 we call them compas, the migrants-- they're facing  
25 hurdles and the people that are trying to help them

2 which is us are facing hurdles. We've been kicked  
3 out of homeless shelters. When the supervisors found  
4 out we were there providing translation services,  
5 we're not allowed anywhere near HERRCs. We have the  
6 cops called on us constantly for feeding people,  
7 including feeding halal meals, 400 people a day on  
8 weekends. We have migrants who have moved to other  
9 shelters and even move to Long Island who come back  
10 to 47 Hall Street to help organize the giving out of  
11 food and clothing, because the City has failed  
12 adjectively. I'll end with this. The only thing that  
13 I'm applauding the Council for is overriding Eric  
14 Adams' veto of the FEPS voucher system. That FEPS  
15 voucher process is what is going to save and unite  
16 New Yorkers, because everybody is seeking a solution  
17 to their individual housing crisis, and that includes  
18 parents who are separated from their children in ICE  
19 detention in Texas who cannot get their children out  
20 of ICE detention in Texas, because they do not have a  
21 stable-- what is considered a stable address for the  
22 authorities here. And we know that Eric Adams' game  
23 plan is separate African-American and Puerto Rican  
24 and long-term Latino residents from incoming  
25 migrants. We all saw the shooting on the G Train the

2 other day. That was a black man attacking a Latino  
3 couple for claiming that they were stealing his  
4 money. That is the Laurie Cumbo playbook. It is the  
5 Kathy Hochul playbook. It is the Vickie Paladino  
6 playbook, and I'm urging people to sign everybody up  
7 for FEPS vouchers.

8 CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: Refrain from  
9 calling any more names.

10 SERGIO UZURIN: My apologies. But it's  
11 serious business. We hope that we can have  
12 translators to sign everybody up for FEPS. Thank  
13 you.

14 MARIEL ACOSTA: Thank you, Chair Avilés  
15 for opening up this forum to listen to us. My name  
16 is Mariel Acosta. I'm here today as a member of the  
17 broader mutual aid coalition from around the city  
18 that has been taken several direct action measures to  
19 support our new neighbors. I also speak to you as a  
20 Black immigrant, a community member, and as a parent.  
21 April is National Bilingual/Multilingual Learner  
22 Advocacy Month and affecting all asylum-seekers as  
23 we've heard today from many people and migrants,  
24 especially at the intersection of race. There are  
25 issues of language access or the lack thereof due to

2 the absence of qualified translators and interpreters  
3 in migrant shelters and respite centers. For  
4 instance, migrants often receive mistranslated  
5 materials or even mistranslations in the citywide  
6 designated languages, French, Arabic, Spanish, or  
7 materials not translated at all. This stands in  
8 direct violation of various sections and  
9 implementation plans described in Local Law 30 of  
10 2017. The lack of access to information due to  
11 insufficient or absent translation and interpretation  
12 in turn limits migrants abilities to access the  
13 social services they need towards applying for their  
14 asylum ID, TPS, insurance and other important  
15 documentation and services. This deliberate lack of  
16 adequate language access leaves under resourced  
17 mutual aid groups like us scrambling to pick up the  
18 slack of the companies that get paid millions of  
19 dollars to provide the services. I'd also like to  
20 highlight reproductive issues, especially as today is  
21 the second-to-last day of the Annual Black Maternal  
22 Health Week. This is week is between April 11<sup>th</sup> to  
23 April 17<sup>th</sup>, and it is a week when advocates highlight  
24 Black maternal health and the disproportionate threat  
25 of Black maternal mortality Black women face. In the

2 US Black women are dying three to four times the rate  
3 of white women during and after childbirth regardless  
4 of income and level of education, mainly due to  
5 racist medical practices. To this, add the variables  
6 of Black asylum-seekers' immigration status, language  
7 barriers, the trauma of experiencing displacements  
8 from their countries of origin, of having to traverse  
9 several countries on foot while pregnant to then get  
10 to the US and be re-traumatized and re-victimized by  
11 racism and xenophobia at the hands of the  
12 institutions that are supposed to be providing  
13 services to them. As a mother and activist I started  
14 working with professional birth workers to organize  
15 and facilitate workshops out of my university. I'm a  
16 graduate student at CUNY, and the workshops are  
17 directed to pregnant migrant women to offer them  
18 guidance and material and emotional support. To our  
19 mutual aid work, I think that I've been doing since  
20 last year with migrant families, I noticed that  
21 pregnant women lacked access and information to key  
22 services pertaining to perinatal care.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Mariel, could you--  
24 I'm so sorry to do this, but we're past our time, and  
25 we have a good number of people. We have to exit the

2 room and I want everyone who's been patiently  
3 waiting. Could you--

4 MARIEL ACOSTA: [interposing] Okay. I'll  
5 wrap up real quick. So through this work we've also  
6 found out that pregnant women are malnourished and  
7 their children as well. Shelters [inaudible] notice  
8 when we try to distribute warm meals, they kick us  
9 out and they send security and cops to us when we're  
10 standing in the public sidewalk, and them claiming  
11 this is private property, you know, their hotel  
12 shelters. And yeah, while proposing your bills  
13 today, especially Intro 739, and when discussing the  
14 experiences of Black migrants in New York City, I  
15 hope you will also consider and propose a plan to  
16 hold accountable the Adams Administration and the  
17 public and private entities responsible for the  
18 management of the shelter where this already  
19 vulnerable population continues to be re-victimized  
20 and be traumatized. I'll leave it there. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. I  
22 appreciate. I know you have more to say, I really  
23 do. I think with that I'm going to call the next  
24 panel. Thank you to all of you for your work. I know  
25 you are doing the people's work. Next, we are going

2 to have Iesha Sekou. I don't know if she's still  
3 here. Arielle Wisbaum? Maybe not. Connie Ticho?  
4 Moira Shoush. Moira? Olivya Veazey? Thaerou Barry?  
5 And Bangaly Camara? Bangaly Camara? Thank you.

6 MELISSA JOHNSON: I'll be speaking on  
7 behalf of Moira's behalf. Moira is a student  
8 organizer at Columbia University, and also interning  
9 with BAJI. So, she's testifying on how the city's  
10 failure to provide meaningful language access for  
11 migrants speaking indigenous Afro-diasporic languages  
12 contributed to the inability to access services or to  
13 effectively communicate with city agencies. The  
14 City's current language access laws only require city  
15 agencies to provide language access services for  
16 designated citywide languages, a group of 10  
17 languages that currently only includes one indigenous  
18 Afro-diasporic language, Haitian Creole. The policy  
19 is a harmful departure from the City's previous  
20 language access law 2003 that required city agencies  
21 to provide language access assistance and individuals  
22 with primary language defined by the law as the  
23 language in which an LEP individual chooses to  
24 communicate with the others. Today, she speaks to  
25 the easily preventable obstacles that a friend who is

2 a Senagli as asylum-seekers, Chike Vay [sic], due to  
3 the lack of meaningful language access laws in the  
4 city. She was asked to translate on behalf of Chike  
5 for an experience that he had with NYPD. He's a 25-  
6 year-old migrants who arrived in New York City last  
7 summer. His primary language is Wolof, but he also  
8 speaks very limited French and very limited English.  
9 He had an incident or a run-in with NYPD where the  
10 officer explained that he violated a law requiring  
11 commercial cyclists to wear helmets. He was given a  
12 criminal summons. When he asked for explanation as  
13 to what the summons was and why the situation  
14 occurred or how he violated the law, she was called  
15 on his behalf via cellphone to translate. However,  
16 during the experience with the police officer, he was  
17 trying to indicate that he works as an Uber Eats  
18 cyclist and uses the app to document his time when  
19 he's on-cycle and when he is off. He relayed the  
20 information to the officer and to Moira who  
21 translated on his behalf, but the NYPD officer  
22 refused to take that into consideration. He was sent  
23 straight to court where the court translators did not  
24 have Wolof translation, nor did they have a French  
25 translator who could provide translation and

2 interpretation services for limited proficiency for  
3 French. She's advocating that you avoid this issue  
4 by providing meaningful language access to African  
5 migrants in their primary language as indicated in  
6 previous laws that the City adopted. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
8 you.

9 THAEROU BARRY: My name is Thaerou Barry.  
10 I came from Guinea. Well I was born in Monrovia  
11 [sic]. Attend school there and graduated from high  
12 school. After that, my parent decide to for me to do  
13 a forced marriage to old person that [inaudible] my  
14 condition. I'm disabled. So they want to decide to  
15 [inaudible] my rights. I decide to run away and  
16 [inaudible] Guinea. I [inaudible] to one of my  
17 friends, and instead she brought me a ticket so I  
18 need to come to [inaudible] to ask for help. I need  
19 to further my education. I don't want old man  
20 [inaudible] 72 years [inaudible] and some children. I  
21 decide that my parents cannot force me traditional  
22 wedding to what I now want. I decide to follow my  
23 education because I'm a disabled-- what able can do,  
24 I can never do that. So I decide to come. So my  
25 parents said they will force to marry [inaudible].

2 After I graduated from high school from 12 years,  
3 after then I want to know my education. They said  
4 no. I decide to marry. I said I don't want to marry  
5 because I saw most of my friends, they got married  
6 [inaudible] okay. I'm looking at my condition. I  
7 need help. So I decide to [inaudible] to my friend.  
8 She told me that run away [inaudible] guinea. She  
9 said the border is open. I can help you to pass  
10 through [inaudible] to enter, but I faced some  
11 difficulty on the road. Since 2012 I've been  
12 suffering. I don't have-- even I'm talking with my  
13 family. They said they can't listen to me, because  
14 my parents forced to marry to [inaudible] I not want  
15 to marry.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.  
17 I'm sorry. Thank you.

18 THAEROU BARRY: So I need help. I need  
19 support. I don't have lawyer. Even if I [inaudible]  
20 train or the bus, I don't have metro card. Last time  
21 I was sick I went to the hospital. The nurses was  
22 asking me for money. I told them I came from the  
23 border. I don't have money. I'm not working. I'm a  
24 high school graduate, and also one of my friends she  
25 helped me. I went to airline [sic] school. I have my

2 AAA [sic] degree. I told her that I have my document.  
3 I brought my document with me, but if I apply for a  
4 job, they can say if you don't have social security  
5 or working permit, you cannot have job. I enter  
6 since January 11, but I've been going to [inaudible].

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Ma'am--

8 THAEROU BARRY: I've been going to--  
9 [inaudible] one of my friends, she told me that  
10 [inaudible] is not good for you. I am Muslim. The  
11 food that they give [inaudible] is not good. It's not  
12 healthful for you. [inaudible] you can find  
13 solution. If the government can help you so you can  
14 [inaudible] for life. I said, okay, thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Ms.  
16 Barry, and thank you for your testimony. Moira? Are  
17 you Moira?

18 OLIVYA VEAZEY: Olivya. Thank you for  
19 hosting this opportunity to testify today. My name  
20 is Olivya Veazey. I'm a community organizer with  
21 Urban Librarians Unite, as well as an oral history  
22 teacher at LaGuardia Community College. I spend a  
23 lot of time volunteering with African migrants. I  
24 promised some of my friends that I'll share testimony  
25 translated from French on their behalf. These are

2 from two asylum-seekers. I'm going to leave their  
3 names out. The first comes from a young Senegalese  
4 man. He told me, "Life in the shelter is not a life.  
5 I wouldn't advise anyone to live in such conditions.  
6 If you go out to look for work and you miss a meal,  
7 then you have to go find food. But if you can't find  
8 any work, how are you supposed to buy food. In the  
9 place where you sleep there's so much noise, and you  
10 worry about your cellphone and shoes being stolen,  
11 and you hear people arguing all the time. When  
12 you've been there for 30 days, they'll kick you out  
13 in the middle of the night in the cold. They just  
14 don't respect us. To work, you need a permit and  
15 social security number. You're always told to go find  
16 a lawyer so that they can help you file your case,  
17 but that's too slow and they're too busy, and  
18 anyways, you can't go find a lawyer to help you file  
19 your case, because you don't work, you don't have any  
20 money to pay a lawyer to help you file your case. So  
21 now you'll stay like that until the day of your  
22 hearing before the judge when you haven't even filed  
23 your case. This life is really pitiful and  
24 complicated." The second testimony is from a migrant  
25 from Mauritania. "My first night at Hall Street, I

2 asked myself if I was in a psychiatric hospital or in  
3 a place of refuge. I saw guards who had no notion of  
4 humanity. It seemed they were just there to yell. I  
5 asked myself if I was really in the United States.

6 You meet staff at the shelters who would rather clean  
7 their fingernails than answer a question. Sometimes  
8 you ask a question, and strangely you get many

9 different answers." This is me now. While helping

10 people with asylum applications, I've translated the

11 stories of dozens of Black migrants, and I can tell

12 you that the people I've worked with are fleeing

13 violence, torture, unjust imprisonment and

14 persecution. They face retribution for organizing

15 against slavery, fighting against political and

16 ethnic oppression for their sexuality and for their

17 religious choices. To wrap up quickly I'll just say

18 in my capacity working with librarians, I know that

19 many, many services for African migrants occur in the

20 basements of libraries. I tell Black migrants almost

21 every day that they can go to libraries for free,

22 even just to charge their phones, and this is news to

23 many of them. Library workers are extremely good at

24 community engagement and resource distribution, and

25 they also tell me that they would love to serve this

2 migrant community more. They're often being barred  
3 from shelters, and it takes them months to be able to  
4 get into just the family shelters to do story times.  
5 They currently rely mostly on the help of the mutual  
6 aid groups to facilitate this connection. We should  
7 have translations and translators in all public  
8 libraries which are already community spaces to allow  
9 everyone access to the resources available there. We  
10 don't have to separate out our community resources  
11 into ones that are for asylum seekers, and ones that  
12 are for the rest of the people. This also creates  
13 social barriers between the two groups. It's much  
14 better if there are also places where people can come  
15 together. The community leaders also speaking  
16 earlier mentioned job fairs and job training multiple  
17 times. Librarians put on job fairs and connect  
18 people to career development resources all the time.  
19 So I just urge the City Council to think about that.  
20 Thank you very much for your time.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you all.

22 Thank you for your testimony. And now we will move  
23 to three virtual testimonies. Also, for anyone left  
24 in the room, if you were here to testify and have not  
25 done so, please fill out a witness slip with the

2 Sergeant at Arms. Now as we move to the virtual  
3 panelists, please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to  
4 announce that you may begin before starting your  
5 testimony.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Mbacke Thiam?

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 MBACKE THIAM: Hello? Hi everyone.

10 [inaudible]

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: We hear you and see  
12 you.

13 MBACKE THIAM: Okay, thank you. My name  
14 is Mbacke Thiam. I'm the Housing and Health  
15 Community Organizer at Center for the Independence of  
16 the Disabled in New York. I'm also African immigrant  
17 here in Harlem, and it seem like there is a urge on  
18 myself [inaudible] not just on behalf of African  
19 immigrants, but also on behalf of the impact that  
20 will have on people with disabilities here. So, I  
21 think my most concern is for the lack of-- why we  
22 didn't see Health + Hospitals in this room today. I  
23 think they are urged to come here and be able to tell  
24 us how they are seeing the impact of the healthy  
25 survey and how that provided an assessment to better

2 cater to the needs of the immigrants [inaudible]  
3 paying attention on the impact on hospitals that are  
4 closing like Beth Israel, like downstate-- SUNY  
5 Downstate which is in Brooklyn, and all this may have  
6 on impact on the people with disabilities, but also  
7 people with chronic disease. But in addition, as a  
8 migrant as I know, there is a language barrier  
9 [inaudible] of finding in order to help people be  
10 understood when they are sick, when they're not  
11 feeling well, and not always to rely on the language  
12 line which was problematic earlier as we were saying  
13 that. Language line may not communicate-- help  
14 people communicate in their own language when they  
15 have to speak Wolof or Haitian Creole or other  
16 languages, and they were offered French from France,  
17 it's going to be different, [inaudible]. Also,  
18 another problem in the health disparities for these  
19 migrants. I'm writing written testimony--

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time  
21 is expired.

22 MBACKE THIAM: Yeah, I'm writing a  
23 written testimony.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thiam, you can  
25 submit-- you can submit your testimony.

2 MBACKE THIAM: Yes.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And we look forward  
4 to receiving it. So thank you so much.

5 MBACKE THIAM: Okay, thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Next we will have  
7 Tanesha Grant.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 TANESHA GRANT: Hello. My name is  
10 Tanesha Grant. I am the Executive Director of Parents  
11 supporting Parents and Moms United for Black Lives,  
12 New York City. We are-- our focus our work is in  
13 Harlem. For the last three years, Parents Supporting  
14 Parents New York has been supporting our Black  
15 migrants who work very closely with Manhattan Adult  
16 Center. Chair, I suggest that you come to visit.  
17 This is a hub for Black immigrants, but the prob--  
18 and Black migrants, but the problem is they don't  
19 have resources. Language access is a real barrier  
20 for our Black migrants. I heard someone earlier  
21 testify about Wolof, the language that a lot of our  
22 African-speaking family speak, and we have big, big  
23 problems in Harlem and Washington Heights where we  
24 are not supporting migrants. I would be great if  
25 community-based organizations such as PSPNY could get

2 the funds to hire our own interpreters so that we can  
3 include all of our community, and that our Black  
4 migrants can stop being treated other than other.  
5 The base of the migrant situation is a Spanish-  
6 speaking space, and that is not right. We have many  
7 migrants of many different countries, especially in  
8 Africa that cannot get the resources that they  
9 deserve. So I hope that this committee, you know,  
10 thinks about that and really start working with  
11 community-based organizations, none of which I heard  
12 today who have come to testify about the need for  
13 support for our Black migrants and asylum-seekers.  
14 Thank you for letting me testify, and thank you for  
15 this hearing.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Ms.  
17 Grant. Always wonderful to see you. Thank you for  
18 the work you do. And lastly, we will have Peter  
19 Taron [sic].

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Mr. Taron? And Mr.  
22 Tarson, apologies.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Mr. Tarson, if  
25 you're speaking we can't hear you. Mr. Tarson, it

2 looks like your microphone is not working. It seems  
3 that you are unmuted, but we cannot hear you.

4 Unfortunately, we are going to have to move on. If  
5 we can't fix the microphone situation, but we welcome  
6 your testimony. You can submit it up to 72 hours  
7 post-hearing. Okay, Mr. Tarson. I'm so sorry, we  
8 can't get the technology fixed. Okay, so we have now  
9 heard from everyone who has signed up to testify. If  
10 we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to  
11 testify in-person, please visit the Sergeant at Arms  
12 table can complete the witness slip now. If we have  
13 inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify  
14 virtually, please use the raise hand function in the  
15 Zoom, and a member of our staff will call on you in  
16 order of the hands raised. Okay, so we're going to  
17 call Taina Wagnac on Zoom.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

19 TAINA WAGNAC: Good afternoon. My name  
20 is Taina Wagnac. I'm Senior Manager of State and  
21 Local Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition.  
22 Thank you to Chair Narcisse and Avilés for holding  
23 this historic hearing on the experiences of Black  
24 immigrants living in New York City. I also would  
25 like to take the opportunity to submit testimony and

2 support of the proposed legislation Introduction 84 and  
3 85 sponsored by Council Member Rivera. The  
4 legislation supports the creation of humane policy by  
5 collecting data on the employment obstacles that  
6 recent arrival including [inaudible] including their  
7 chronic health needs. I'm deeply honored to submit  
8 testimony today shedding light on the experiences of  
9 Black immigrants living in New York. Living as a  
10 Haitian immigrant in New York City has been a very  
11 unique experience with its triumphs and challenges.  
12 For a start, you live in a city that seems to  
13 celebrate Black culture where there are several  
14 different types of enclaves like Little Haiti, Little  
15 Senegal, and aided by also the fact that immigrants  
16 are job-creators and innovators. Yet, Black and  
17 African immigrants seem to be missing from the public  
18 consciousness in overall immigration conversation.  
19 And the reason community-- in fact, community-led  
20 initiative and grassroots organizations such as  
21 African Communities together have been playing a  
22 pivotal role in providing immediate support for Black  
23 asylum-seekers arriving in the city. Moreover, I  
24 just want to jump into our recommendation to the  
25 Council. We are grateful and happy to hear that MOIA

2 is aware of the community interpreter bank as well as  
3 the language access worker cooperative. We thank  
4 City Council for being a champion for language access  
5 and for restoring in the budget \$3.8 million to  
6 continue the work that the language access  
7 collaborative has started in expanding access to and  
8 improving language services--

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time  
10 is expired.

11 TANESHA GRANT: [inaudible] communities.  
12 And we also call for City Council to baseline \$5  
13 million in this City budget to continue this work,  
14 and also call for the Council to implement CityFEPS  
15 legislation and allocated resources to combat housing  
16 discrimination [inaudible].

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank  
18 you so much, Taina, thank you. So, just in terms of  
19 last call for those who have registered but were not  
20 present, we're going to make a last call? Yosmin  
21 Badie? Peter Tarson?

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] You may  
23 begin.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Peter Tarson, if you  
25 could try to unmute on Zoom. If you are speaking, we

2 cannot hear you. I'm sorry, Mr. Tarson, we still  
3 cannot hear you. Porez Luxama? Yamina Kezadri?  
4 Hildalyn Colon Hernandez? Michael Magazine? Damarc  
5 Durce Barlatier? Porez Luxama? Melissa McCloskey?  
6 Thierno Diallo? Zeinats Eyega? Mamadou Saliou  
7 Diallo? Elsie Saint-- Damian Harris-Hernandez? Ninaj  
8 Raoul? Arielle Wisbaum? Michael Magazine? Ronnie  
9 James? Connie Ticho? Iesha Sekou? Bangaly Camara  
10 and Peter M. Tarson? Seeing no one else, I would  
11 like again to note that written testimony will be  
12 reviewed in full by committee staff and may be  
13 submitted up to a record of up to 72 hours after the  
14 close of this hearing by emailing it to  
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov. And with that, I want to  
16 thank everyone for coming out today to offer  
17 testimony, especially our service providers, our  
18 mutual aid groups, our community members, and all of  
19 those who have come out to share with us their  
20 firsthand experiences. In the note of a beautiful  
21 song, [speaking Spanish], means the beautiful faces  
22 of my Black community. We see you. We will do  
23 better by you. All people deserve dignity. Thank  
24 you so much. And with that, I want to thank my co-  
25 chair Council Member Narcisse for her tireless

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2 advocacy as Chair of the Health Committee on behalf  
3 of migrants. Thank you, and with that, we close.

4 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 13, 2024